

## **Spongy Moth *Formally* (Gypsy Moth)**

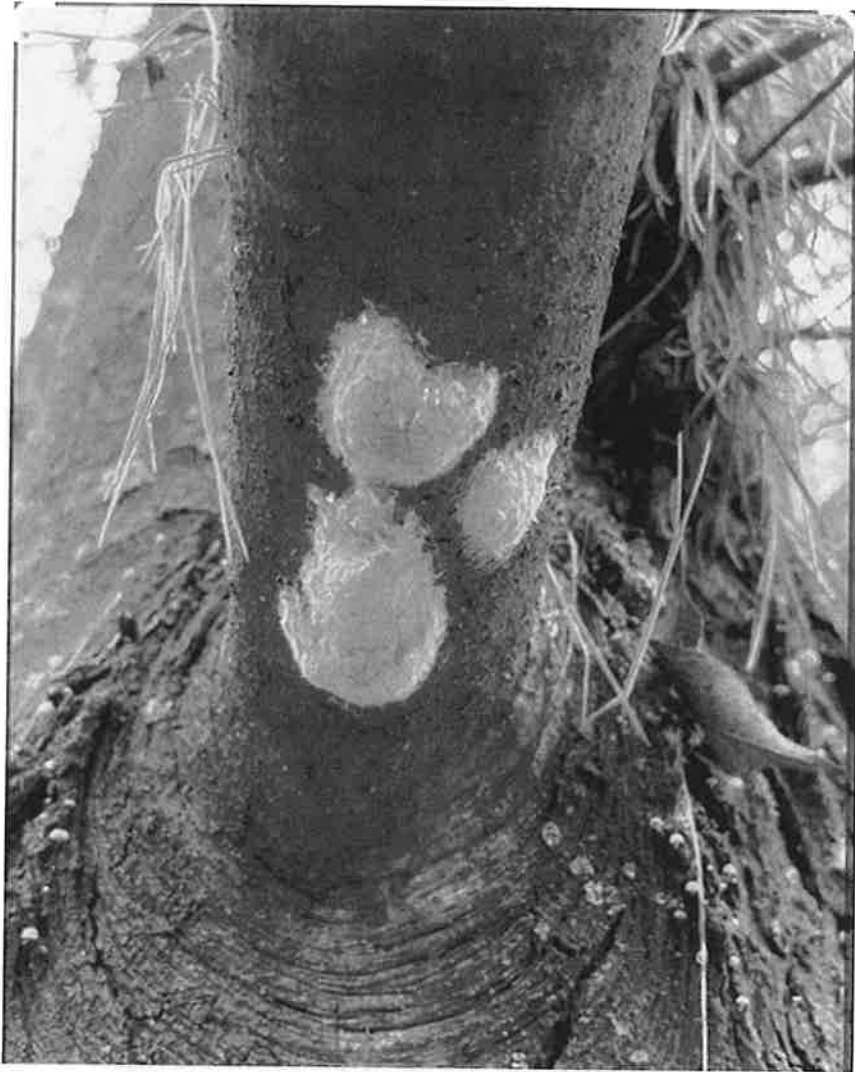
Spongy Moth caterpillar with characteristic red and blue spots on its back.

The Spongy moth is a non-native defoliating insect that feeds on a variety of tree species found in North America. The City of Whitewater's management program focuses on controlling outbreak levels of spongy moth in city owned areas that are at risk of defoliation, typically oak dominant areas. Since spongy moth is firmly established in Wisconsin, the complete removal of these insects is no longer possible.

## **What you can do**

Help manage spongy moth by following these Integrated Pest Management Strategy techniques.

Wearing long-sleeve shirts and protective equipment such as gloves and face masks will help minimize exposure to spongy moth hairs, silken threads, and shed skins, which can cause skin rashes and upper respiratory tract irritation in some people.



## August to May: Egg Mass Removal

Carefully survey your property for egg masses and scrape them off surfaces into soapy water to destroy them. In addition to trees, egg masses can be found on eaves troughs, doorframes, under patio furniture, play structures and garden stones.

### Required supplies

- A flat object such as a butter knife or plastic paint scraper
- Catchment container or bag to collect the egg masses
- Bucket of soapy water. Dish soap works well

## Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Place your catchment container below the egg mass
2. Use your scraper tool to remove the egg mass from surface. Ensure all eggs are scraped. Try not to leave any residual eggs in bark ridges or crevices.
3. Empty contents of your catch container or bag into bucket of soapy water
4. Leave the eggs sitting in the bucket for a day or two, then dispose of contents in the garbage. Don't scrape egg masses onto the ground; this does not necessarily kill the eggs and some may still hatch next spring.

Egg masses can be located high up in trees. Be safe if trying to access anything up high, especially if using ladders. Some private tree companies can be hired to provide service at heights.

## May to July: Hand pick Caterpillars

Handpicking caterpillars is most effective on small newly planted trees, shrubs, and plants infested with spongy moth. If possible, gently shake the tree so caterpillars fall from leaves. Thoroughly inspect the remaining foliage, branches, and trunk for caterpillars and using gloves, pick them off you tree. Fallen and collected caterpillars should be placed and left to soak in soapy water to destroy them.

## May to September: Burlap Banding

Once spongy moth caterpillars grow to about an inch in length by mid-June, they will move down the trunk to seek shelter from predators and heat. Reduce the number of caterpillars on the in your yard by trapping them.

## Required Supplies

- Burlap cloth
- Twine or rope
- Bucket of soapy water. Dish soap

## Step-by-Step Instructions

1. Wrap and secure a piece of burlap cloth around the trunk of your tree
2. Tie twine or rope around the center or slightly below the center of the burlap
3. Drape the burlap cloth over the twine or rope so there is an overhang where the caterpillars can crawl underneath to seek shelter during the day
4. Check the trap by lifting the overhanging burlap cloth every afternoon and collect any hiding caterpillars

5. Put them into a bucket of soapy water for a few days to destroy them

## **Tree Damage**

The spongy moth caterpillar is known to feed on most species of hardwood trees with the exception of Ash, Tulip Tree, American Sycamore, London plane, Catalpa, Fir and Cedar. Most healthy trees can withstand one to several years of severe defoliation by spongy moth. Under normal circumstances, defoliated trees should regrow their leaves by the end of July, depending on weather conditions during the season. It is recommended if the tree is defoliated, a water schedule should be implemented to stimulate rapid regrowth of foliage.

## **Spongy Moth's Natural Predators**

Spongy moths have three significant natural enemies:

- A fungus: Entomophaga
- A virus: Nucleopolyhedrosis
- A small wasp

The fungus and virus can be very effective at naturally controlling populations, however, they require a cool wet spring to be effective. The wasp can parasitize up to 30% of the eggs that are near the surface of an egg mass, but cannot reach the eggs in the center of the mass.

## **City's Management Plan**

The City of Whitewater will be conducting park inspections and spraying found egg masses over the winter and early spring as temperature permits.

All trees found to have egg masses will be tagged in our mapping system and monitored for any defoliation.

Any tree that has been defoliated in City owned properties will be placed on a water schedule to ensure trees sprout new leaves and to reduce stress.

The goal is to ride out the cycle of these pests as elimination is not possible. Keep the stress levels down on our trees and prevent the window being opened for other pests to cause greater problems.