

State Campsites Threatened By Gypsy Moths



To help prevent gypsy moths from devastating Michigan forests, the Automobile Club of Michigan and Michigan State University have joined with private campground operators in a survey program to detect any statewide spread of the leaf-eating pests.

Auto Club has distributed gypsy moth traps to Michigan's more than 300 private campground sites.

"In recent years, recreational vehicles have become the main carriers of gypsy moths from the Eastern seaboard to other areas of the country," notes Joseph Ratke, Auto Club touring manager, adding that:

"With the record number of campers and trailers on the road today, the threat these insect pests pose to Michigan's campsites is tremendous."

Auto Club points out that if the gypsy moth becomes established in Michigan, it would make most campgrounds in infested areas unusable due to tree defoliation.

In addition, gypsy moths are comparable to fish flies as nuisances to campers. In infested areas, the caterpillars swarm in great numbers over trails, underbrush, buildings and camping equipment.

State and federal officials are now attempting to eradicate the third infestation of gypsy moths in Michigan in less than 20 years.

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The gypsy moth traps, supplied by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are baited with a chemical substance that attracts male gypsy moths within a 1/4 mile radius.

The traps are made from paper cups. If any moths are captured by the end of the summer, campground operators have been instructed to contact Dr. William Wallner at Michigan State's Cooperative Extension Service.

Harmful only in the caterpillar stage, gypsy moths defoliated more than two million acres of forest in 1971 in New England, New York and Pennsylvania.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture since has estimated that up to five percent of all recreational vehicles leaving the Northeast are gypsy moth carriers.

"The gypsy moth's egg-laying period - which is between July and September - coincides with the time when large numbers of recreational vehicles are in wooded campsites," notes Wallner, a Michigan State entomology professor.

He said Michigan's current infestation of gypsy moths tentatively has been linked to an egg mass brought into the state by a recreational vehicle from Connecticut.

"Since campgrounds are a frequent entry point for transient gypsy moths into forests, the participation of private campground operators in our survey program will be a tremendous service," male moths, which do not fly, are white with about a two-inch wingspread.

In searching a recreational vehicle, these areas in particular should be inspected: the trailer hitch, any loose material at the bottom of the trailer, under steps, on both sides of the wheels and inside the truck and camper.

If any eggs, cocoons or caterpillars are found, they should be removed and crushed. As an added precaution, they should be burned.

Making this inspection is especially important if campers are traveling in areas where there are known gypsy moth infestations.

"Anyone who enjoys the outdoors should understand what the impact of acres and acres of defoliated trees would be on Michigan's campsites and wildlife areas," says Ratke.

Auto Club notes that recreational vehicle owners also can help protect their forests by periodically inspecting their vehicles for gypsy moths.

Checks should be made especially for gypsy moth egg masses since a single mass contains up to 1,000 eggs. The egg deposits, which hatch during late April and early May, are tan-colored and covered with fuzz. Average size is about 1 1/2 inches long and 3/4 inch wide.

Brownish, hairy gypsy moth caterpillars can be distinguished by their red and blue spots. In late July or early August, the caterpillars spin cocoons and emerge 10 to 14 days later as adult moths.

Male gypsy moths have dark brown forewings and a 1 1/2 inch wingspread. The female moths, which do not fly, are white with about a two-inch wingspread.

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