

# Living with gypsy moths— an update from Audubon

As the gypsy moth season reaches its peak amid growing public concern over the potential damage, Massachusetts Audubon speaks out again on this issue. Mass. Audubon continues to support an integrated approach to gypsy moth control. This includes opposition to all aerial spraying of insecticides as biologically and economically unsound. Instead, Mass. Audubon has encouraged the development of biological control of gypsy moths, further experimentation with the use of the virus which controls their population in the wild, and the mechanical destruction of gypsy moth eggs and caterpillars by homeowners withing to protect individual trees.

Mass. Audubon supports the use of *Bacillus thuringiensis* ("Bt") for localized spraying of individual trees if an insecticide is to be used. "Bt" (known commercially as Dipel, Biofed, or Thuricide) is a bacterial preparation which kills only the caterpillars of butterflies and moths. It should be noted that Mass. Audubon does not advocate the use of chemical control agents, including Sevin (carbaryl).

Mass. Audubon opposes the use of chemical insecticides as both ineffective and costly. Chemical control agents interfere with natural controls on gypsy moths, such as predators, parasites and disease. Since gypsy moths have been in Massachusetts for 100 years, we know that their population explosions are cyclical, and that such increases cannot be effectively controlled by chemical agents- the greatest outbreaks of gypsy moths occurred during the years when DDT was in heavy use. We also know that they represent a nuisance rather than a threat to our forests, since the Commonwealth has become far more extensively wooded during the period when gypsy moths have been present.

Mass. Audubon's opposition to Sevin (carbaryl) is based in part on the factors mentioned above. In addition, Sevin is very toxic to honeybees, and kills or depresses populations of some gypsy moth predators. There are also unresolved questions regarding its safety to humans. Sevin has been under review as a potential health hazard since 1969. Although the Massachusetts Audubon Society is unable to assess the specific health hazards associated with Sevin, the Society is concerned about this problem.

There are several means of limiting gypsy moth caterpillars from late May to early July. Caterpillars can be trapped in a piece of folded burlap wrapped around the tree (the caterpillars must then be destroyed). Trees can also be protected by a "moat"- an old halved tire with detergent and water at the base of the tree. Attaching a strip of aluminum foil, covered with a sticky substance, around the trunk will serve the same purpose (it must be changed when it becomes filled with stuck caterpillars). It should be noted that localized spraying with "Bt", if used, must take place in May or early June to be

effective.

Mass. Audubon does not endorse or support any program or policy for gypsy moth control except those contained in this statement. In this way, Mass. Audubon reaffirms its commitment to an integrated approach to gypsy moth suppression that will result in the least damage to human health, wildlife, and the natural environment.