

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

"That time of year" hasn't come quite yet, but despite the long winter so recently passed, it's creeping up on us. And, for once during an April, I'm not writing about spring. No, indeed.

What I refer to, however, is just as sure to put in its appearance as the darling buds of May. The principal difference is, though, that spring bursts forth upon every side, under every stone, in each tender blade of grass and each unfurling leaflet. Not so with gypsy moths.

Where gypsy moths were most destructive last year, they may be hardly noticeable this season. And where not a one was to be found last summer, this year, that area may suffer an invasion and serious defoliation that may best be equated with a plague of locusts. Only the most recent of newcomers to Cape Cod will find the presence of gypsy moths in nearby woodlands, or even much closer to their homes, a surprise this summer.

For many residents of the Cape, one question is not whether foundation plantings and ornamental shrubs and trees will be attacked, but exactly when, and to what extent. Another question is bound to be, "What can be done to minimize the damage?"

The first sign of the siege you'll see will probably be a tiny black worm descending from a tree branch on a filament so fine it's nearly invisible to the naked eye. The uninitiated might not give that discovery a second thought, but the knowing will wince, for within ten days or two weeks following the first appearance of the moth's larval stage, every oak tree within creeping-crawling distance will have been stripped bare of its leaves, and the voracious caterpillars will have begun chewing to bar twigs anything else green in the vicinity.

At the time the caterpillars begin to eat, sprays of Sevin, Dipel, or other pesticides may help control the damage, but environmentalists will voice strong objections to aerial spraying, will warn that insecticides may also be harmful to human health, will point out correctly that indiscriminate spraying also kills beneficial insects such as bees, lady bugs, and even the hornets which are the gypsy moths' natural enemy.

Articles on the pros and cons will predict that birds consuming bugs which have fed on sprayed leaves may be

killed, that fish in ponds where spray drifts may die, that other life forms, including man, may be negatively affected. It will be argued that the moths, given a chance to complete their natural cycle, will eventually deplete their own food supply causing their populations to collapse.

And all these postulates may be true. Nevertheless, the sight of acre after acre of denuded woodlands is abhorrent to lovers of forests, and every homeowner who takes pride in his fine foundation specimens, who finds pleasure in his flowering shrubs, whose heart is gladdened at the sight of shade trees casting cool shadows over manicured lawns, shudders at the thought of greenery disappearing before the insatiable jaws of billions of gypsy moth caterpillars.

Some there are who last year took preventive steps in the hope that Mother Nature can be fooled. Whether their efforts were successful will be clearly evident during this year's month of June. One such, a man who lives close enough to me to be called a neighbor, last year purchased several traps containing a substance which smells, to the male gypsy moth when he has reached the flying stage, enough like the tantalizing aroma emitted by the female gypsy moth when she is ready to mate, to elicit appropriate response. Males emerge earlier from their pupal stage than do females; by entrapping all the males before the females are receptive to masculine attention, the fertile and prodigiously productive females may go virginal to their graves.

That is the theory behind the sex-lure traps designed to help control future generations of gypsy moths. Convinced the technique was worth the minimal expense and a small effort, my neighbor brought home his traps, read the directions carefully, and followed them to the letter.

Included in those directions was the recommendation that after baiting the device with the attractant, hands be thoroughly washed. This was done. But when my neighbor stepped outside carrying the baited traps and prepared to hang them among the trees in his yard, he received an unexpected welcome.

As he crossed the deck at the rear of his home, out of the woods and bushes separating his property from other peoples' came flights of gypsy moths from all directions. They fluttered frantically about his head. They plastered

themselves against his jeans. They settled in a swarm upon the traps in his hands. And, following the first wave, came more.

Gypsy moths are utterly harmless to man. They neither bite nor sting. Yet finding oneself in close proximity to thousands of them can be a disturbing, if not a disgusting, experience. The sensation of being attacked by a horde of soft squishy flipping flapping insects, all bent on getting to the source of that intoxicating odor, nearly sent that six-foot human male around the bend.

Nor do I blame him. When he first told me the story, I was convulsed with a fit of laughter, as he intended I should be; but, after recovering from the paroxysm, I sympathized, for, surely, I should have been as repulsed as he, were I to have the same experience. There's something ignominious, too, about finding oneself the object of sexual attraction among gypsy moths.

The man's foresightedness and determination to take positive action to help rid the area of as many of these obnoxious pests as possible is admirable and commendable. I hope that among the moths who answered his siren call were included all those on my own acreage. And I also hope that anyone who suspects gypsy moth eggs are waiting to hatch among the trees on their property will make timely purchases of the sex-lure traps this summer, before the supplies of the traps are exhausted. Further, I hope local stores will order ample supplies so local demands may be met. Last year, when I looked for them, I was too late; there were none to be had.

But be warned: the chemical attractant is powerful stuff. The best method may be to set the traps before the males emerge from the pupal stage. Should the smallest particle cling to your clothing, your hands, or any object attached to you, and be exposed to the male's sensitive olfactory organs, you'll find yourself the object of unsought attentions. At least six launderings, his wife told me, were required to eliminate the enticing odor from his jeans.

If everyone invests in a few of these traps and hangs them out, this year, all the males within range may be trapped, and next year's population could, indeed, be greatly reduced.

Never underestimate, however, the powerful urge to procreate.

Dartmouth College Club to meet

The April luncheon meeting of the Dartmouth Club of Cape Cod will be held at Mildred's Chowder House in Hyannis on Tuesday, April 27, starting with the social hour at 11:45 a.m. and followed at 12:15 p.m. by the luncheon.

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