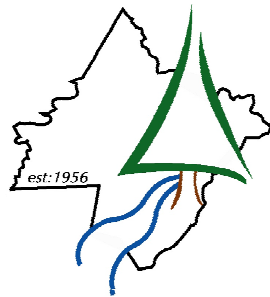


September 18, 2008



## Conservation Horizons

*Pike County Conservation District*

### What's with the webs?

While driving along admiring the beautiful landscape that is Pike County you may have noticed some of the trees are covered with mysterious web-like substances. Contrary to popular belief, this is not the work of the pesky Gypsy Moth caterpillar. This is the work of two other caterpillar species - the eastern tent caterpillar and the fall webworm. To shed some light on these mysterious creatures we looked to the Penn State College of Agricultural Sciences Department of Entomology website, [http://www.ento.psu.edu/extension/fact\\_sheets.html](http://www.ento.psu.edu/extension/fact_sheets.html), for more information. Below is a brief description of these pests and how they affect our landscapes.

#### **Fall Webworm**

The fall webworm is a native pest of shade trees and shrubs and appears from late summer through early fall. It feeds on almost 90 species of deciduous trees commonly attacking hickory, walnut, birch, cherry and crabapple. The fall webworm constructs its nest over the end of the branch rather than at tree crotches. The large noticeable webs contain caterpillars, dead partially eaten leaves, and fecal droppings. The white hair-covered egg masses contain several hundred light yellow eggs. When fully grown, they are covered with whitish hairs that originate from black and orange warts. Larvae vary by coloring and markings, but are usually greenish with a broad, dusky stripe along the back with a yellow stripe along the side. Adult fall webworms vary considerably from pure white to white with black spots with a wingspread of about 32 mm. Females usually deposit their egg masses on the underside of the leaves, hatching in approximately 1 week. They immediately begin to spin a small silken web over the leaves on which they feed consuming leaves inside the protection of a tent-like web. As they grow, they enlarge the web, sometimes up to 2-3 feet of the infested branch. They may defoliate a tree occasionally, but rarely kill it. After about 6 weeks the mature larvae leave the web and pupate on or in the soil. There may be one or two generations each year, depending on the geographic location in Pennsylvania.

#### **The Eastern Tent Caterpillar**

The eastern tent caterpillar usually strikes our area every eight to ten years. These pests arrive in the spring and are recognized by the nests or tents that they construct in the forks and crotches of a tree. These pests prefer cherry, crabapple, and apple trees, occasionally attacking

other deciduous ornamental shrubs, shade and forest trees. The small larvae spin fine strands of silk wherever they crawl. These tents are made of silken layers and serve as protective sites for larvae and feed for about six to eight weeks. Fully grown larvae are about two inches long, generally black with a white stripe down the middle of the back. When these caterpillars mature they leave the host tree to search for a suitable place to spin their pale yellowish cocoons. During late June and July adults emerge and the female deposits eggs in a mass around small twigs. There is only a generation a year in Pennsylvania. The caterpillars do not feed within their webs, but congregate there during the night and rainy weather. When they are abundant, they will eat all the leaves on a tree which weakens it, but seldom kills it. The leaves on the host tree may be stripped from all the twigs within a distance of three feet from the nests.

The fall webworm and the eastern tent caterpillar larvae are prey for other insects, toads and birds. Several kinds of small, beneficial wasps parasitize eggs, larvae, or pupae of these pests. Many caterpillars die from disease during unfavorable weather. Pruning and destroying the webbed branches and twigs that contain egg masses before the eggs hatch may assist in protecting the tree. These small nests can be easily crushed. Do not burn or torch the nests in trees as this may do additional damage to the tree. Soap or other insecticides may be applied from mid- to late- summer. Several chemical insecticides and a microbial insecticide are registered for control of these insects. If control is necessary, consult a pest-control specialist.

**August Question:** In the U.S., how many miles does the average grocery store's produce travel between the farm where it was grown and your refrigerator? Check out "*Shop Local, Save Land*" – a guide to farms and farm markets in Monroe, Pike and Wayne Counties that was recently produced by the Delaware Highlands Conservancy- call 570-226-3164 for your copy.

**August Answer:** 1500 miles

**September Question:** More than 37 percent of the plant species currently found in Pennsylvania did not occur here at the time of European settlement. True or False?