



# Gypsy Moth

By Forest Health Staff

The gypsy moth is a serious forest pest capable of causing severe damage to hardwood trees, especially oaks. This damage is inflicted as the gypsy moth larvae defoliate entire stands of trees. In cooperation with the USDA, Georgia deploys traps annually to detect the presence of the moth. There are no known infestations currently in Georgia, although the threat is always present.

**History of spread:** Gypsy moths were brought into Massachusetts in the late 1860's. The intent was to farm the moths for silk produced by the larvae. It wasn't long before the moths escaped captivity and moved out into the surrounding woodlands. Many northeastern states now have established populations. Georgia has had outbreaks in White, Fannin and Rockdale Counties. These spots were eradicated by state and federal forestry officials. It is likely that they were started by individuals moving cargo with egg masses attached to it from infested areas. The natural spread of gypsy moths occurs as newly hatched larvae spin long silk threads and ride on the breeze. It will be many years before the natural spread brings gypsy moths into Georgia.

**Identification & Life Cycle:** The gypsy moth goes through four stages of development – egg, larvae, pupae and moth. In summer, a moth lays up to 1,000 eggs in masses between the

size of a dime and quarter. The eggs are covered in the buff colored hairs the female pulls from her abdomen (Figure 1). The female will lay eggs on most anything but usually does so in a protected area. In the south, egg hatch will begin in late March.



Figure 1: Gypsy Moth Egg Masses.  
Photo by Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, Bugwood.org

Gypsy Moth larvae are very easy to distinguish when they are about half grown. The larvae have five pairs of blue dots and six pairs of red dots down their back (Figure 2). The



Figure 2: Gypsy Moth Larvae.  
Photo by USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

larvae will enter the pupal stage in May. Adult moths will emerge 10-14 days later. The moth is not very distinguishable. The larger female

is a brown buff color. The male is darker and smaller (Figure 3).



Figure 3: Male and Female Gypsy Moths.  
Photo by John H. Ghent, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

Male moths fly off in search of females to mate with. The female European gypsy moth does not fly but the female Asian gypsy moth does.

**Damage caused:** The larvae or caterpillar is the destructive stage of the gypsy moth. These larvae feed on several hundred different tree species. Larvae feed during the night and rest in bark crevices during the day, except at high densities in which feeding occurs all day. During epidemic population levels entire forests can be stripped of their leaves. Several years of defoliation can lead to tree mortality. Trees stressed by environmental factors such as drought can be particularly hard hit by defoliation. The impact of gypsy moths would be felt by timber growers, wildlife managers and homeowners.

