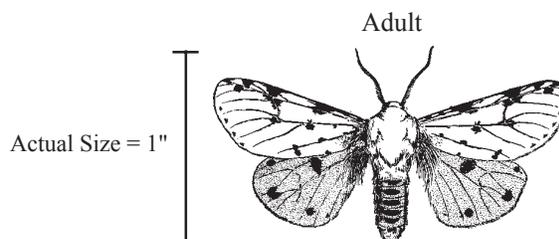
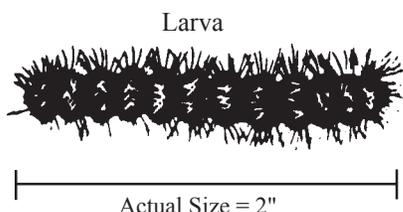


PEST CONTROL BULLETIN NO. 32

SALT MARSH CATERPILLARS

Estigmene acrea (Drury)



GENERAL INFORMATION

The salt marsh caterpillar or "woolly bear" is most frequently seen in the late summer or fall scurrying over the ground, often in large numbers, as they invade yards and gardens from adjoining fields and crops. During these migrations residents often become quite disturbed because of the invasion and apparent inability to cope with the problem. These hairy caterpillars are not poisonous and do not have stinging hairs.

The salt marsh caterpillars develop into tiger moths in the early spring. The moths are mostly white with scattered small black spots. The abdomen is mostly orange with a row of black spots on the top and along the sides. The moths have a wing spread of two to two and one-half inches. The larvae hatch from the eggs the nocturnal moths lay. The caterpillars quickly develop long black or reddish hairs and are greyish but darken to yellow, brownish or almost black with yellow lines and markings. When mature, the caterpillars are about two inches long.

HABITS AND DAMAGE

Young larvae feed close together on the lower side of leaves, to which they give a skeletonizing appearance from their feeding. As the larvae grow larger they become voracious feeders on the many plants to which they spread. Herbaceous crop plants and weeds are most commonly attacked. It is when the infested plants have matured and begin to dry that the main migration occurs over the ground.

CONTROL

Prevention of migration would be enhanced if weed hosts were destroyed before the caterpillars begin movement and if infested crops were promptly "disced under" after the final harvest.

Control is difficult since the mature caterpillars are very resistant to most stomach poisons. Some insecticide materials used may require a permit from the County Agricultural Commissioner.

A barrier over which the caterpillars cannot move is an aluminum foil of similar slick barrier, such as butcher's paper, buried in the soil so that it is perpendicular to the ground for about 10 to 12 inches high and placed along the edge of one's property to exclude invasion. A trench, in which is placed some of the above insecticide dusts, may be made along the outside edge of the barrier.

Often in the fall, the caterpillars die from a fungus disease which affects them.

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This information is provided to help homeowners with their pest problems. Insecticides may be purchased at nurseries, hardware, farm supply, and pet stores. If additional help is needed, contact with a registered pest control operator is suggested.

No endorsement of trade names or products is intended, nor is criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

PRECAUTIONS

1. Handle insecticides with care and follow instructions on the label.

2. Do not use around open flame or exposed foods, and always clean food preparation areas after the use of pesticides.
3. Store out of reach of children and pets, preferably in locked cabinets.
4. Never keep pesticides in anything other than the original container.
5. Never reuse the pesticide container to store any other materials.
6. Dispose of all empty containers properly by placing them in the trash can for removal to the local disposal area.



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