

Del. anti-gypsy moth campaign gears up for '82

NEWARK, Del. — Delaware experienced its first sizable outbreak of gypsy moths last spring. This came as no surprise to entomologists and state foresters, who have been monitoring the spread of this insect.

Strategy meetings were held early in the season for representative of local governments, agencies and communities likely to be affected by the outbreak. Their well-laid plans failed, however, when citizens panicked and started using a wide variety of control methods, many of which were useless because the pests were too mature, or the procedures used were simply ineffective.

Gypsy moth caterpillars will be chomping on tree leaves in some parts of northern New Castle county again next year. According to those who predict such events, Delaware's gypsy moth population has been growing for several years. Three hundred acres reportedly were involved in 1981. Feeding caused complete

defoliation in some cases.

"One defoliation usually doesn't kill most trees," says University of Delaware Extension pesticide specialist John McDaniel. "But if it occurs two years in a row, some may die." Reduced tree vigor seems to be the important factor in losses caused by this pest.

The insecticide most commonly used against the gypsy moth is Carbaryl — better known by its trade-name, Sevin. "This insecticide is reasonably priced and is effective if applications are made at the proper stage of worm development," the specialist says. The best time to apply Sevin is the first few days after caterpillars hatch.

In December of 1980 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency completed a thorough study of Sevin and its effects on human beings. The study probably involved more research reports than similar studies on some medicines, since Sevin has been around longer than some of them, McDaniel says.

As a result of this very detailed scrutiny of Sevin, the EPA concluded that "the overall weight of evidence does not raise prudent concerns of unreasonable risk to human beings." It's hard to consider the EPA as soft on pesticides.

Sevin was introduced over 20 years ago and is labeled for use on more than 100 crops in the U.S. This chemical is readily biodegradable. That is, it quickly breaks down to become harmless substances. It is widely used to control pests on dogs, cats, and other animals.

Sevin will kill honeybees if they come in contact with it soon after application. Beekeepers have reported losing large numbers of bees as a result of spraying fields which were in bloom when treated. Kills of other beneficial insect species have also been found under similar circumstances.

Much of this adverse effect can be eliminated by not spraying plants while they are blooming.

"As is often the case," says McDaniel, "we have a product which works well and presents no unreasonable hazard to man when used properly, but which has the ability to harm local honeybees if misused." Pollination by bees is essential to crop production in many cases. People enjoy honey. And beeswax is a unique and useful product. So it behooves us to take steps to protect this valuable insect when treating for insect pests.

The simplest way to avoid injury to bees is to spray when the trees

used as food by gypsy moth caterpillars are not in bloom. Most species have finished flowering before the gypsy moth becomes a problem and treatment is called for.

Plans are now being made to hold several meetings in New Castle and Kent counties later this winter in order to coordinate 1982 control efforts. These meetings, which will be jointly sponsored by the Cooperative Extension Service and the Delaware Department of Agriculture, will be used to publicize the problem and to advise on what basis control decisions should be made.



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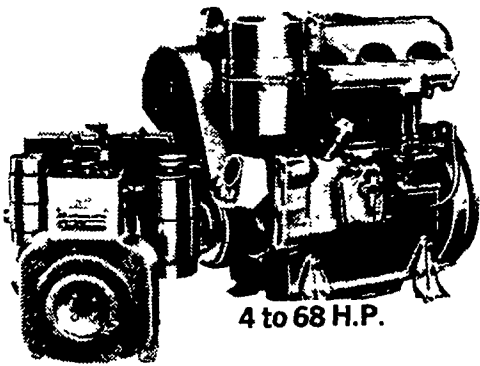
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