

Pa. Braces For Tree Pest Onslaught

WARREN (Warren Co.) — They hatch during mid- to late May, then begin to devour the leaves of hardwood trees. In 1993, they defoliated Pennsylvania landscapes and forests to the tune of more than 1.2 million acres.

If the pest that comes to mind is the gypsy moth caterpillar, think again. The elm spanworm has become the latest major threat to the state's woodlands. The noticeable defoliation it caused in 1993

was nearly four times greater than that of its better-known cousin, the gypsy moth.

"Unlike the gypsy moth, the elm spanworm is a native species," said Greg Hoover, extension entomologist Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "It has been epidemic periodically in Pennsylvania since 1931, but rarely for more than one year at a time. In the past, it was best known as a major pest of urban

street trees."

The adult of the elm spanworm is a powdery white moth with a wingspan of one to one-and-a-half inches. In mid-summer, the females lay an average of 250 oblong eggs in compact masses on the underside of twigs or branches or on tree trunks. The eggs are bright yellow-green when first laid, but darken to a dull olive gray or brown in the winter.

After they hatch in the spring, the destructive larvae grow to about two inches long and mimic twigs. Most are dull or slate black with a rust-colored head. Some of the larvae may be light green with yellow heads.

The larvae feed on a large variety of hardwoods and shade trees, although they prefer elm, hickory, oak, red and sugar maple, American beech, and ash. They begin feeding on the underside of leaves,

causing a shot-hole effect. As they mature, they eat all leaf material between the major veins.

Hoover said property owners can take steps to protect their trees. "You should monitor your landscape from mid-May through early June for signs of elm spanworm larvae," he said. "Where possible, prune small twigs that are infested with egg masses and destroy the eggs by burning or burying them.

"If necessary, a registered insecticide can be applied when larvae are small. Homeowners may want to contact a professional arborist to apply an insecticide, especially on large trees."

The current elm spanworm outbreak began in 1991, when the pest defoliated 65,000 acres, mostly in Elk and McKean counties. In 1992, it spread to Potter County and defoliation increased to more than 300,000 acres.

By 1993, the outbreak extended across the northern third of Pennsylvania from Sullivan and Bradford counties in the east to Warren and Forest counties in the west. The damage reached as far south as Somerset County. Defoliation was visible from the air in 15 counties.

Entomologists are looking to the elm spanworm's natural enemies to help control the pest.

"There are two tiny parasitic wasps that are known to suppress the elm spanworm in the egg state," said Hoover. "If the parasite population increases enough, these small beneficial insects can destroy 80 percent or more of the elm spanworm and cause a collapse of the outbreak.

"But until the parasite population catches up with the pest, it looks as though damage from the elm spanworm may be severe in 1994."

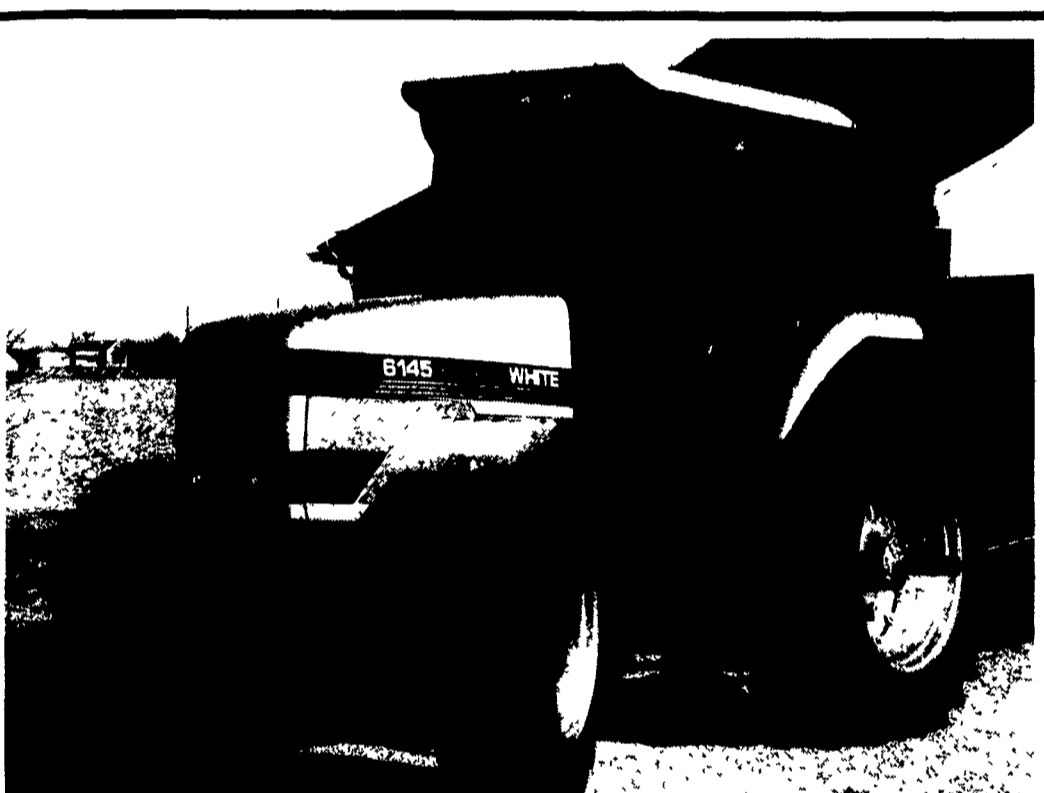
Spring Classic Open Horse Show Set

DALLAS (Luzerne Co.) — The Ninth Annual Spring Classic Open Horse Show will be held on May 7-8 at the Luzerne County Fairgrounds on Route 118 in Dallas.

The show will begin on Saturday at 8 a.m., featuring a variety of western classes. Events include western pleasure, reining, trail and gymkhana for all ages.

On Sunday, the show begins at 8 a.m. with English classes for all ages. A wide variety of hunter classes, including pleasure and over fence classes, will be held.

The \$300 added Pleasure Classic will be held both days and a Super Horse Award will be given at the end of each day to the horse accumulating the most points throughout the day.



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