

Oak Processionary Moth – Update

The Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) is a relatively new pest to the UK. An outbreak was first identified in the UK in 2006, in West London, which is believed to have originated from over-wintering eggs, transported on young Oak trees travelling from Europe to the UK.

Since 2006, OPM infestations have occurred entirely around London and surrounding counties. Although OPM specimens have previously been identified in Leeds and Sheffield, follow-up surveys suggest no viable breeding populations have become established.

The most recent map released by the forestry commission (see bottom of page) has shown a slow but steady spread throughout the London boroughs. Members working in or around London should familiarise themselves with this distribution and identification guide, below.

Why should I be aware of this pest?

1. OPM caterpillars are capable of defoliating large parts of Oak trees. This leaves target trees vulnerable to other, external stresses, such as disease, drought or flooding.
2. The caterpillars have thousands of hairs which, when in contact with human or animal skin, can cause unpleasant rashes. In isolated cases, the hairs can cause more serious issues such as sore throats, breathing difficulties and eye problems. The hairs are also commonly found in the nests they live in.

What do they look like?

- Mature caterpillars are characterised by long, white hairs, on darker bodies. They are likely to form processions (hence the name), and found primarily on Oak trees. They are most likely to be seen in summer.
- Nests are silky in appearance, and almost always on the trunk or large limbs of host trees.



For more detailed photographs from each stage of the life cycle, please see the Forestry Commission identification document below:

[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/identificationimagesopm.pdf/\\$FILE/identificationimagesopm.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/identificationimagesopm.pdf/$FILE/identificationimagesopm.pdf)

Oak Processionary Moth distribution map - London

[https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/OPMNestSurveyResultsAt1_October2017.pdf/\\$FILE/OPMNestSurveyResultsAt1_October2017.pdf](https://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/OPMNestSurveyResultsAt1_October2017.pdf/$FILE/OPMNestSurveyResultsAt1_October2017.pdf)

Incidences of Oak Processionary Moth should be reported to the Forestry Commission:

Telephone: 0300 067 4442

Email: opm@forestry.gsi.gov.uk