

# Officials don't know what to make of gypsy moth discovery in Felton

FELTON — Seven tiny gypsy moths, found within a one-eighth square mile area here this summer, has local agricultural officials confused.

The gypsy moth finds do not follow the usual pattern, according to county Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Rick Bergman. Officials don't know whether they have an infestation on their hands or just a handful of moths might have hitchhiked into the area on vehicles.

An extensive "egg mass survey" by state agricultural crews in downtown Felton over the past few weeks has turned up nothing, according to Bergman. He said the crews will be in the area for several more weeks. The surveys are very detailed — to the point of taking apart wood piles, looking for gypsy moth eggs.

It is the gypsy moth's tree-eating caterpillars that agricultural officials fear. The caterpillars — which emerge from egg masses in spring — thrive on many trees, including redwoods that

dominate San Lorenzo Valley. Ten years ago, more than 1.9 million acres of forest in northeastern United States were totally or partially stripped by the moth.

While this is the fifth consecutive summer the moths have been found in the county, this is the first time more than one has been found in the same immediate area at once. This is also the first time the moths have been found in the wooded Valley — past single finds being limited to the Santa Cruz Yacht Harbor and Live Oak area.

The good news concerning this summer's discoveries, said Bergman, is the fact no moths have turned up in Santa Cruz or Live Oak. He said it was unlikely any would show up this late.

However, as to the Felton finds, he maintained it is "certainly perplexing because we don't know what we have."

Any decision about the possible need for pesticide spraying in Felton, Bergman added, depends on the results of the on-

going egg mass survey. The state would be the one to decide on spraying, and that decision would be made only after public hearings.

In whatever case, no aerial spraying is foreseen. Ground spraying also would only involve the immediate area around the finds. Such spraying takes place in mid-spring when caterpillars emerge from egg masses.

Gypsy moths are known for their hitchhiking patterns, said Bergman. They like to lay eggs in hiding places, such as lawn furniture. It is believed the moths found locally may have been brought in accidentally by visitors.

A huge gypsy moth outbreak — affecting a 100-square-mile area in Eugene, Ore. — recently occurred. Bergman is asking any persons who might have traveled through that area to contact his office. They are interested in inspecting recreational vehicles, outdoor furniture and camping equipment.