

# Gypsy moths turn up

By NANCY BARR

Signs of a gypsy moth infestation have been discovered in Felton, but just what will be done to prevent the spread of the pest is yet to be determined.

A crew from the state Department of Food and Agriculture has been carefully checking the area around Felton Empire Road and Highway 9 where four gypsy moths were discovered in July. So far, they have found one egg mass that may have been deposited by the moths — a sign that there is an infestation, says Rick Bergman, deputy county agricultural commissioner.

"That excludes the theory of non-infestation, that is, that the moths were carried in on a vehicle," Bergman said.

Although gypsy moths have been discovered in Santa Cruz, Live Oak and Capitola in recent years, this is the first time there has been a sign of infestation. The extent of the infestation is unknown and the search is continuing for any more egg masses.

That search is a "painstaking, laborious process," Bergman said.

"It's very time-consuming," he said. "(Crews) can spend three hours on a single residential property. They take apart piles of firewood a piece at a time and put them back together."

They also must check every plant or tree on the property, along with any toys, cars or furniture that may be outside.

A gypsy moth infestation could create serious damage to forests, parks and backyard trees. When the gypsy moth is in the caterpillar stage, it can eat as much as a square foot of

leaves a day and if there are many caterpillars, trees can be defoliated and weakened, and sometimes killed, according to information provided by the state Department of Food and Agriculture.

It will be up to the state to determine what action will be taken to prevent a spread of the gypsy moth in Santa Cruz County, Bergman said.

"There's lots of precedent for spraying gypsy moth infestations in California," Bergman said. There is also a lot of controversy over the best path to take in eradicating the gypsy moth, he said.

Bergman said that even if some kind of spraying is done, it will not be like the spraying during the 1981 Mediterranean fruit fly infestation.

"This involves a much smaller area," he said, "and they are attempting to introduce ground spraying as much as possible."

By the end of October, a scientific committee appointed by the state agriculture department will make a recommendation as to how to deal with the Felton gypsy moth problem, Bergman said. The state will seek public comment on the committee's recommendations before a final decision is made whether to spray or not.

What Bergman said is the most alarming news regarding the gypsy moth is that 17,000 gypsy moths were found in a 100-square-mile section of the Eugene, Ore., area. Bergman said that if Oregon officials can't eradicate the pest there, it is possible the infestation will spread to California.

"You can eradicate gypsy

moth over a small area," he said, but it is difficult and expensive to handle a large infestation.

Officials at border stations check vehicles entering California from Oregon, he said, but the inspections are not always thorough.