

# Mothra

The Light Brown Apple Moth is here and the state wants it gone, but some citizens are dead set against the method | BY PETER KOHT

Australia's revenge for the cane toad, the Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM) has established a foothold on the Central Coast. Less than two inches long, *Epiphyas*

*postvittana* looks very similar to native moths like the orange tortrix, but officials from the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) are noting its arrival with portents of doom.

With a projected adaptability to more than 80 percent of the North American continent, LBAM is a "significant concern for other countries, states and nations," the CDFA warns. The agency believes that the moth could be responsible for more than \$100 million in agricultural losses.

According to CDFA head, A.G. Kawamura, an organic farmer from Orange County, LBAM "threatens our state's natural environment and food systems. They can feed on more than 2,000 different types of crops, including 250 food crops. They reproduce at an alarming rate with females laying clutches of more than 500 eggs with three to five lifecycles per year."

To combat the invading moth, which has been extant on the Central Coast since at least 2006 and was likely carried over from either Australasia or Hawaii, CDFA has proposed and partially implemented an aerial pheromone dispersal over Santa Cruz and Monterey counties. Utilizing two chemicals, Checkmate ORL-F and Checkmate LBAM, planes crisscrossed Monterey County in early September. A second application was dispersed in the first week of October.

Opponents of the spraying ask if eradication is the best way to deal with the invasion. Members of anti-spraying coalitions point to the moth's history in Hawaii, where it is considered a pest, not a plague.

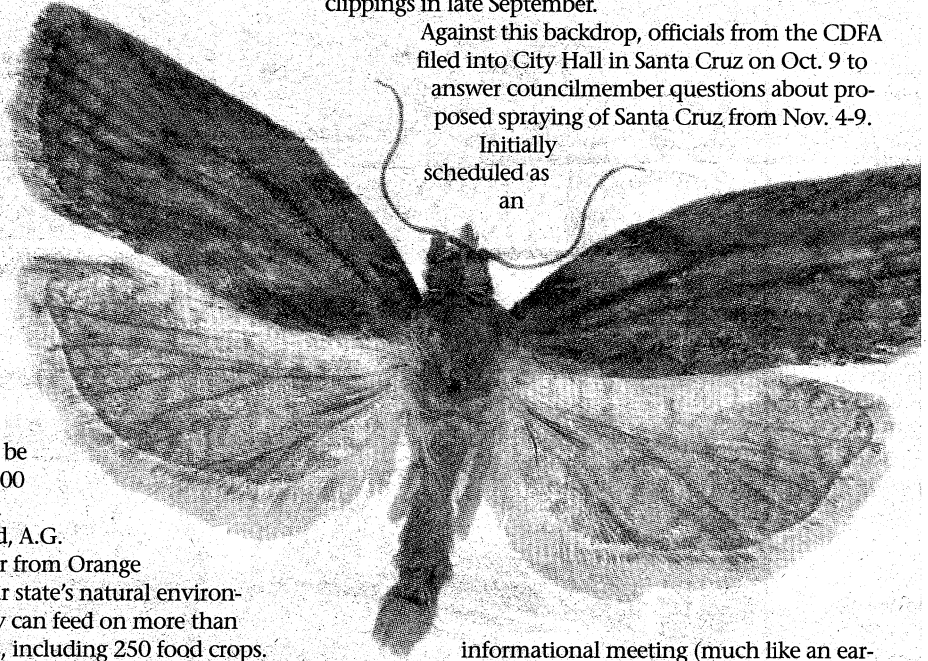
"[LBAM] was first detected in Hawaii more than a century ago, in 1896, but has not been a significant pest in Hawaii," wrote that state's agriculture department on May 2. "In fact, LBAM may actually be considered a bio control agent for serious invasive weeds, such as gorse and blackberry."

But don't try telling that to nursery or orchard owners. Their goods are under quarantine and only ship-

pable after a liberal dosing of organophosphate. Damages have run into the millions, and state officials fear a statewide agricultural quarantine from other countries like Canada, which decertified imports of Central Coast clippings in late September.

Against this backdrop, officials from the CDFA filed into City Hall in Santa Cruz on Oct. 9 to answer councilmember questions about proposed spraying of Santa Cruz from Nov. 4-9.

Initially scheduled as an



informational meeting (much like an earlier event at Simpkins Family Swim Center on Oct. 2 that saw Highway Patrol Officers and Sheriff's Deputies called in to quell community unrest) the city council meeting took a turn for the legalistic when Ed Porter called for the city to file a motion in court calling for a preliminary injunction against the aerial spraying. "I'm nervous about how the state does this to its cities," he said. "I don't like this where the people come and tell us what to do."

Carried by a 4-3 vote, the motion echoed the legal tactics undertaken by HOPE (Helping Our Peninsula's Environment) in an earlier filing in Monterey County. On Oct. 10, their petition for relief was rewarded with this email from the CDFA: "Due to the issuance of a temporary restraining order in Monterey County, the Light Brown Apple Moth pheromone application on the Monterey Peninsula is suspended until further notice." The delay is expected to be 10 days.

While the CDFA maintains that the pheromone spraying represents the most environmentally-sensitive eradication effort ever undertaken by the state, given that it doesn't kill the moths and only hopes to disrupt their sexual reproduction, and doesn't employ organophosphates or other caustic agents, activists and