

Animals

# Will gypsy moth find turn out to be another

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**LIVE OAK** — For the fourth consecutive year, a gypsy moth has been found here, prompting an immediate stepping up of a detection and trapping program by county agriculture officials.

County Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Rick Bergman says no pesticide spraying will take place as a result of the discovery.

The earliest any spraying might take place would be next year, and that would only occur if substantial evidence of an infestation is shown here this fall, he says. Also, any spraying would be done by hand and not by helicopter as with the medfly war in 1981.

Ground spraying is presently being conducted by the state in four Northern California counties — Santa Clara,

Alameda, Contra Costa and Marin.

But unlike the voracious Mediterranean fruit fly — which quickly spread out of control in California two years ago — the state has a good jump on the gypsy moth.

It is the moth's hairy caterpillar that does the damage. When moths are spotted in spring or summer, experts have to wait until winter to see how many eggs have been laid.

As a caterpillar, the insect virtually defoliates broad-leaf trees, like oak and elm, and stone fruit trees, such as peaches and cherries. The larvae can completely strip ornamental shrubs in a matter of days.

The moth was discovered in Live Oak last Tuesday "within three miles" of finds last year along East Cliff Drive near the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor, according to Bergman.

A second moth was found Thursday in

the same area, but has not yet been confirmed as a gypsy moth by state officials.

The discoveries were not surprising, says Bergman, in fact he says they're "overdue." He maintains it's "premature" to try and predict what the new finds mean.

Gypsy moths are known for their peculiar hitchhiking habits, he said. They often will lay egg masses on recreational vehicles and even inside lawn furniture in infested states and hithike to other areas.

Moths found here in past years did not represent infestations. They were merely hitchhikers.

"This find may just be another in a series of coincidental false alarms," Bergman says. "There are several mobile home parks, apartment complexes and considerable tourist traffic in the area."

County agriculture crews are taking no chances, however. Literally thousands of

detection traps have been placed throughout the county.

The five-square-mile are immediately surrounding the new discovery areas have been blanketed with 49 traps per mile.

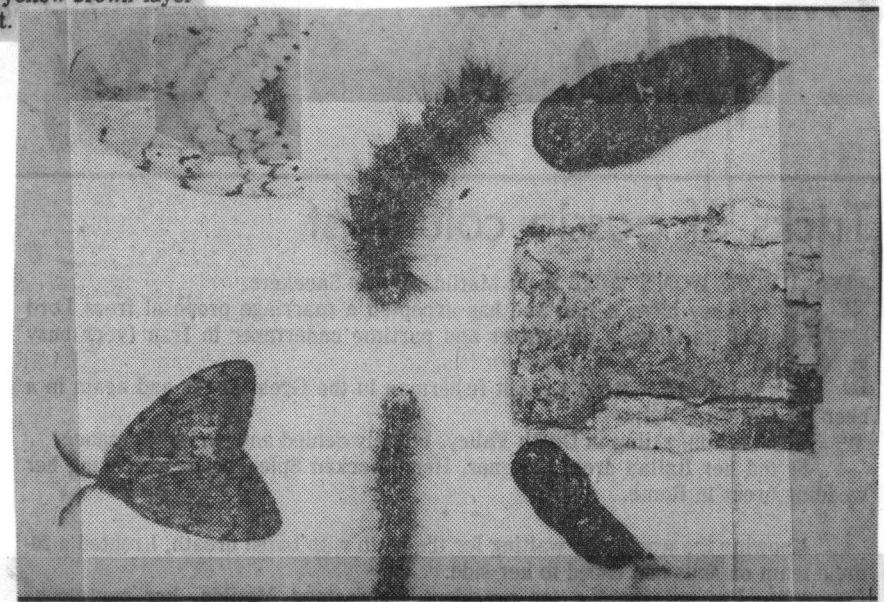
In fall, the county Agriculture Department will begin an "egg mass survey," according to Bergman. This survey will take place in areas where moths have been trapped.

"If we find any signs of infestation — that means egg masses appearing on something other than vehicles and lawn furniture — such as, tree trunks, sides of houses or firewood, that's a good indication that spraying might be necessary," he says.

Female gypsy moths are fairly large, about 1½ inches in diameter and mostly white with a few dark markings. Male gypsy moths are smaller, about an inch in size and brown. Egg masses are about 1½ inches with a golden yellow-brown layer of hairs surrounding it.

## false alarm?

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This photo shows life cycle of gypsy moth.