



GREEN LIFE

A NATIVE CAMPING IN OUR WOODS



By Paula Jones

While walking in your neighborhood, a park, or along a trail recently you may have noticed 'tents' of caterpillars in some trees. These are Eastern Tent Caterpillars, often mistaken for Spongy Moth caterpillars. (The Spongy Moth was formerly known as the Gypsy Moth).

Unlike Spongy Moth caterpillars, Eastern Tent caterpillars are native to Connecticut, and generally not harmful to Connecticut's trees. The caterpillars cooperatively build the 'tents' on their host trees to provide shelter from predators (birds). The tents expand as the caterpillars grow. Spongy Moths are not social, and do not build tents. They are pests and can cause widespread defoliation when their populations are high.

Eastern Tent caterpillars rarely cause extensive damage to trees because they co-evolved with native trees and birds. Younger landscape trees are the ones most susceptible to defoliation stress. If you have tent caterpillars in your younger, smaller trees and are concerned about it,

Photo by Paula Jones

there's a simple solution. Use a broom to break up the tent, and sweep it in a bucket of soapy water. Breaking up the tent also exposes the caterpillars to their natural predators - birds, which rely on insects (including juicy caterpillars) to feed their babies in the spring. Baby birds need protein, and caterpillars are a good protein package.

For more information about tent caterpillars, here is

a link to a short piece on the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection's website:

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/caes/documents/publications/fact_sheets/entomology/tent_caterpillars_malacosoma.pdf

