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**NORTHERN TENT CATERPILLAR
IN SOUTHWESTERN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

N. Humphreys
Forest Insect and Disease Survey

The northern tent caterpillar, *Malacosoma californicum pluviale*, is widespread on southern Vancouver Island and the Gulf Islands for the third consecutive year and on the Sunshine Coast for the second consecutive year. Severe defoliation is expected on deciduous trees and shrubs throughout the Greater Victoria area, with various fruit trees the main host. On Salt Spring and Texada islands caterpillar tents have been noted mainly on fruit trees and ornamental poplars. Numerous colonies have also been reported throughout the Comox Valley, around Lund, Duncan and the Cowichan River drainage.

Infested trees will become partially or completely stripped by mid-June. The diameter growth of infested trees is reduced and top-kill and branch dieback can occur after several consecutive years of defoliation. Defoliated trees usually re-leaf by mid-summer. The conspicuous silken tents are used as a resting place between forages for food, as a molting site, and also for protection during unfavorable weather conditions. Trees become very unsightly during the infestation period and the hordes of crawling larvae are of considerable annoyance in recreational areas.

Infestations usually last from 3-5 years. Populations are controlled naturally through the action of parasites, predators, and disease although early assessments of colonies in the Victoria area indicate healthy populations with no signs of disease. In urban areas the most simple method of control is through the destruction of egg masses in the winter or by destroying tents in the spring. The naturally occurring bacterium *Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *kurstaki* (Btk), a spray-applied bio-insecticide, can be purchased at garden supply outlets.

For further information please call the Forest Insect and Disease Survey at 363-0778.
