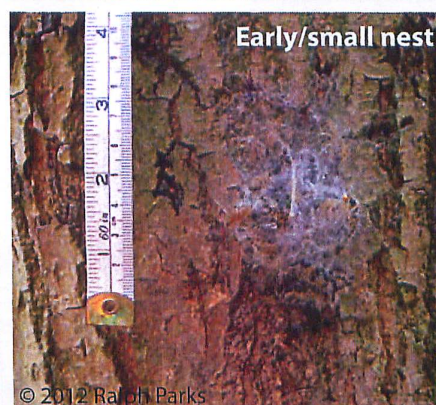


# Oak Processionary Moth

*Thaumetopoea processionea*



The nests can be found anywhere in the tree from the trunk to the main branches and when new, the nests appear white; this soon discolours though to match the colour of the tree bark. Even abandoned nests contain shed skins and thousands of toxic hairs. Extreme caution should be taken and the nests must be reported immediately.

- Thank you to Bartlett Tree Experts and Ralph Parks for providing images and text.

**Preventative spraying and nest removal must be done by experienced operatives.**

**Restrictions are in place on the movement of OPM infected material including any arisings from Oaks within the OPM outbreak and buffer zone.**

**Do not attempt to remove the caterpillars or nests without proper training and use of PPE.**

**Sightings of caterpillars or nests must be reported to the Forestry Commission's Forest Research Agency  
Tel: 01420 22255 Email: [christine.tilbury@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:christine.tilbury@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)**





# Oak Processionary Moth

*Thaumetopoea processionea*

**Be aware if working in oak trees within the M25 of the potential for OPM.**



June/July

© 2012 Jon Banks (BTE)

This caterpillar is a defoliator of oaks, both common species and Evergreen Oak and Sweet Chestnut. It has been a problem in West London since it was first reported in 2006.

These caterpillars are posing an increasing threat to humans as their range is being extended by the warming European climate. The backs of the older caterpillars are covered with as many as 63,000 pointed defensive bristles containing a toxin known as thaumetopoein. Contact with the hairs, or their inhalation, can cause skin irritations and exacerbate breathing problems. These problems can still occur even if the caterpillars are not handled as their hairs can break off and travel in the air, **tree workers are the most vulnerable of all to these effects. Tree workers will become sensitised by repeated exposure and suffer greater effects from such exposure.**



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As the caterpillars grow they lighten in colour, from brown to grey. The older caterpillars have a single black stripe running down the middle of the back and a whitish line along each side. Long white hairs arise from the body. Less easy to see are the thousands of toxic short hairs.

They feed together and when not feeding, congregate in communal nests made of white silk webbing. They follow one another head-to-tail to and from the nests.



© 2012 Bartlett Tree Experts



Feeding damage

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