

Kev's Guide to - Caterpillars

Description and life cycle

The adult moth is grey-brown with a wingspan of over 40mm. It lays greyish coloured eggs in neat clusters, usually on the tree or in woodpiles. It is mostly active at night and can also lay eggs under shade cloth and behind curtains.

Eggs hatch as brown-black hairy caterpillars with a faint yellow body stripe. They quickly grow up to 40mm long, feeding at night and only on cape lilac trees. They are sensitive to sunlight and while small hide under bark and in hollows of the tree, usually on the southern side.

As they get larger, they come to ground at dawn, either by crawling down the trunk or by dropping down on a fine web. They are looking for shady hiding spots, new trees to feed on and places to pupate. The caterpillars move quickly, and can cover 60 to 80 metres or more in a short time. Many will return to the tree at dusk or just after, crawling up the trunk to feed on the leaves. This daily movement up and down the tree can continue for a week or more.

Caterpillars are active during the warmer months, and there can be from three to five generations, five to six weeks apart. Activity generally starts in October through to April, but it can begin as early as mid-September.

Control

Like most insect pests, effective control is easiest early in their life cycle. Start control treatments in early October; or monitor for the pest weekly by shining a torch up into the canopy of the tree at dusk and start control measures at the first sign of activity.



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The hairs of the caterpillar can cause an allergic reaction to the skin, so it is advised not to touch them with your hands and prevent children from playing with them.

Kev's Caterpillar Treatment

After trial and error I have found a specific chemical that works a treat on caterpillars. This treatment is done by spraying the trunks of the infested trees as well as the ground below, also it is important to cover as much ground between the infested trees and your home so they are stopped before reaching the walls, then chemical is also applied to the walls facing the infestation in case there is just not enough ground space between the trees and your home.

Cost starts at \$300 depending on the area that requires treatment.



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