

## Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) - (*Thaumetopoea processionea*)



<https://www.newscientist.com/article/2302003-tougher-action-needed-to-stop-oak-killing-moths-spread-in-the-uk/>

### What is OPM?

Oak processionary moth is a pest found on Oak trees primarily in the south of England but that has begun to spread northwards in the UK. It has been found this month in Long Eaton which is adjacent to the M1 in the East Midlands.

There are various stages in the moth's lifecycle, but it is the caterpillar stage that holds the most significance to humans and land managers. The caterpillars cluster together in large silken nests usually on tree stems and branches at various heights but are sometimes seen on the ground. Multiple nests can be found on one tree. The "processionary" part of the name relates to the feeding pattern of the caterpillar as it travels in a procession nose to tail to feed on young oak leaves. Caterpillars are only seen in mid-late spring and early summer. Old nests can still be found during the winter but are not usually inhabited. It is extremely rare to find OPM on any host species other than Oak.

### What are the risks?

Hairs on the caterpillars' bodies contain an irritant to human and animal skin, eyes and can cause sore throats and breathing difficulties. The risk of exposure is highest in May and June. Caterpillars can shed their hairs when threatened, these hairs can travel in the wind and are abundant in and around nests. They can also be present within the vicinity of the host tree on other vegetation and on the ground. They can get onto clothes and are notorious for blowing onto peoples hung-out washing.

### Key information

- Oak processionary moth caterpillars develop tiny hairs that can be harmful to humans and animals.
- Caterpillars are usually present from mid spring to early summer.
- The host species is almost entirely limited to Oak (*Quercus* sp.).
- Nest sizes range from small to a few feet across, are silk like in appearance and can be seen on the stems, branches (usually underside) and sometimes on the floor.

### Action:

- Spot it, avoid it, report it! Sightings are to be reported to the Forestry Commission and to your **environmental team** in a prompt manner so that treatment can be arranged.

### Links:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/oak-processionary-moth-identified-in-derbyshire>

<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/oak-processionary-moth-thaumetopoea-processionea/>

### What are the controls measures.

It isn't possible to eradicate the largest outbreaks of OPM, but a government programme has been in place since 2012 to minimise its size, spread and impact. Treatment is available in the form of pesticide and nest removal. This is to be carried out by trained professionals with the correct equipment. OPM will often spread to neighbouring Oak trees, so it is wise to carry out a thorough inspection of other Oaks nearby.

### What can I do if I spot OPM

- Keep your distance from infected trees/nests and if windy remove yourself from the area all together.
- Do not touch or try to remove any nests or caterpillars.
- Report sightings to the Forestry commission via their tree alert page and to your environmental team - Make sure you have coordinates/location pin to hand.



<https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/oak-processionary-moth-thaumetopoea-proceSSIONEA/opm-manual-2-public-and-animal-health-advice/>

### Links:

Further reading can be found on this link 'Health effects of exposure to setae of oak processionary moth larvae:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/432003/Oak\\_Processionary\\_Moth\\_FINAL\\_2.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/432003/Oak_Processionary_Moth_FINAL_2.pdf)

Public and animal health advice – Forest Research:

<https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/pest-and-disease-resources/oak-processionary-moth-thaumetopoea-proceSSIONEA/opm-manual-2-public-and-animal-health-advice/>

<https://www.getsurrey.co.uk/news/surrey-news/gallery/large-oak-processionary-moth-nests-14809972>



# Key Contacts

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Forestry Commission: Tree alert page

<https://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/tools-and-resources/fthr/tree-alert/>