



# Forest Health Note

## Silver-Spotted Tiger Moth (*Halsidota argentata*)

### Hosts:

Douglas-fir, true fir, spruce and pine.

### Importance:

Silver-spotted tiger moth is the most common defoliator of Douglas-fir in western Oregon. Damage is commonly reported during the winter or spring months, often after caterpillars have stripped one or two branches of needles. Tiger moth defoliation can make trees unsightly, but no permanent damage results from these infestations (Figure 1).

“...defoliation can make trees unsightly, but no permanent damage results...”

### Look For:

September - April

Caterpillars cluster inside dense webs covering one or more branches. Tiger moth caterpillars are the only defoliators encountered in large numbers on



Figure 1: Young Douglas-fir with tiger moth colony and feeding damage to older needles. New buds are not damaged by larval feeding and flush normally.

Douglas-fir foliage during the winter and early spring. The caterpillar is small ( $\frac{1}{4}$ " to  $1\frac{1}{2}$ ") and covered with dense black, reddish-brown, and yellow hairs (Figure 2).

Young larvae feed gregariously, forming loose webs in which they overwinter. Larvae resume feeding in early spring,

with colonies usually restricted to only a few branches.

May - June

Webs may still be present on trees, but the nearly mature caterpillars abandon the web and disperse over the tree to feed as single individuals.

Mid-June - August

The pupal, moth and egg stages predominate during these months, and the caterpillars are absent from tree foliage. There is one tiger moth generation per year.

### Impact of Tiger Moth Defoliation:

Tiger moth defoliation usually occurs on a few scattered trees and infestations do not spread. Larval feeding is concentrated in the vicinity of the webbing so that only a few branches are stripped of needles. The buds at the tips of the branches are unaffected by the defoliation and flush normally during April - May. The flushing of new



Figure 2: Mature tiger moth larva feeding singly.



foliage greatly improves the appearance of trees and the new needles are not eaten by larvae. Tiger moth infestations only persist for one or two years and do not cause branches to die.

***Control:***

*Natural*

Larval parasites, particularly Tachinid flies, can dramatically reduce moth populations such that control is usually not required. High levels of parasitism cause most large infestations or outbreaks to collapse in one or two years.

*Cultural*

On high value trees, prune off and destroy the infested branch and caterpillars as soon as the infestation is apparent.

*Insecticides*

Spraying of tiger moth infestations is rarely if ever warranted. Insecticides are most effective against small larvae and should be applied as soon as the infestation is noticed to minimize foliage damage. The following formulations are registered for tiger moth control on ornamental trees:

- *Bacillus thuringiensis*
- tebufenozide
- cyfluthrin
- spinosad

**Remember, when using pesticides, always read and follow the label.**

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