

URL: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/forest-tent-caterpillar>

Government of Ontario

Forest tent caterpillar

Information about forest tent caterpillar (*Malacosoma disstria*), a forest defoliating insect found in Ontario.

Overview

- native to North America
- forest tent caterpillar is the most widespread defoliator of hardwood trees in North America
- periodic outbreaks approximately every 10 to 12 years and typically last from 3 to 6 years in a particular area

Host species

In northern Ontario, forest tent caterpillar prefers trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*) and other poplars, as well as white birch (*Betula papyrifera*). In southern Ontario, the preferred hosts are sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) and oak (*Quercus* spp.), but it can also be found defoliating many other hardwoods excluding red maple (*Acer rubrum*).

Characteristics and life cycle

- adults are buff-brown moths with three darker bands across each forewing
- they are in flight from late June to early August
- eggs are laid in bands of a hundred or more, cemented together in bands completely encircling a twig and covered with a glue-like protective coating
- eggs are laid in the summer, with the larvae emerging the following spring at time of bud break
- full-grown caterpillars are 50mm long, hairy and brownish, with a slate-blue stripe along each side and a row of keyhole-shaped white spots along the back
- after feeding for six weeks, the caterpillars spin yellowish cocoons in a sheltered place and then pupate inside
- forest tent caterpillars have one generation per year

