

## SILVER-SPOTTED TIGER MOTHS ON CONIFERS

The tiger moths are a small family of stout-bodied moths with broad and attractively colored wings. The adult of the silvers-potted tiger moth, *Halisidota argentata*, is a large yellowish brown moth with numerous distinct silvery-white spots on the front wings.

Adults fly in July and August depositing green, hemispherical eggs in loose clusters on twigs and needles of host trees, principally Douglas-fir, but also on western hemlock, lodgepole pine, grand fir, sitka spruce and western red-cedar.

The eggs hatch in about three weeks and the small brown hairy caterpillars feed in colonies on needles, forming loose webs containing dead needles and other debris. Feeding continues into the fall and larvae overwinter in the webs. In the spring larval feeding resumes until the larvae are about one inch long at which time they abandon their gregarious habit, disperse and feed individually.



Damage to Noble fir caused by feeding of larvae of the Silver-spotted tiger moth.

The mature larva is generally reddish brown, but there are yellow hairs and black tufts. These tufts contain poisonous hairs that can cause dermatitis. Larvae are commonly attacked by parasites.

**The important distinguishing characteristic of this insect relates to appearance of the mature larval form in early spring when no other common caterpillar is in this stage of development.** Gypsy moths are not yet at the mature larval stage: at this time they are only about 1/4" long. Tent caterpillars (which feed on deciduous hosts) are also in the early larval stages.

In June, larvae spin brownish cocoons which are attached to parts of the defoliated trees or to debris beneath the tree. After pupation, adults emerge to deposit eggs in July-August.

## Control

The silver-spotted tiger moth larvae are rarely seen in fall or winter but are readily noticed when defoliation is evident in the spring - March to May. Damage will not kill trees, but feeding on individual branches may require extensive pruning. Time also heals.

It may be possible to prune out early infestation on individual trees in the fall or early spring. Extensive damage to individual Christmas trees may make those trees unmarketable, at least for the current year. Chemical control will not repair damage.

If control is contemplated, Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) is available in packages for the homeowner and for the commercial grower. There are several brands. Follow label directions for application and be aware that this biological insecticide is only effective against certain caterpillars.

Chemical insecticides registered for use include Orthene and diazinon. Follow labels carefully for safe and proper use and for the protection of non-target species, such as honeybees.

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**Pesticide Use** - Due to constantly changing laws and regulations, no liability for the suggested use of chemicals in this Newsletter is assumed by the ONW Newsletter. Pesticides should be applied according to label directions on the pesticide container.

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