

## Case study for OPM removal in Hertfordshire: North Mymms Parish Council

Oak processionary moth (OPM) is an invasive species introduced into England in 2005. It has since become established in London and is now spreading into surrounding counties. OPM is found almost exclusively on oak. Eggs over-winter once laid mid-August, caterpillars emerge mid-April and proceed through six development stages before emerging as moths during late-July.



While the moth is harmless, caterpillars pose a risk to public health through microscopic hairs which cover its body. Contact with hairs typically causes skin rashes, although symptoms can include eye irritation, sore throats and in extreme cases breathing difficulties and allergic reactions.



Following the main outbreak London has been designated as the core zone, while Hertfordshire sits within the control zone ring which aims to slow and reduce OPM spread. The Forestry Commission (FC) has led the control programme which revolves around insecticide sprays between mid-April and late-June. It is sometimes necessary to manually remove nests in high risk areas, however while spraying in the control zone is current FC funded, nest removal must be funded by the land owner.

An outbreak of OPM was recently confirmed in Hertfordshire in June 2019 in a playground belonging to North Mymms Parish Council (NMPC) in Welham Green. Caterpillars were observed moving around the base of a lone oak and a single nest was subsequently located about 2-3m up on the main trunk after a child broke out in a rash after touching one of the caterpillars.



NMPC responded immediately; upon being alerted of the incident the council informed FC's OPM team and posted notices using FC templates alerting local residents of the risk. Because the playground was assessed as a high-risk area with a high likelihood of additional contact incidents the base of the tree was cordoned off to reduce this risk.

Contact was maintained between NMPC, Hertfordshire County Council's (HCC) Tree Health Project Officer and one of Welwyn Hatfield Borough

Council's team of Tree Officers throughout the process to ensure all necessary steps were taken within each organisation. This included informing adjacent landowners and a nearby school.

Because the caterpillars were in an advanced lifecycle stage, insecticide sprays would have been ineffective this year; therefore NMPC engaged a trained specialist local tree professional to manually remove the nest. This took place just ten days after the initial sighting. It is anticipated that FC will include this tree in their scheduled spraying programme in 2020 and 2021. No other nests have so far been detected on the tree or other nearby oak trees. OPM population spread is slow and incremental; however FC has advised that a growing number of similar instances should be expected in Southern Hertfordshire over the coming years. If not addressed infestations can become very serious; however the quick and informed action taken by NMPC has reduced the associated risk.



OPM is a notifiable species which must be reported to FC for their dedicated team to provide official ID confirmation and record confirmed sightings. FC will then instruct necessary action and provide further information and support.

More information can be found on the FC website: [www.forestresearch.gov.uk/opm](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/opm)  
FC's dedicated OPM team can be contacted by email: [OPM@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:OPM@forestrycommission.gov.uk)

Further information about tree pests and diseases in Hertfordshire can be access through HCC's Tree Health Network: [www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/treehealth](http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/treehealth)

All images courtesy of FC, NMPC and Maydencroft Ltd

# Potential oak processionary moth (OPM) sighting

## What action should I take?



### Notify

- Involve the responsible person within your organisation
- This could include; Parish Council Clerk, Head Teacher or Tree Officer, whoever is responsible for ensuring the safety of people using the green spaces on your land.



### Report

- Report the sighting to the Forestry Commission's (FC) OPM team - [OPM@forestrycommission.gov.uk](mailto:OPM@forestrycommission.gov.uk)
- Also notify your local District/Borough Council's Tree Officer



### Inform

- Post notices alerting staff, residents and the general public to the sighting and the associated risks
- Template documents can be found on the FC website: [www.forestresearch.gov.uk/opm](http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/opm)



### Assess

- Assess the location and extent of the infestation to determine whether further action is necessary to reduce the risk of contact
- Consider cordoning or the tree around the drip line or limiting access to parts of the area



### Action

- Follow FC advice on how best to control the infestation which is likely to involve arrangements for the FC's insecticide spraying programme and possibly nest removal using a trained specialist tree professional