



## OAK PROCESSIONARY MOTH

*Thaumetopoea processionea*

The **Oak Processionary** (*Thaumetopoea processionea*) is a moth whose caterpillars are pests in oak forests and pose a health hazard because of their poisonous setae (hairs), which may cause skin irritation and asthma.



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**Oak is its preferred food source, but it also attacks hazel, hornbeam, sweet chestnut, birch and beech.**

### Damage:

The moths are posing an increasing threat to humans as their range is being extended by the warming European climate. The backs of older caterpillars (3rd to 6th instars) are covered with up to 63,000 pointed defensive bristles containing an urticating toxin. The setae break off readily, become airborne and can cause epidemic caterpillar dermatitis, manifested as a papular rash, pruritus, conjunctivitis and, if inhaled, pharyngitis and respiratory distress, including asthma or even anaphylaxis.

### Identifying Features:

The wingspan of adult stage moths is between 25 and 35 mm. Their pattern of tan, brown and white make the adults difficult to see against oak bark. Adults fly during July and August. The larvae construct communal nests of white silk from which they crawl at night in single file, head to tail in large processions to feed on foliage in the crowns of trees, returning in the same manner.



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#### Information Source

Oak Processionary Moth [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oak\\_Processionary](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oak_Processionary)>

#### Image Sources

[Oak Processionary Moth](http://www.forestryimages.org/), 24 November 2008 <http://www.forestryimages.org/>