

HARPSWELL ANCHOR

Contact Information:

Anchor Publishing, Inc.
945 Harpswell Neck Road
Harpswell, Maine 04079
207-833-5100
www.harpswellanchor.com
news@harpswellanchor.com
View us on Facebook

Anchor Office Hours:

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Monday – Friday

Editor & Publisher:

Robert Anderson

Graphic Design:

Tom Allen

Office Manager:

Claudia Simmons

Staff:

Kara Douglas

Pilot:

The late Lloyd Thompson

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Browntail Moth in Harpswell Is Widespread

BY MARY ANN NAHF

Browntail Moth has been with us for decades. The pest hitchhiked a ride on a shipment of roses from Europe to Massachusetts in 1897. By the early 1900s, it had spread throughout six eastern states and two Canadian provinces. The State of Maine even had a bounty on the webs. The population collapsed in the 1920s, and for decades the moth retreated to a few islands in Casco Bay and Cape Cod.

The last few years, however, have seen a significant rebound to levels not seen in Harpswell since the late 1990s and the moth can now be found throughout our town. Overall in coastal Maine, populations have risen to levels higher than anything seen since the early 1900s. Cumberland and Sagadahoc counties are hard hit – damage from the moth was so extensive last summer that its effects could be mapped from the air.

As the infestation increased, the town began getting more and more calls asking for help. Information about clipping nests, measures to protect one from the toxic hairs, and what to do for the rash are now provided on the town website. Cool wet springs are conducive to the spread of Entomophaga aulicae, a fungus fatal to the moth. Our first line of defense is to hope that the right conditions rescue us once again! While waiting, there are



Pest Control Long Point Road Association members Carl Paine, Dick Fahey (A-Man Landscaping), Scott Keller, Roger Greenwood, David Plumpton, Douglas Butler (Assoc. President), Sue Rich and dog Toby team up to scout the area for browntail moth nests. (MARY ANN NAHF PHOTO)

actions we can take both individually and communally.

What Can Individuals Do?

The first line of defense is to cut out all nests you can reach before March 31st. Removing just ten nests can prevent as many as 4,000 new caterpillars from hatching out this spring. Destroy the cut nests by dunking them in soapy water over night, burning them, or chipping them.

When You Need a Professional

Webs that are too high to reach can be treated with pesticides before the end of May. Timing is critical: treatment before the end of May will kill the larvae before they develop toxic hairs. Treat after that and you will have lots of dead caterpillars with toxic

hairs lying about. Other possible treatments besides using a hydraulic hand-held spray gun, include injections into the tree, bark painting and having a professional with a cherry picker clip out the webs. Just treating a few trees may not help much if other nearby trees are affected. The more widespread the control, the more effective. A single round of treatment is not going to provide protection the following year; annual treatments may be needed to control the problem.

If considering chemical treatment, seek professional help. There is a State protocol for treating browntail moth in the 250 ft shoreline zone, details of which are posted on the town's website. State Statute also requires that application of any pesticide as a service for which compensation is paid must be done by a Maine

licensed commercial pesticide applicator. Have the applicator provide you with a clear treatment plan that considers the surrounding environment. As Long Point Road Association's Doug Butler emphasized, "The most important thing for our neighborhood was developing a relationship with an experienced licensed professional who used town and conservation resources to come up with a plan for us that will be effective and respect the environment and the law. It's not something we could have figured out ourselves."

Research is Ongoing for Better Solutions

Presently available remedies are either prohibitively expensive or practically impossible because so many of the nests are too high to reach safely. Community-wide aerial spraying tried in the past killed off marine life – not a good option for our community – and application methods are now restricted near coastal waters. State and university experts find aerial spraying costly, minimally effective, and controversial.

Other ongoing research at the University of Maine seeks to understand the underlying cause of the current outbreak, and to develop environmentally sound management options that are more cost-effective and could be used to treat large areas without affecting pollinators and marine life. In 2018, Dr. Eleanor Groden, an
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Browntail

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entomologist from the University of Maine, came to a Selectmen's meeting to talk about this research. The Town, aware that this work would help the whole community, sought and received authorization at Town Meeting to contribute funds to the project. Dr. Grodon began testing in Harpswell in April 2018 and her final report will be available this month.

The Maine Forest Service and its partners are conducting ongoing research into better chemical, biological and mechanical controls and techniques to disrupt mating. The University of Maine is exploring ways to compromise the integrity of the moth's overwintering webs so that the caterpillars are more



Maine Forest Serv

Itchy Brown tail moth caterpillars devour local foliage. (PHOTO COURTESY MFS)

exposed to harsh temperatures and thus die. Researchers already know that the moth thrives in coastal conditions and does less well as it penetrates Maine's interior. This January, Cumberland County Commissioners committed \$15,000 towards University of Maine's Phase I study that includes web silk research. Let's hope our researchers are successful – but meanwhile, clip those nests and be sure to call a licensed pesticide applicator when considering chemical control. ‡

Daniel

From page 1

tract at Mitchell Field. The property includes a garage and concrete slab, which the company will renovate.

"This business is in keeping with the marine-related vision for use of the area and will allow for continued recreation around its perimeter," Daniel explains.

Debates that the select board has settled during the six years when Daniel served have included removal of Mitchell Field's water tower. Concerns about the water tower landed in court in 2018 after a town meeting vote to remove it spurred the non-profit Friends of Mitchell Field to request further consideration of the tower as a base for a cell service antenna. Two studies on repurposing of the tower did not reveal a cost-effective use of the structure, and no cell service provider expressed sustained interest in the site, however, Friends of Mitchell Field promised to raise and manage all funds needed to maintain the tower themselves and requested a second town-wide vote on the subject. The board of selectmen declined to hold a second town vote (in a 2-1 vote among selectmen), stating that it would be inappropriate to overrule a decision made at town meeting. The Friends of Mitchell Field brought suit against the Town and the two groups entered into litigation.

Ultimately, the water tower was dismantled in September, 2018 after Superior Court Justice Andrew

M. Horton ruled that Harpswell's select board had acted reasonably in rejecting the petition that called for a second town wide vote.

Nelson Barter, a member of Harpswell's Water Tower Task Force, reflects on Daniel's handling of the process. "Selectman Daniel was fair and impartial. He had ample opportunity to force an end to this issue, but he didn't. Instead, he made the fairest appraisal possible. He has my respect and admiration," Barter says.

"The town does understand the need for improvements to local cell service," says Daniel. "We have an energy and technology committee looking at where and how those improvements can be made. Any cell tower infrastructure in this case would be constructed and maintained by the carrier."

Predating the debate about the water tower, was a local disagreement over the public's right to access Bailey Island's Cedar Beach using a privately owned road. After five years of legal battles, in July 2016, the Maine Supreme Judicial Court denied an easement that would provide public access to the beach along the road. Subsequently, however, the property owner suggested conditions under which she would be willing to keep the road open to beach-goers. Concerned that she could change her mind at any time, members of Cedar Beach/Cedar Island Supporters (CB/CIS) approached the board of selectmen to request an appraisal of the road.

"An appraisal is often the first step in creating an eminent do-

main case," Daniel explains. "We could understand their concern about the road being closed again, but I also wanted to take some time to see if the town could negotiate an agreement with the landowner that would avoid another battle."

The turning point, he says, came at the board of selectmen's meeting in October 2016, where CB/CIS members, selectmen and ultimately the property owners were able to sketch out a plan that would respect the rights of the property owners and beach-goers, alike. "Ultimately, the town and the land owner were able to reach an agreement and keep the road open," he says.

During Daniel's tenure, the board also worked with Harpswell's three volunteer fire and rescue departments and citizens to develop and implement around the clock paramedic service. Art Howe was hired as the Town's Fire Administrator, a position developed in consultations between the board of selectmen and the fire and rescue departments. Per diem firefighters have been hired to assist and support the volunteer departments.

Overall, says Daniel, "it has been a pleasure to serve Harpswell as selectman and I thank town citizens for affording me the opportunity to give back to our town in this way. What an incredible experience it has been to work with different colleagues, Town staff, commissions, boards, committees, individuals and community organizations in their pursuit of the common good that serves us all." ‡

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