

# Ravaged Summer

It's the Natural Sequel to "Silent Spring"

THE New York Times, which devotes countless columns of space to chronicling air and water pollution, noisy jets and fish kills, recently and with some reluctance—the story appeared on page 59—saw fit to print a different kind of tale. Headlined "Suffolk Legislature to Fight an Infestation of Gypsy Moths," the dispatch provided a graphic account of "Long Island's invasion by red and blue polka-dotted gypsy moth caterpillars," which agricultural experts describe as the worst in a century. "We are in a state of emergency," cried one resident of Shirley. "Our children cannot go out. Our pools are finished for the summer. It's a question of survival—the caterpillars or us." Last week came word—on page 37 this time, in greater detail and with pictures—of "a double invasion by gypsy moths and canker-worms (which) has stripped trees, driven away picknickers and campers, and cause widespread concern in upper Westchester County and Western Connecticut." Many of the trees, the story continued, "are in their second leafless summer"; by the third year, "most will probably begin to show signs of permanent damage."

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While the active agents are creatures of Mother Nature, the disaster that has befallen widespread areas of New York and Connecticut is strictly man-made. Thus, from The Times' story on Suffolk County, we learn—if we read far enough—that of the 25,000 acres "severely infested and in danger of defoliation," the state, against the bitter opposition of conservationists, has sprayed only "14,000 acres in areas of low population density," not with DDT, which it shuns, but with Sevin, a less effective, short-lived insecticide. In the northern part of New Jersey, which stopped the aerial spraying of DDT over a half-a-decade ago, the gypsy moth for the second straight year has damaged thousands of acres of woodland, and, to the consternation of local inhabitants, caused a mass migration of copperheads and rattlesnakes to lower, shadier ground. In one state after another to ban the pesticide—at least a dozen now have made the move—strange things, ranging from the slaughter of honeybees to the accidental loss of human life from highly toxic substitutes, have been happening. Indeed, throughout the U.S., which once could boast of stamping out the anopheles mosquito and its cargo of disease and death, lately have come reports of frightening outbreaks of malaria.

Though fragmentary and scattered, the evidence should give reasonable men pause. On far less convincing claims of damage to the environment and threats to heredity—for the most part, on little more than sweeping, unproved assertions—conservationists and ecologists have made great headway in persuading or coercing federal and state agencies, legislatures and courts to limit or prohibit the use of DDT and similar pesticides. Now, despite the alarming proliferation of signs that all is not well—that perhaps in their own way, they have upset the so-called balance of nature—such pressure groups are fanatically redoubling their efforts. Not content with what they have wrought, the Environmental Defense Fund, National Audubon Society, Sierra Club and other soul-mates of the late Rachel Carson have filed suit to compel the U.S. Department of Agriculture to suspend immediately the shipment of DDT in interstate commerce. If they succeed, their triumph will be shared not only by the gypsy moth, but also by the rednecked cane borer, climbing cutworm, carrot weevil, cabbage looper, onion maggot, darkling beetle, white grub and the rest of the estimated 210 insect pests for which, in most cases, DDT is the sole known means of control. The nation's farm and wood lands and food supply, not to mention health and welfare, contrariwise, might not recover. Win or lose on the issue, the nature-lovers already have left their mark on the landscape. In less than a decade, "Silent Spring" has spawned ravaged summer.

The mouse, to change the metaphor, has labored and brought forth a mountain. Since 1962, when the book appeared, its influence has spread far and wide. In 1966 a lawyer in Patchogue, L.I. (a stone's throw away from afflicted Shirley) sued to prevent the Suffolk County Mosquito Control Commission from employing DDT. The agency was enjoined from using the pesticide for two years, and, to the pleasure and profit of the gypsy moth, it has not done so since. A number of states, including California, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York and Wisconsin, have forbidden the use of DDT in whole or in part; the Labour Government in Britain and Socialist Sweden have done the same. Last fall, pursuant to recommendations of the Commission on Pesticides and Their Relation to Environmental Health, that DDT and DDD be eliminated within two years except "where essential to the preservation of human health and welfare . . .," the Department of Agriculture moved to

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end its use on tobacco, shade trees, in aquatic environments and in and around the home. Too little and too late, cried the Environmentalists; led by the successful litigant cited above, they have gone to court to seek an immediate nationwide ban.

The enormity of this demand—echoed editorially by The New York Times in disregard of its own news columns—must be viewed against the proper background. Since "Silent Spring," Barron's time and again has sought to debunk the extravagant charges and wild alarmism over DDT, which have gained spurious circulation in a "largely rigged market for ideas, where anti-capitalism is the rage and anything that smacks of it, no matter how outrageous or absurd, can count on an incredible longevity." Once a voice crying in the wilderness, we now have lots of company. Thus, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in defending its moderate stand on DDT, cites such authorities as The President's Science Advisory Committee, the National Research Council-National Academy of Sciences, the aforementioned Commission on Pesticides and the Council on Environmental and Public Health of the American Medical Association.

Despite loud claims to the contrary, USDA flatly makes the following points. There have been instances in which DDT in lakes and streams has contributed to fish mortality; however, "we know of no reports of any endangerment of any species of fish as a result of the use of DDT." The same holds true of birds whose numbers (according to the Audubon Society's own count, and including the supposedly endangered robin) are constantly increasing. As to the alleged threat to mankind, USDA quotes a recent AMA finding that "the claim that DDT has a carcinogenic effect upon humans constitutes an unproved speculation." Moreover, there has been "no increase in the levels of DDT in human beings during the past decade," while "comprehensive studies of workers in DDT factories show no impairment of health attributable to occupational exposure to DDT."

Similar views have been expressed by the World Health Organization, which last summer stated: "DDT has been the main agent in eradicating malaria in countries whose populations total 550 million people, of having saved about five million lives and prevented 100 million illnesses in the first eight years of its use, of having recently reduced the annual malaria death-rate in India from 750,000 down to 1,500, and of having served at least two billion people in the world without causing the loss of a single life by poisoning from DDT alone." . . . "It is so safe that no symptoms have been observed among the spraymen or among the inhabitants of the spray areas, which numbered respectively 130,000 and 535 million at the peak of the campaign."

The perils of the substance are thus largely illusory; however the dangers of a ban, even limited in scope, are frighteningly real. In California and Arizona, beekeepers complain that toxic substitutes for DDT are wiping out their hives. Maine gave up DDT years ago; in 1967, when the spruce bud worm threatened to destroy its forests, the state hastily changed its mind. (At the urging of the Swedish

Board of Private Forestry, the National Poisons and Pesticides Board has granted forestry a one-year exemption from the general ban. Without DDT, officials feared, the large pine weevil would cause \$20 million worth of damage to trees and seedlings.) The alarming spread of the gypsy moth—which Harold Porter, president of the National Plant Board (an organization of state plant pest-control officials) blames squarely on the lack of DDT—lately has made headlines, not only in New York State but also in New Jersey, where the number of defoliated acres is mounting geometrically from 5,000 in 1968 to well over 100,000 this year, Pennsylvania and Virginia. All told, according to the Department of Agriculture, the gypsy moth in 1969 defoliated 260,000 acres of woodland, triple the number destroyed in 1968. This year's toll will be far worse.

Here, in official but graphic terms, is what's involved: "In their caterpillar form, gypsy moths strip the leaves from forest, shade and fruit trees, as well as ornamental shrubs. By defoliating forests, they increase fire and erosion hazards, adversely affect stream flow, reduce land and recreational values, and destroy wildlife habitats. Plant protection officials point out that a single defoliation has been known to kill white pines, spruce and hemlock. Two defoliations can kill most hardwoods."

What the Environmentalists are seeking would be a major disaster, both at home and abroad. To deny the product to such nations as India would constitute, in the words of one scientist, "an act of genocide." To ban DDT in this country as too dangerous, while permitting its export, would be a flagrant piece of hypocrisy, which could only trigger global ill-will. The physical dangers, finally, are frightening to behold. Thus, the World Health Organization points out that in Ceylon, which discontinued the spraying of DDT several years ago, "more than a million cases of malaria have reappeared." In this country, which thought it had wiped out the disease long ago, 1,559 cases were reported in the first 24 weeks of 1970, up 25% from 1969. As to food and fiber, a Special Review Group, comprising four noted entomologists, after a thoroughgoing scrutiny of current practices, concluded last month that DDT remains essential for most domestic crops; perhaps as a wry postscript, it added that there is no satisfactory substitute for DDT in the control of rattlesnakes in the Southwest U.S. "If we had to depend on nature," an eloquent lawmaker once said, "we would probably die of disease at a fairly early age, if we did not starve first."

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By their fruits ye shall know them. Through their unbridled recklessness with facts and sheer irrationality—a triumph of superstition over science, one scholarly critic has averred—so-called conservationists and ecologists have poisoned the climate of opinion. Now willy-nilly they are threatening to unleash famine and pestilence upon their fellow citizens. ("It's a question of survival," cried the resident of Shirley, "the caterpillars or us.") They profess to preserve wildlife, defend the environment, befriend the earth. Their natural prey is civilized man.