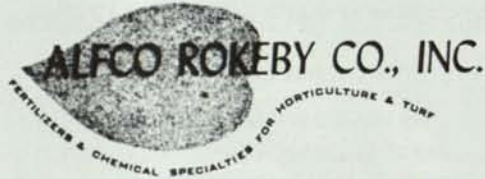


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## Gypsy "Rose" Moth

by Stanley Rachesky  
Entomologist — University of Illinois

Let me entertain you for the next few minutes presenting the fantabulous, stupendous, electrifying Gypsy "Rose" Moth, stripper of trees. Watch as she bumps and grinds her way through the branches, devouring every leaf in sight.

The gypsy moth, a voracious insect that has chomped its way through the forests of the East Coast may be positioning itself to threaten the woodlands of Illinois.

The first gypsy moth in Illinois was trapped in Palos Township in South Cook County by a ranger of the Cook County Forest Preserve District.

The moths in Illinois may have hitched rides on a variety of vehicles. Campers, railroad cars, or automobiles returning from the infested areas could have carried egg masses. The egg masses more than likely would go unnoticed by vehicle owners (who goes around looking for egg masses on his car?) The masses look like small sections of a sponge. In nature, they're found on tree bark, rocks, and many other places. The egg mass will contain anywhere from 50 to 800 eggs.

The caterpillars grow to about two inches in length. They have double rows of very conspicuous blue and red dots or tubercles down the length of the back. This caterpillar, also called a larvae, is the stage of the insect that does the damage to the trees. They can defoliate entire stands of forests. One caterpillar will eat a square foot of leaf surface every 24 hours.

The adult moth cannot feed. Its main purpose on this earth is to mate and lay eggs. Male moths have dark brown forewings and wingspread of about 1½ inches. They are strong fliers. The female moths on the other hand, are white with black wing markings, are much larger than the males, and surprisingly enough, do not fly.

The gypsy moth is not native to North America. It was introduced here in 1869 from Europe by a naturalist in Massachusetts who wanted to study them. They are kept under control in Europe by natural predators and parasites.

The imported moths in Massachusetts were accidentally freed during a violent windstorm and began to spread.

In Connecticut, over 365,000 acres have been defoliated as well as 240,000 acres in New York and 130,000 acres in New Jersey. Repeated defoliations will destroy a forest. It also increases fire hazards, permits soil erosion, and drastically effects wildlife.

In urban areas, the caterpillars have destroyed

shrubs around homes and trees in parks. They also can infest homes, stores, and swimming pools.

This column on gypsy moths has been written to inform and educate the public on a destructive insect that may, or may never, become a problem in Illinois. Don't go around thinking that every caterpillar or moth you see is a gypsy moth. At present, the chances are mighty slim you'll ever see one.

However, if you feel that the caterpillar you may have captured fits the description mentioned, send your specimen to the University of Illinois, 169 Natural Resources Building, Urbana, Illinois 61801. You may also send the specimen to the Illinois Division of Plant Industry, 999 N. Main Street, Glen Ellyn, Illinois 60137. Either of these offices can give you a positive identification of the insect problem. An increase in the search for other possible specimens is being made in South Cook County area to determine the extent of the infestation.

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