



Tent Caterpillars in Hot Springs Village

Description

Tent Caterpillars in Our Trees

If you have been outside here in Hot Springs Village then you have probably seen the tent caterpillars. They are the ones making the web-like nests in trees and bushes. By now, the caterpillars are pretty big and they may be seen gathering on the tent waving around. Tent caterpillars are moth larvae and hatch from their eggs in early spring at the time the leaves of their host tree are unfolding. They construct a tent at a site that intercepts the early morning sun. The position of the tent is critical because the caterpillars must bask in the early morning sun to elevate their temperatures that occur from the cooler nights in the spring. While the tent caterpillar feeds on the newly grown leaves and can defoliate a tree, the tree always recovers.



The tent consists of discrete layers of silk separated by gaps. Each gap has its own temperature. During the warmer part of the day the caterpillar will leave its nest and go forage before returning to the nest in late evening. The caterpillar puts off a pheromone that it can follow back to the nest. Around early to mid-summer you will probably see the caterpillars on the streets and in your driveways and possibly even on your houses. The caterpillar has a very short life span as it is a favorite food for many of our birds especially the robins, cardinals, and blue jays. When fully grown the caterpillar emerges as a moth and begins reproducing. The female dies after laying her eggs and the male lives a week or two after. The tent caterpillars are a boom-or-bust creature whose life cycle only begins once a year and usually has a boom in numbers every 10 years. Tent caterpillars are about an inch and a half long and are black with yellow dots and a blue face. Tent caterpillars are very sociable. They cannot sting or harm.



By [Todd Noles](#), Hot Springs Village Common Property, Forest, and Wildlife Manager

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