

CUTE LITTLE GUY? NO.

Their victims: Western Tent Caterpillars are often found on fruit trees like apple, peach, plum, cherry, pear, Wild Rose, Poplar, Willow, and Red Alder. The webs and feces are toxic for wildlife, and toxic to dogs if eaten. Their carcasses can also cause slippery roads sometimes. Disgusting!

Their impact: Tent caterpillars are defoliators, meaning that they eat the leaves off of deciduous trees. The bare branches they leave behind aren't just an eyesore; they can lead to the slowing of growth of the tree, branch dieback, and even, in some cases, the death of the tree. If enough trees die, it can leave room for less desirable or non-native plants to take over.



Life Cycle

Western Tent Caterpillars go through winter as eggs, which hatch in the spring as foliage starts to bloom. The larvae spin a dense web colony for shelter. The web grows as the caterpillars venture further out to feed. Caterpillars mature in four to six weeks. After that time (usually mid May), the caterpillars start to venture out to find a place to build their cocoon. Moths emerge in June and July and lay their eggs to hatch the following spring.



WESTERN TENT CATERPILLARS

By Barrett, Kimberly, Mattie, and Raymond



Malacosoma Californicum

The Western Tent Caterpillar is a native but dangerous part of our ecosystem. While they are mainly an eyesore, there are many other cons to these monstrosities that inhabit our parks.

Research Question: Although a native species, What effect would eradication of Western Tent Caterpillars have on the local ecosystem? How do we eradicate the species with minimal collateral damage?

Predators (our allies for eradication)

Tachinid flies lay their eggs on caterpillars. Parasitic wasps such as *Trichogramma minutum* and *T. pretiosum* target both eggs and larvae. Larvae are eaten by beetles. During all stages of life, *Malacosoma californicum* is also eaten by chickadee, junco, nuthatch, bushtit, and robins.



Our Findings

According to our study, the public is alarmingly unaware of this menace! At Larrabee state park, a shocking 76% of survey takers hadn't seen a single caterpillar tent, with only 4 people having seen 1 nest during their time in the park. While surveying, we easily spotted at least 19 tents. Several people recalled seeing them around their homes, campus, or workplace but were unaware of their presence in a natural setting, even when a tent was only a couple feet above their heads! Although we weren't able to collect data on tent caterpillar populations, the statistical number of people who weren't aware of their surroundings is staggering.

