

Aerial spraying of woodland near Pangbourne to control Oak Processionary moth

Butterfly Conservation is very concerned about the aerial spraying of 10ha of woodland near Pangbourne, in part an SSSI, and the possible impact on wildlife and especially the butterflies and moths that breed there. We have raised these concerns with the Forestry Commission and have met with them to understand the background for the spraying and what measures are in place to monitor the impacts on wildlife.

Oak Processionary moth is a non-native species that has recently been imported on oak trees and has become widespread in south-west London. It is regarded as a pest species because it has the potential to cause damage to oak trees. It can also cause health problems to people who come into contact with the caterpillars which have thousands of tiny irritating hairs that can cause rashes, itching and other symptoms.

Full details can be found on the Forestry Commission website <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/opm>

Butterfly Conservation accepts the need to control Oak Processionary moth where it occurs close to human habitation because of the health risks. We also understand why attempts should be made to attempt to eradicate the moth as a matter of urgency if it occurs outside the main outbreak area in south-west London. We have explained to the Forestry Commission why we believe that aerial spraying is so potentially damaging to wildlife and have been reassured that the spraying at Pangbourne is a one-off attempt to eradicate an outbreak and will not set a precedent for other areas. All necessary consents have been obtained for the spraying to go ahead, using a strain of *Bacillus thuringiensis* that is specific to Lepidoptera (butterflies and moths). This is non toxic to humans. However, as this spray will kill larvae there may be a knock-on impact on the local bird populations and other animals.

Now that the spraying has been given approval, our main aim is to ensure that the Forestry Commission establishes a robust monitoring programme so that we can properly assess the impact of spraying on wildlife and the effectiveness of the control programme. Butterfly Conservation will use its huge database of over 23 million records on butterflies and moths to contribute to this programme. We also understand that these outbreaks have been the result of at least four separate importations of oaks for amenity purposes. We are therefore strongly supporting efforts by FC and others to immediately tighten import regulations to prevent future importations of tree pests and diseases.

Butterfly Conservation will be monitoring the situation closely and will do all we can to minimise and preferably avoid any damage to our dwindling butterfly and moth populations.

Butterfly Conservation
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