



Conservancy Advisory – California Oak Moth Impacts

For the first time in many years the Santa Lucia Preserve is experiencing a significant outbreak of oak moths. The California oak moth is native to our region. It lives exclusively on oak trees and provides an important food source for numerous bird species. Large oak moth outbreaks can damage leaves and even defoliate extensive areas of trees. While the trees look shabby or sick for a few months, the leaves grow back. **The moths and worms are safe for people to be around and will not permanently harm healthy trees.**

In July, moths were fluttering around oak trees over large portions of the Preserve as well as other areas of Carmel Valley. The moths have laid eggs and the caterpillars are emerging (you'll see them hanging from silk threads or on the undersides of oak leaves). We expect many oak trees to be affected during the next 2-3 months, and a new crop of moths in fall.

While many trees will be visually impacted, please keep the following in mind:

- This is a natural process, and is a food source for native birds.
- **The effects are temporary, and the trees will recover.**
- The moths are not a danger to people.
- If there is a particular oak tree near your home where you wish to reduce leaf loss, you may consider having it sprayed with a **safe biodegradable product called "BT"**.
- Use of toxic chemicals is not permitted, as it has the potential to harm children, pets, birds and other sensitive species.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Chris Hauser, the Conservancy's Plant Ecologist, chauser@slconservancy.org, 626-8595 x 103.



Oak worm caterpillar eating a live oak leaf.



Coast live oaks defoliated by oak worms.