

Fact sheet:

Spongy Moth: *Lymantria dispar asiatica* and *L.d.japonica*



The Spongy moth is a proven invader and one of the most feared pests by temperate countries such as New Zealand. Spongy moths are regularly intercepted at the New Zealand border on inanimate objects such as shipping containers, used cars and container ships. An incursion, or any change to New Zealand's status as Spongy moth free, could result in significant market access restrictions for export industries such as kiwifruit.

Identification

Eggs are laid in the Northern Hemisphere between July and September on any sheltered structures, including shipping containers, used cars and shipping vessels. Eggs are smaller than 1mm in size and are normally in clusters of 200 – 1200 eggs (*image below far right*).

When these eggs hatch, a 'ballooning' of new hatched larvae may be observed, with silken threads able to be carried 50m or more in the wind. Newly-hatched larvae are black. Older larvae have five pairs of raised blue spots and six pairs of raised brick-red spots along their backs (*image below*).

The male adult moth (*image below far left*) is grey-brown with a wingspan of 3-4cm. The female (*image below*) is nearly all white with wavy black bands across the wing and a wingspan of about 9cm.



Distribution and climate range

Spongy moths prefer a temperate climate and would favour New Zealand conditions if it managed to establish here. Indigenous to China and Russia, it has become established in Korea, Japan, Europe and the East Coast of North America.

Female moths frequently lay eggs on ships in Japan and Russia which can result in transportation of these eggs elsewhere.



Surveillance

The Spongy moth is considered such a serious threat to New Zealand that it is one of only three horticultural pests (fruit fly and ants being the other) with an ongoing targeted surveillance programme. The programme uses over 1500 pheromone traps placed across the country to cover likely points of entry. There has only been one post-border detection of Spongy moth in New Zealand, in a Hamilton surveillance trap in 2003. This find resulted in a large-scale response with intensive pheromone trapping and aerial spraying. It wasn't until two years later that the pest was finally declared eradicated.

**What should you do if you think you have seen this pest?
Phone MPI on 0800 80 99 66 or KVH on 0800 665 825**