

Fall Webworm (*Hyphantria cunea*) is Abundant on Bald Cypress

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Fall webworms feed inside the webbing on this bald cypress tree (above, left). A close-up (above, right) shows a fall webworm larva of the blackheaded strain and an immense amount of webbing. Moths (right) remaining in the daytime which were attracted by lights the previous night (photo by Renee Wilson, Rookery Bay).



I have had several reports about all of the little white moths around night lights these last few days (the last week of March 2009). These are the early generations of the fall webworm. Snowbirds may be familiar with the caterpillar which webs the ends of various trees' branches (persimmon, mulberry, black walnut, sweetgum and about 100 other species) together late in the summer. Despite the seasonal connotation of its name, this caterpillar has several generations per year, starting in the spring. The later occurring generations are typically more noticeable with the extensive webbing at the ends of bald cypress tree branches in late September 2003. As with many insect pests, they are more abundant some years than others. In 2003, I had to look up the hosts to be sure that it attacked bald cypress. Indeed, bald cypress is a favorite, along with about 100 other hosts, including south Florida trees such as water hickory and Carolina

Early Oct 2003, 2008, 2009

willow. Larvae in our area are pale-yellow or greenish with two rows of black spots along their "back". They have scattered long hairs and black head capsules.

After feeding, the caterpillar hides in bark crevices and other protected areas on the ground and changes into an amber-brown pupa inside a loose cocoon. The adult is a white moth (some have some black freckles) about one inch long which deposits about 200 to 300 greenish eggs in one mass on the underside of leaves.



A female moth has deposited a batch of light green eggs covered with white scales.

What to do:The damage caused by this species is considered aesthetic. Typically it is late in the season when the webbing is noticed and the bald

cypress would be defoliating soon anyway, so spraying won't protect the trees. Also, with bald cypress which typically *grows along ponds and waterways*, the drift from spraying with some insecticides could endanger aquatic life, that means dead fish and frogs, etc. So, it is better to let nature take its course and do nothing. But make note in your tickler file or mark your calendar to look for the webbing in say July and early September and prune out the little web-makers before they become so obvious. If necessary, use a product specific for caterpillars, such as a B.t. (*Bacillus thuringiensis*) containing product or ferti-lome's 'Borer, Bagworm, Leafminer & Tent Caterpillar Spray' which would have little impact on aquatic life.

For more information on home gardening, contact the Collier County Extension Service, Master Gardener Plant Clinic, at 353-2872. If you have a specimen that you want identified, the Extension Plant Clinic at 14700 Immokalee Rd. is open Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 9 a.m. to noon and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.; call 353-4244. The downtown clinic is at the Main Library and is open Thursday, 9 a.m. to noon; call 261-8208 to confirm time. Extension programs are open to all persons without regard to race, color, creed, sex, handicap or national origin. For updates on Southwest Florida Horticulture visit: <http://collier.ifas.ufl.edu>