

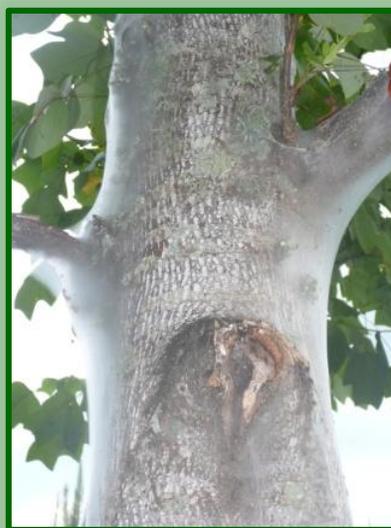


Ghostly Appearing Trees

In July Aaron Rambin, MFC Service Forester in Jones County, was called to a homeowner's house to identify a tree problem. The trees in the yard were covered from the root collar up the bole into the branches with what looked a lot like a very fine spider or caterpillar web. The webbing was not on the leaves, but only on the bark of the bole and branches. The webbing was on water oaks, willow oaks, live oaks, and yellow poplar trees. There were about half a dozen trees covered in the webbing. The trees all appeared to be in good health, with no die back, wilting, or flagging. Insect feeding on the foliage was not observed.

Aaron was observing a rare but not unusual event that occurs periodically in the southern part of the state. The cause of the webbing is a product of very small insects referred to as webbing bark lice or psocids. They are in the insect order Psocoptera, Family Psocidae. There are many different species of Psocidae, most of which go largely unnoticed, and most do not produce such large amounts of webbing. However, this webbing bark louse is relatively common in the southern part of the state where it causes these striking phenomena. These insects are harmless to the tree, and the webbing is

usually short-lived, disappearing within a couple of months or so. The insects feed primarily on fungi, lichens and other things growing on the bark of the trees.



According to Blake Layton, Extension Entomology Specialist at Mississippi State University, There is another species that is quite common that does not produce webbing and is most frequently observed on crape myrtles. It occurs on other trees as well, but the dark-colored colonies stand out on the smooth, light bark of crapes and thus are spotted more often. This psocid lives in clusters or "herds" on the trunk. These clusters of nymphs range in size from palm-sized down to the size of a quarter or 50 cent piece. As for control, this is one case where the "do nothing approach" works just fine.

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