

The (lost) battle against the processionary caterpillar

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A great many reports are being received of the presence of processionary caterpillars in many areas of the province. The caterpillars, which are covered with extremely itchy hairs, have been seen and photographed by many readers, who have raised the alarm because of how harmful they are. Processionary caterpillars have itchy hairs, which, when released into the air, can cause severe harm to man and to animals.

EFFECTS ON MAN – When the hairs and hair fragments get into the skin, they cause an extremely itchy, irritating rash, that may disappear after a couple of days. When the hairs or hair fragments get into the eyes, the nasal mucous, the mouth, or even worse, when they get into the respiratory and digestive tracts, the consequences may be more severe. In the event of contact, the advice is to wash every garment, using gloves and choosing the highest possible temperature for the wash. Also, wash the skin thoroughly with soap and water. Consult a doctor if a severe rash or respiratory problems appear.

EFFECTS ON ANIMALS – The processionary caterpillar is very dangerous for dogs, which, when sniffing the ground, may accidentally ingest the itchy hairs covering the insect's body. The symptoms that a dog presents in this unfortunate situation are often severe: the first and most recognisable is sudden and intense salivation, caused by a violent, inflammatory process that mainly affects the mouth, and to a lesser extent, the oesophagus and stomach. The first treatment that needs to be administered to an unfortunate dog affected by the processionary caterpillar entails removing the itchy substance from the oral cavity: to do this, you should wash its mouth thoroughly, using a water and bicarbonate solution. After this, you should consult a vet.

WHAT TO DO – You should act as you would act with ragweed. In private spaces, the individual owners are responsible, and must contact specialised companies. For reports concerning public spaces, contact the local “Verde Pubblico” Office. In any case, you should never intervene alone if you do not know exactly what to do, because you may cause the spores to scatter.

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