

Nest Removal

Nest removal involves the manual removal of the OPM nests and the caterpillars within the nests either by vacuum or by hand. By timing the removal effectively this will not only remove the caterpillars but also the OPM nests which would otherwise continue to pose a risk.

The first thing to consider when planning for nest removal is personal protection from contact with the caterpillars' irritating hairs. Both the caterpillars and nests will pose a health risk as the nests contain thousands of hairs shed by the caterpillars. These hairs can cause itchy rashes, eye and throat irritations and occasionally breathing difficulties in people and animals. In rare cases the hairs can cause an allergic reaction. You can become sensitised by repeated exposure to the hairs, worsening your symptoms. There are [standard operating procedures](#) for the process that detail PPE and equipment requirements. There are also a number of limiting factors, such as site access and ground conditions that should be carefully assessed before work is carried out. Nest removal is best left to professionals.

PROS	CONS
Reduces current and subsequent populations	Difficult to remove nests in upper canopies
Reduces later urticarial impacts as hairs are removed in nests	Natural enemies within nests may also be removed, reducing natural build-up of biocontrol
Vacuum removal minimises operator and environmental contamination with hairs and reduces need for MEWPS or tree climbing	Capacity for significant levels of nest removal needs to have been arranged/procured well in advance of OPM season, it is unlikely sufficient capacity will be available from local contractors if this is approached reactively.
	Nest removal does not prevent defoliation and urticating hairs from earlier larval stages
	Destroying nests with blowtorches not recommended; as it causes caterpillars to eject hairs
	Costly
	Extreme care and use of PPE required



Picture: Max Blake

Things to Consider

- OPM hairs are persistent and can remain a hazard for a number of years. It is essential that operators wear appropriate protective clothing and use specialist equipment
- Nest removal should be arranged ahead of the OPM season to ensure capacity from local suppliers.
- OPM nest material is classified as hazardous waste. You must use a waste management company which is registered to handle and dispose of hazardous waste, for further advice please contact the [Environment Agency](#).
- Nest removal cannot completely eradicate OPM but has the advantage of having little effect on other insects. It may be the only option permitted in SSSI's and other designated sites. Contact [Natural England](#) for advice.

Timings

Nest removal is most effective between late June and early August (prior to moth emergence). Attempting nest removal before this will only kill the larvae in the nest and may miss caterpillars feeding on the leaves at the time.

Contacts

Details of businesses able to carry out the work can be obtained from:

- the Arboricultural Association (www.trees.org.uk);
- your local borough or district council's tree officer;
- the British Pest Control Association (www.bpca.org.uk); or
- the Forestry Commission on opm@forestrycommission.gov.uk or 0300 067 4442.

It is recommended you get at least three quotes for costs of nest removal