

JULY 23, 2001

## **RED GUM LERP PSYLLID ATTACKS THE EUCALYPTUS**

**By Thomas P. Peterson**

The free ride is over for Eucalyptus trees that have thrived in California relatively pest free since the 1980's. There are more than 500 species of Eucalyptus in Australia, the home of the Eucalyptus tree. There they dominate not only the high rainfall woodland areas, but dry inland areas as well, depending on the species. Many species appear to grow well in California, but in reality few are adapted to its soils and arid climate. California's climate is much like that of the Mediterranean, with dry summers and wet winters. Consequently the eucalyptus suffer varying degrees of drought stress during the hot, dry season, causing increased susceptibility to secondary invaders such as insect infestations.

The most conspicuous and perhaps most destructive new pest is the red gum lerp psyllid (*Glycapsis brimbecombe*). This psyllid was discovered in 1998 in L. A. County, and is currently spreading throughout the state. Psyllids feed by sucking plant juices and excreting excess amounts of water and sugar as honeydew, a clear sugar liquid. The honeydew drops to the surfaces below the trees when populations are high. A black soot-like mold grows on honeydew covered surfaces. High populations of psyllid cause serve leaf drop and create a sticky residue nuisance as well. Extensive defoliation weakens the tree's defense system and increases its susceptibility to wood-boring pests, such as the eucalyptus longhorned borer (*Phoracantha semipunctata*).

The immediate response of the pest management community has been to look for a chemical pesticide, but timing of applications is difficult and treatments have produced mixed results in the landscape. Researchers believe that the development of a monitoring program, followed by a biological control program would help reduce the pesticide load to the environment. Biological control programs are underway, with more research needed in techniques for mass rearing of the control agents. Researchers were encouraged this spring to find that the biological controls successfully overwintered

For future plantings, it is important to select species that will tolerate the local conditions. Careful species selection may help to prevent the ongoing pest problems.

University of California Cooperative Extension Master Gardener Volunteers can provide additional gardening information upon request. Call the San Luis Obispo office at 781-5939 on Mondays and Thursdays from 1 to 5 PM. You may also call the Paso Robles office at 237-3100 on Wednesdays from 8 AM to 12 PM. The Paso Robles Library Master Gardener community outreach program is available to gardeners on Mondays from 10 AM to noon. The Master Gardener email address is [mastergardener@co.slo.ca.us](mailto:mastergardener@co.slo.ca.us).