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Invertebrate of the Month

February 2011



Uraba lugens pt 2

A considerable area of the southern Jarrah forest is now looking brown, much like a northern hemisphere autumn. January is when damage from this insect is most apparent in the forest canopy and is therefore the best time to conduct aerial surveys to map the extent of the outbreak. The brown colouring of the forest which is evident in high infestation areas at present is caused by leaf skeletonization from the early larval stages. Later larval stages munch the leaf down to the mid rib leaving a jagged saw-tooth like pattern. As the larvae grow they moult, leaving their old skins behind on the leaves they were feeding on (pictured left above). Since these larvae are hairy, their moulting casts are hairy too and can cause skin irritation in some people. In February larvae will be pupating (mainly on the lower parts of the tree and in leaf litter. Eggs are usually laid in March-April and early larval feeding starts in April-May. Therefore if survival levels of the late stage larvae are moderate to high we can expect high numbers in Dec 2011 and another round of heavy defoliation. The last outbreak finished when high mortality levels due to native pathogens dramatically reduced the population. Following the last outbreak (1982-1990) most trees recovered from the severe defoliation.