

# Identifying pests in Tasmania's forests: information sheet 6

## Large green sawfly

Scientific name: *Perga affinis*

Other Common name: **Spitfires**

Order: **HYMENOPTERA (Wasps, ants and bees)**

Several species of sawflies are found in Tasmania but the large green sawfly is the most common.

### **Characteristic damage**

Foliage of a range of eucalypt species is progressively stripped bare from the top down.

**Severe damage:** the tree is reduced to bare branches, often giving the tree a reddish appearance (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Roadside tree severely damaged by sawfly larvae

**Less severe damage:** only the foliage from the top of the tree is stripped.

Damage is most noticeable in trees 1 - 6 years old but older trees are also attacked. Sawflies cause some damage every summer and appear in outbreak proportions in some areas.

### **Effect on the trees**

Defoliation slows growth and reduces wood production for several seasons after severe damage. Tree form and wood quality may be also affected.

### **Trees most at risk**

A variety of tree species are attacked, including *E. viminalis* and *E. ovata*, particularly those growing in small groups on the roadside or in open woodland.

**Time of damage:** Autumn, winter and spring; April - December

### **The insect**

**Adult sawfly:** is metallic green, about 2.5 cm long, but is not often seen (Fig. 2).

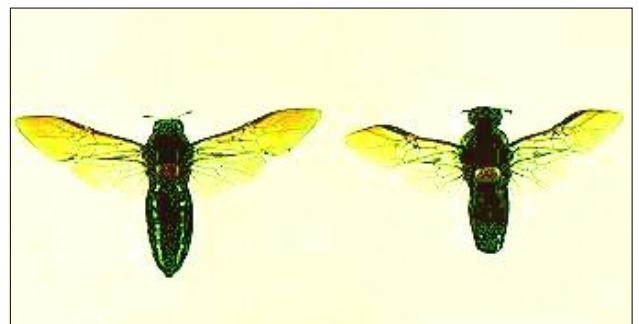


Figure 2. Adult large green sawflies – female left, male right (about life size)



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*Eggs*: about 40 eggs are laid in a row inserted between the upper and lower leaf surfaces, along the midrib.



Figure 3. Large green sawfly larvae (about life size)

*Larvae*: two to eight weeks after the eggs are laid, the tiny black larvae hatch out and start feeding. They feed and grow for about six months, until they are about 4 cm long, and covered with short white hairs (Fig. 3). They congregate during the day on tree trunks in large groups (Fig. 4), moving out to the branches at night to feed. When disturbed they regurgitate a drop of concentrated eucalypt oil to deter predators. If they strip one tree, they can migrate in a group down the trunk and across the ground to the next tree. When they have finished feeding, they crawl down the trunk and burrow into the soil to pupate in a large raft, where they remain for up to four years (Fig. 5).



Figure 4. Sawfly larval group in tree



Figure 5. Sawfly larvae migrating between trees or to pupation site

### ***Controlling damage***

#### **Natural control**

Very few natural enemies attack sawflies because of their defensive behaviour. Some flies and wasps parasitise the larvae just before they pupate. Damage to small trees can be reduced if the larvae are removed by hand when they are small, or killed when they migrate between trees.

#### **Chemical control**

No insecticides are registered specifically for sawflies but most broad spectrum insecticides will kill them, including Dominex®, a synthetic pyrethroid, which is registered in Tasmania to control the Tasmanian *Eucalyptus* leaf beetle on eucalypts. However, it also kills most other insects including the natural enemies. Refer to entomology staff in Forestry Tasmania for when and how to control outbreaks.