

This Thursday, September 28 in the Formentera Council's hall of ceremonies (sala d'Actes), a 7.30pm info session will be held on the pine processionary caterpillar on the island. Sandra Closa, head of the Palma government's healthy forests service, will tell crowds about the ins and outs of the CiF/Govern balear's control efforts this October.

The first plague of the pine processionary on the island was detected in 2007 and efforts to stem its spread have been afoot since then. One method involving pheromone traps began afresh in mid-July, when crews took to the island's wooded areas to install 1,102 traps. In mid-September, a tally of captured caterpillars indicated a upturn since 2016: 4,280 in 2017 compared to 2,125 one year earlier.

In an attempt to control the pest, officials have determined to resort to additional methods, including aerial treatment with a biological phytosanitary product.

Dusting

The aerial treatment involves dusting pine trees from a helicopter equipped with differential GPS, a technology that allows operators full control of dosage and affected areas. The process uses extremely low quantities of *bacillus thuringiensis/kurstaki*, a bacterium which exists naturally on the soil and on plants. The product, which quickly degrades under UV rays, disappears from leaves within days, does not effect bees and is used to control pests like mosquitos.

From October 2 some 1,500 hectares of land on the island will be submitted to a double dusting. Meteorological conditions like temperature, wind, relative humidity and rainfall and the caterpillars' particular stage of development will affect the nature of treatment.

It is worth noting that in 2014 a planned dusting using the chemical agent diflubenzuron was rejected by the people of Formentera. The current treatment has been rubber-stamped by the Consell d'Entitats' land and environment committee, which received input from island beekeepers and hunters, and the Formentera Council plenary.

Other treatments
Crews will also push forward with a second kind of treatment, which targets the caterpillars' nests. The pine processionary protects itself from the winter cold by building itself nests. Since 2010, with help from the Balearic nature institute and forest service staff, the regional department of environment and the Formentera Council have embarked on nest removal campaigns.

Another method entails using predators of the caterpillar. Crews have already set up some shelters for bats and approximately forty more will be installed next month.

Leaflets to educate residents about the pine processionary, printed by the Formentera Council and the Govern balear, will be handed out at the talk and in other places.