The Formentera Council Office of Environment has launched an effort to control the spread of the pine processionary caterpillar. According to Daisee Aguilera, councillor in charge of the department, two professional forestry workers have been brought in to oversee a three-week push that will include removal and controlled burning of the pine processionary's nests.

Members of Es Cap de Barbaria's hunters' club have volunteered to shoot down nests from otherwise out of reach pine-tops. In addition to financing the campaign, whose cost so far stands at 7,547 euros, the Council has helped the local shooters in their task by purchasing 2,500 shotgun cartridges.

Area of action

This year, besides operations in Es Cap de Barbaria, considered the hardest hit area on the island, controls will be extended to parts of Sant Francesc, Ses Bardetes and Ses Salines park, where the caterpillar has also turned up, albeit in reduced numbers. Aguilera stressed the pine processionary's spread across the new areas of action, in the periphery of the current centre, remained unsubstantial. “However,” she said, “the aim behind extending nest removal to these zones is to stop the insect's expansion”.

Local involvement

Aguilera turned to Formentera residents for help identifying pine trees affected by the pest. Anyone with useful information is asked to call the Office of Environment atÂ 971 32 12 10 or visit the Citizen Information Office (OAC), in person or online.

The Council thanked the administration in Palma for its speed in this initial phase of the campaign, which included on-the-ground treatment measures. This move came on the back of a proposal that was unanimously adopted at the Council's September 30 plenary session last year. In October and November, members of Ibanat, the wilderness brigade in the Balearics, were tasked with a push to control the insect's spread using a spray treatment.

Formentera residents rejected aerial application of a chemical agent called diflubenzuron in

2014 on the grounds that the method wasn't selective and had known detrimental effects on flora, fauna and human health.

“A technical meeting to review our control efforts to date is being planned for the end of February. Based on that information we'll recalibrate our strategy as we move forward combating the pine processionary's spread,” concluded the councillor.