

Try
This

Conker Tree Science

Take part in real science this summer

Have you noticed our horse-chestnut trees recently? They are the trees which produce conkers each autumn, and in the spring they look fantastic with fresh green leaves smothered with white flowers. But by mid-summer the leaves may begin to look blotchy and quickly turn brown. The cause is a tiny moth with caterpillars that live inside the leaves and mine their way through – and you can undertake research to help us discover more about it through Conker Tree Science.

The leaf-mining moth is fascinating because it has spread so rapidly across most of the England and Wales over the past 13 years. It has been seen once in Scotland and it got to Ireland only two years ago. Where will it spread to this year? And how bad will the damage get in different parts of England and Wales? The only way we can do this science is with the help of people from across the country and across the summer! You can visit the website at www.conkertreescience.org.uk to take part and discover more. From mid-June we will launch a revamped smartphone app to make recording even easier.



The *Cameraria* moth which damages the conker trees



Conker leaves showing moth damage

In the past few years we have run different 'missions'. The instructions are still on the website (under Take part > Missions) and are ideal school projects. Let us know if you take part in the pest controllers mission in the first week of July. You can rear your own tiny moths and see if you can find the tiny pest-controlling wasps that eat the caterpillars from the inside out!

Just to prove that this is real research, you can read about the contributions of thousands of people to this citizen science project in the past and the resulting discoveries in the freely-available scientific paper by Pocock and Evans (2014) at <http://bit.ly/1ICm7Ev>.

Michael Pocock is an ecologist at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

Fruits (conkers) and leaves of the horse-chestnut, one of our most recognizable trees.