

# MOURNINGCLOAK BUTTERFLY (Spiny-elm caterpillar)— *Nymphalis antiopa*

**HOSTS:** Elm, willow, hackberry, and cottonwood and other poplars

**IDENTIFICATION, LIFE CYCLE, AND DAMAGE:** Mature larvae are about 70 mm long and are velvety black sprinkled with small white dots. The abdominal prolegs and a single row of spots on the back are red. Several rows of large branched spines run the length of the body. The butterfly has a black body, a wingspan of 60 to 80 mm, and dark reddish-brown wings with a creamy-yellow border and a row of blue spots.

Adult butterflies overwinter in sheltered places, and in early spring (April in Nebraska), females lay clusters of eggs around twigs. Two to three weeks later, eggs hatch and the young caterpillars feed gregariously, usually on leaves of terminal branches. However, leaves throughout the tree may be eaten. During July, larvae molt to the chrysalis (pupal) stage. In the Southern Plains, first generation adults appear in late July and lay eggs for a second generation. The second generation larvae pupate in September. There is only one generation per year in the Northern Plains.

**CONTROL:** Spray carbaryl, methoxychlor, malathion, diazinon, fluvalinate, or *Bacillus thuringiensis* (B.t.) on the leaves as soon as feeding is observed during the spring or summer. Except for B.t., these insecticides also will kill beneficial insect parasites and predators that feed on eggs and larvae of the spiny-elm caterpillar. Cut and burn branches with egg masses.



*Spiny-elm caterpillar*