

Browntail moth's decline is documented

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A fly introduced in 1906 to control browntail moths in the United States is now linked with the decline of several native species of butterflies and moths.

Insect ecologists say the innocuous-looking fly nearly eliminated the invasive browntail moth that defoliated trees throughout New England and plagued humans with a rash.

But the fly, a bit smaller than the common housefly, didn't stop with the browntail moth. It has also contributed to the decline of more than 180 species of butterflies and moths.

A study, co-led by Dylan Parry of the State University of New York, is the first to document the link between the fly and the browntail moth's near disappearance.

Parry's research, conducted with Joseph Elkinton and George Boettner of the University of Massachusetts, also notes the introduction of a non-native insect as a "control agent" can be both unpredictable and far-reaching.

"When biological control is effective, it's a wonderful thing," said Parry. "But when you release an organism into an environment, it's really impossible to get it back out of that environment. So I think the fly is here to stay."

The study appears in the journal *Ecology*.

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