

Caterpillars swarm Indonesia's Bali

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Caterpillars crawl over a leaf in Denpasar, on the Indonesian resort island of Bali. Swarms of caterpillars which can cause skin rashes have invaded the Indonesian holiday island of Bali, an official said, but tourist areas have not been affected so far.

Swarms of caterpillars which can cause skin rashes have invaded the Indonesian holiday island of Bali, an official said Wednesday, but tourist areas have not been affected so far.

The dark, wriggly insects were first sighted in a village on Friday and the swarms have since spread to six districts, including the provincial capital of Denpasar, Bali agricultural chief Made Putra Suryawan told AFP.

"The situation is under control. Since Friday, workers have been spraying insecticide and burning garbage in affected areas to stop the spread," he said.

"Tourists need not be alarmed. The [caterpillars](#) have not spread to tourist areas yet. The threat to tourists is minimal," he added.

Thousands of caterpillars have reportedly descended on parts of neighbouring Java island in the last two weeks, attacking fruit farms and invading residential areas.

Suryawan said officials were trying to identify the species, adding that the rise in the caterpillar population could be attributed to a "disturbed ecosystem".

"There's a reduction in the number of birds and ants that feed on these caterpillars. People catch the birds to sell them and catch the ants to feed their pet birds," he added.

Coming into contact with the caterpillars could cause itchy rashes, Suryawan said.

Bali tourism agency head Ida Bagus Subhiksu said there had been no reports of caterpillar problems from tourist operators so far.

The island is increasing popular with foreign visitors, with 2.5 million overseas tourists expected this year, up from 2.3 million last year.

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