Why Observe?
Eastern Tent Caterpillars (*Malacosoma americanum*) are a native moth and while they can defoliate trees, the trees rarely die as a consequence. Eastern tent caterpillars overwinter as an egg mass. After hatching, the caterpillars work together to build their silken tent, which they use for shelter during hot or rainy weather. After four to six weeks of feeding on leaves they pupate and the adult moths emerge three weeks later. Eastern tent caterpillar population size varies year to year, with large outbreaks every few years.

Knowing the timing of caterpillar emergence can shed light on food availability for birds as well as guide control measures.

Tips for Identification
Caterpillars are dark, moderately hairy, and have a distinctive white stripe going down the length of their backs. At maturity, they are 1.5-2” long. This species creates tents in crotches of branches of host trees.

Be aware that there is variation from individual to individual within a species, so your insect may not look exactly like the one pictured. If you are uncertain whether or not a phenophase is occurring, report a “?” for its status until it becomes clear what you are observing after subsequent visits.
This Phenophase Photo Guide has been vetted by the USA-NPN NCO. It is appropriate for use as a supplement to the Nature’s Notebook phenophase definition sheet for this species.