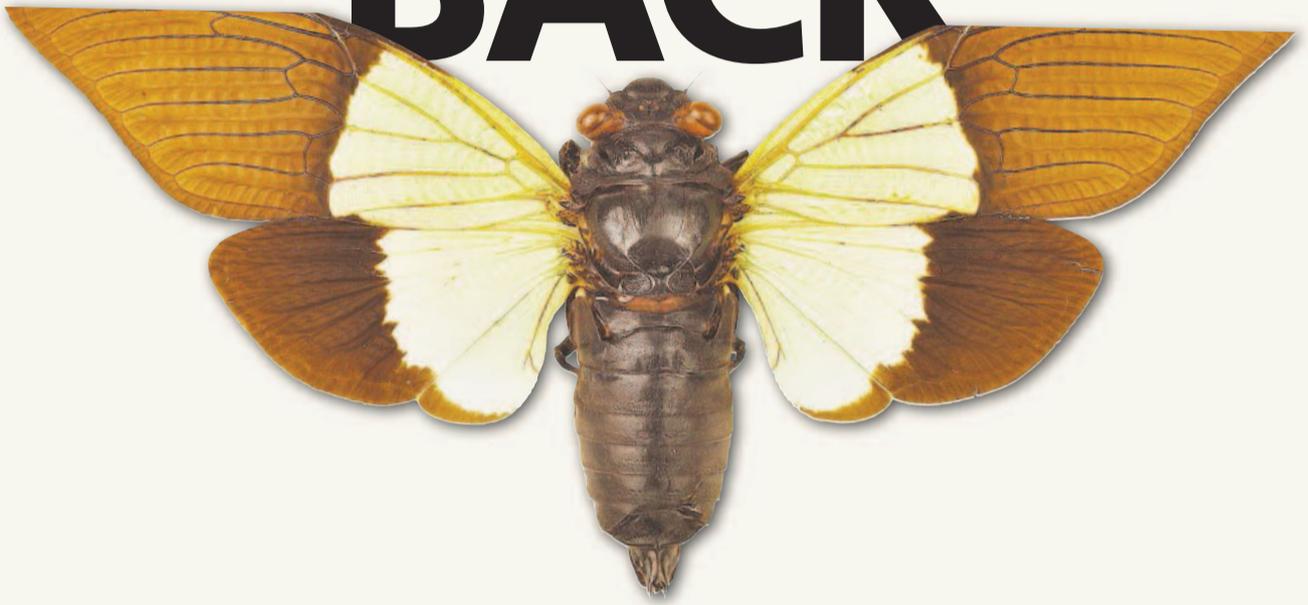


# THEY'RE BACK



Millions of cicadas are about to return.

## ARE YOU READY?

By Doyle Rice :: USA Today  
and Todd B. Bates :: @ToddBBatesAPP

Millions of big, noisy bugs likely will emerge soon after 17 years living underground in New Jersey, according to experts.

But the brightly colored cicadas, which could show up as early as this month, are largely harmless, according to experts.

"They are very cool bugs," said Bill Sciarappa, an insect expert and head of Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County.

They've killed some trees on rare occasions, he said, but "generally, this is not an economic pest, and I don't think this year it's going to be an economic pest."

This year's big "brood" of cicadas — which has been biding its time underground since the first Clinton administration — is forecast to emerge from the ground this spring along the East Coast.

"Spectacular" and "amazing" are two of the words used by University of Maryland entomologist Michael Raupp to describe the East's biggest influx of the annoying, but mainly harmless, bugs since a separate brood emerged in 2004.

This year's "emergence" should be quite extensive, as the critters likely will come out all the way from the Carolinas to the Hudson Valley of New York, said John Cooley, a research scientist from the University of Connecticut.

"All the East Coast cities are in the path of the cicadas," said Cooley, who runs the [magicicada.org](http://magicicada.org)

### CICADAS AND TREES

Female cicadas can harm trees when they insert eggs in twigs. Perhaps a foot or so of a twig will die, with leaves turning brown and the branch tip generally breaking off or flagging. In most cases, however, that's akin to "natural pruning." Here are some ways to protect trees and shrubs from cicadas:

- » Cover small trees and shrubs with an open-weave cloth as cicadas emerge and keep the cloth there for about five weeks.
- » Use sticky tape, such as Tanglefoot, to create a sticky barrier around the base of trees. Vaseline and some other household items also might do the trick.
- » Spray water on cicadas to remove them from trees.

*Source: Rutgers Cooperative Extension fact sheet; Bill Sciarappa, Rutgers Cooperative Extension of Monmouth County.*

website, and requests reports from people who see cicadas this spring.

The emergence could include parts or all of the New York metropolitan area, whose nearly 20 million inhabitants might have to contend with swarms of cicadas.

"The greater New York metro area is going to rock with cicadas," according to Raupp.

Dan Mozgai, a cicada enthusiast from Metuchen, said "the timing depends on the weather. They typi-

cally emerge when the soil temperature reaches 64 degrees." Mozgai is the founder of the website [cicadamania.com](http://cicadamania.com).

David A. Robinson, the New Jersey state climatologist at Rutgers University, said soil temperatures were in the mid-40s last week, so "we're a ways

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# CICADAS

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away” from the emergence of cicadas.

“They have to be in an area where they could have, if you will, hibernated for 17 years,” he said. “In areas that have had a lot of development in the last couple of decades, that might have interfered with their habitat.”

Robinson recalls camping with Cub Scouts in Warren County 17 years ago and “just having them (cicadas) dropping on you constantly.”

“They don’t bite,” he said, but “these suckers are noisy.”

“They’re harmless, but people think of them in the same” way as gypsy moths, he said. Unlike gypsy moths, cicadas don’t defoliate forests, he said.

According to Sciarappa, cicadas have a very sophisticated communication system, with males deploying at least five calls.

“It’s super loud,” he said. “It’s almost deafening.”

Calls include an alarm — a loud buzz to alert other cicadas to watch for predators, he said.

Male calls also have the following themes: a high pitch “I’m over here” call and “hey girl, I heard you click, let’s meet,” according to Sciarappa. Other calls include “nice tree branch you have here” and “time to mate.”

“They’re pretty smooth operators, these guys, so they’re not the dumb, fat bugs we think they are,” he said.

## 15 ‘broods’

There are at least 15 cycles, or “broods,” of periodical cicadas, some of which emerge every 17 years, while others emerge every 13 years. Different broods of cicadas emerge in different parts of the eastern half of the USA in different years. Other species of cicadas show up every summer. The bugs have only been seen as far west as Texas and Oklahoma and have not been spotted in the Far West.

This year’s group is known as “Brood II.” The previous big cicada emergence in the East was 2004’s “Brood X.” (Like Super Bowls, entomologists like using Roman

numerals to label the different broods).

Cicadas are harmless bugs but big enough to startle humans. The largest can have three-inch wingspans. Young, small trees can also be damaged when females deposit their eggs inside branches, so they can be a problem for fruit orchards, Cooley said.

An adult cicada usually lives for about two to four weeks, Mozgai said. This is a long time to wait after spending 17 years underground: They admittedly have “a pretty dismal life,” Cooley said. The bugs only come above ground to breed for the next batch of cicadas.

## Longest-lived bugs

According to the Penn State University Entomology Department, cicadas — the longest-lived insect in North America — stay alive underground by drawing fluid from the roots of plants during those 17 (or 13) years.

And they do serve a purpose: Cicadas aid their host trees by aerating the soil when they emerge, as well as by trimming weaker branches when they lay their eggs, Morzgai notes on his website. “They also form a vital link in the food chain between trees and literally hundreds of carnivores and omnivores.”

Sciarappa said he’s seen roughly 10,000 or more cicadas in an acre (he didn’t count them).

“You might have even 50,000 on an acre that’s really infested,” he said.

A few years ago, cicadas killed mature trees in Farmingdale, but that was very unusual, he said. The cicadas laid eggs and all the branches fell off the trees.

“We should know pretty much over the next month or so if it’s going to be a banner, heavy year” for cicadas, he said.

And who or what eats them? “Anything with a mouth,” said Cooley, including deer, squirrels, house pets, birds, and yes, people.

“Whether they’re curious or doing it for the shock value, people are eating cicadas,” Mozgai writes. “I’ve heard they taste like asparagus, popcorn, minty shrimp and piney shrimp.”

Todd B. Bates:  
732-643-4237; [tbates@njpressmedia.com](mailto:tbates@njpressmedia.com)