Kid's Korner

17-Year Cicadas To Appear This Spring

WASHINGTON — A huge and mysterious family, whose ancestors the Pilgrims noted with horror, will pop up for one of its infrequent but unerringly predictable visits this spring.

The expected visitors will be 17-year cicadas. Countless millions of them will emerge from the ground in the northeastern quarter of the United States between mid-May and early June.

The nymphs, as undeveloped cicadas are called, will climb up tree trunks, fence posts, weed stalks, and other convenient vertical objects. There they'll split their skins, leaving abandoned husks all over the place, and emerge, soft and white.

Within a few hours, their shells will harden and turn black and their orange-veined wings will stiffen. Then the transformed nature insects, red-eyed and an inch and a half long, will fly to the treetops.

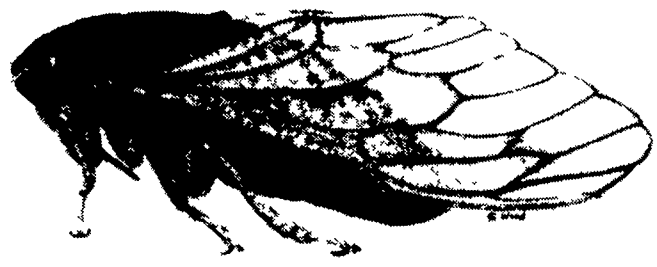
There the males will sing their loud mating song. Oh, how they'll sing. For several cacophonous weeks, from dawn to dusk, the noisemaking membranes on their abdomens will make the insects an insistent and unavoidable presence.

"There's a general din," says Richard C. Froeschner, a Smithsonian Institution entomologist. "In a woods where they're abundant, you have to shout to be heard."

But Froeschner and other entomologists are quick to defend the unloved cicadas. Except for harmless sap-sucking, says Froeschner, "These things don't eat anything."

Gene Wood, a professor of entomology at the University of Maryland, goes a step further. "They don't hurt anybody and they're not a health threat," he says, "so we might as well enjoy 'em while we can."

There are some exceptions, however. After the cicadas have mated, the females deposit 400 to 600 eggs in slits they carve at the ends of branches. In six or seven weeks, nymphs hatch, fall to the ground, and tunnel in for their 17-year burial. On a mature tree, the tip of the branch dies, but the tree is usually not harmed.



Not as formidable as it looks, the 17-year cicada is scheduled to make one of its unerringly predictable visits to the northeastern quarter of the United States this spring. Millions of the black-bodied insects will sing, mate, lay eggs and die within a month after they emerge from the ground, starting in mid-May. They're an inch and a half long and have red eyes and orange-veined wings. But they don't bite or sting and cause little damage.

Young trees are something else. Loss of the branch tips, a process known as "flagging," can weaken or kill them. This can grieve homeowners and orchardists alike. Wood recommends covering young trees with plastic mesh. He prefers this method to insecticide sprays, because sprays harm other forms of life.

Some Scared Badly

Another exception is people who go beyond common aversion to insects and suffer from an insect phobia. While cicadas neither bite nor sting, their noise and numbers combine to make a formidable presence.

"I can imagine it would make some people incredibly anxious, to the point where they would have anxiety attacks," says Paul A. Buongiorno, a Fairfax, Va., psychiatrist.

But somehow, in the view of the entomologists, the mild-mannered creatures deserve a friendlier reception than they receive from an unappreciative public.

After all, they're by far the longest-living insects on earth.

Distinctive to the United States, they're divided into 20 broods. Brood X, for number 10, is the largest of all. It's the one due to arrive in the East this spring. Scarcely a year goes by without the appearance of a brood somewhere.

The last emergence of Brood X was in 1970. It coincided with the arrival of a brood of 13-year cicadas — relatives that live in the South and Midwest — for the first time since 1742 in a joint appearance that occurs only every 221 years. Next show: 2184.

Records of Brood X date back to 1715. Periodical cicadas — not to be confused with every late summer's common cicadas, also called harvest flies and dog-days cicadas — have been known in this country since 1634, when they dropped in on the Pilgrims.

But the deeply religious Pilgrims misnamed the cicadas locusts, thinking the insects were the ravenous type referred to in the stories of Biblical plagues.

Use of the incorrect name persists. Many people call them locusts, confusing them with plant-devouring insects related to grasshoppers and katydids.

The unsolved mystery of the periodical cicadas is their unfailingly accurate natural timeclock. Scientists have been trying to crack the puzzle for centuries. They're no closer than when they started.

Get Ready For Brood X

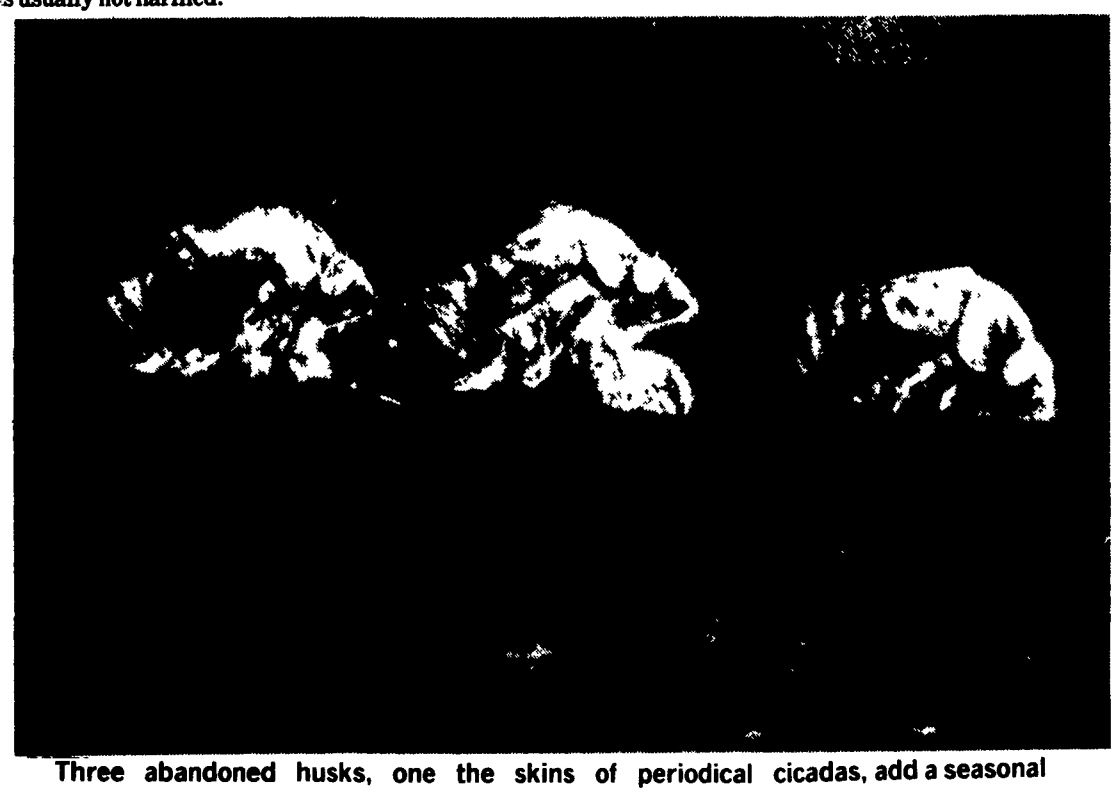
And so once again this year, for the 16th time since 1715, Brood X will boisterously appear. The nymphs, which have been lurking 18 to 24 inches underground for 17 years, sucking root sap, will burst forth instantaneously some evening.

The dime-sized holes they leave in lawns, gardens, fields, and sandboxes won't kill grass or anything else. In fact, says the Smithsonian's Froeschner, the holes will catch rain and help aerate the soil.

Once above ground, the cicadas will culminate their long lives in four climactic activities: They will court, mate, lay eggs, and die.

They will bring happiness to birds, which will feast on their succulent bodies. Dogs and cats, too, will find them to be satisfying snacks. In the old days, Indians ate them. One expert, the late Henry Dybas of Chicago's Field Museum of Natural History, has written: "Those of us who have tried them describe the taste as something like that of a raw potato with a touch of avocado or clam juice."

Finally, after five or six weeks, silence will return to the treetops until another brood of cicadas pays a visit.



Three abandoned husks, one the skins of periodical cicadas, add a seasonal decoration to a tree trunk.

Conrad Weiser FFA Chapter Honors Outstanding Members

ROBESONIA — The annual Conrad Weiser FFA Banquet was held Thursday, March 5th at the high school.

Following a buffet style beef and ham dinner, families, faculty, and special guests gathered in the auditorium for the presentation of awards.

Second, third, and fourth grade students who received trophies last October at the chapter's Annual Pumpkin Contest were presented with trophies.

In the best decorated category, prizes were awarded to Sonja Root, second grade; Amie Forry, third grade; and Michele Ruscio, fourth grade.

Prizes for the heaviest pumpkin went to Adam Murdough, second grade; Jimmy Latshaw, third grade; and Jason Kleinfelter, fourth grade.

Most unusually shaped pumpkin awards were presented to Lindsay Phillips, second grade; Matt Auchenbach, third grade; and Steven Ulrich, fourth grade.

Becky Sonnen, chapter vice-president, presented Certificates of Appreciation to Richard and Darlene Kuhn, Kuhn's Trophies; Robesonia Flowers and Gifts, a local florist; Paul Sell, a night custodian; David Hanagan, H&H Porters; and Ferdinand Kuczala, an art teacher.

Karen Fessler, chapter reporter, presented special awards to Kim Noel, Karen Hartman, Sylvia Alexander, and Christy Aulenbach, business students who serve as secretaries for the FFA Chapter and the agriculture department. The chapter officers presented the Honorary FFA Degree to Glenn and Joan Fessler, the parents of chapter president Kay Fessler, Joe Butcavage, a member of the night custodial staff, and Norman Luckenbill, manager of the Agway store at Leesport.

Kirk Sattazahn, chapter chaplain, presented the Blue and Gold Award to David Moerder. Moerder is an industrial arts teacher, and each year helps the chapter with the slide show.

An FFA member in each grade is presented with a scholarship award. The award is given to the member receiving the highest grade point average. The following received this award: ninth grade, Jason Stewart; tenth grade, Karen Fessler; eleventh grade, Becky Sonnen.

Leadership awards were presented to Karen Fessler and Kirk Sattazahn. Nathan Snyder placed first in the Chapter Creed Speaking Contest and received an FFA jacket. Christine Houck and Jason Stewart received desk plaques for placing second and third.

High sales awards were presented. Doug Putt won the High Sales Award for the processed meats sale as well as the Overall High Chapter Sales Award.

The high salesmen for the citrus sale were recognized. Kirk Sattazahn was first, Karen Fessler was second, and Tim Pajski was third.

The following members received trophies in recognition for their performance at the State FFA Contests held at the Pennsylvania State University last June.

Kay Fessler, a junior, received a gold emblem for placing sixth in the Conservation Public Speaking Contest.

Brenda McFarland, a sophomore, received a gold emblem for placing fourth in the FFA Creed Contest.

Kirk Sattazahn, a sophomore, received a gold emblem for placing first in the FFA Creed Contest.

Karen Fessler, a sophomore, received a gold emblem for placing first in the Dairy Foods Contest.

Steven Miller, chapter advisor, presented plaques to honor C. Andrew Hess and Scott Troutman for receiving their American Farmer Degrees. Mary Jo Cancelmo was recognized as a recipient of the Honorary Keystone Farmer Degree.

The guest speaker was Mrs. Deborah Bowers, a former Conrad Weiser FFA member, state officer, and a graduate of Penn State University. The chapter officers presented a slide show entitled, "A Year To Remember." It featured major chapter events of the past year, classroom work, and Supervised Occupational Experience projects. David Moerder helped the officers produce the program with his professional sound mixing equipment.

FFA Foundation Awards are given to members who have outstanding supervised occupational experience projects. Each student

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