

Highly sexed crickets take to the ring in China

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"[Crickets](#) need lots of sex," said Guo Junxiong, 60, after watching one of his long-antennaed insects overpower an opponent in a bloodless battle held in Beijing during the annual cricket fighting season.

"They should live as couples otherwise the male won't fight."

Cricket fighting, a Chinese tradition dating back more than a thousand

years to imperial times, remains a popular pastime for many men who gather every autumn to watch their insects fight in specially designed glass enclosures.

At a recent tournament in the Chinese capital dozens of men -- mostly middle-aged and smoking heavily -- crowded around white plastic tables to watch pairs of male crickets fight for a gold trophy and \$300 in prize money.

"I always want to be the winner," said Zhao Boguang, vice president of the Singing Insects Association in Beijing and owner of a store specialising in cricket equipment.

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Enthusiasts spend hours every day feeding and watering their chirping

pets, with some keeping them in their bedrooms so they can be easily checked during the night.

Yang Yupeng, 82, said he has been playing with crickets since he was 10 and credits the harmless creatures with keeping him healthy in body and mind.

"The more I watch them fight the happier I am," said Yang, wearing a grey suit of a kind made famous by former Chinese leader Mao Zedong.

"Playing with crickets can alter your mood -- it can keep you feeling calm, happy and solve your worries."

Before a tournament begins, each cricket must be weighed on a tiny set of scales.

Owners carefully remove their crickets from small clay pots using wooden scoops and then gently slide them into a plastic cup or modified beer can, which is hooked onto the scales.



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After their weight is recorded on a white strip of paper, the crickets are returned to their container where they wait for battle.

"I've been playing with crickets since I was very young," said Yu Xin, 30, one of the youngest participants at the tournament in Beijing.

"Now I work in an office with computers and playing with crickets brings me closer to nature."

In the seconds before a fight begins, owners "tease" their crickets by stroking their backs, head and antennae with a long piece of dry grass.

Aroused and ready to fight, the crickets grab at each other with their front legs for an intense but shortlived battle before breaking apart and one of them -- the loser -- scurrying away.

Although betting on cricket fights -- or any other type of competition -- is illegal in China, it is common for Chinese to have a discreet flutter.

"I've been involved in cricket fighting for 40 years and I still find it interesting, they can bring you happiness," said Man Zhiguo, 48.

Cricket fighting is a male dominated sport and, according to Man, that is the way it should be.

Women "don't have the skills to buy, raise or fight crickets and also going to the countryside to find the crickets is hard and hot work," he said.

During their short life -- about 100 days -- crickets are fed a diet of soya beans, carrots and corn, while some enthusiasts even give their beloved insects doses of Chinese traditional medicine to boost their performance in the ring.

And, of course, there is the "excessive sex" needed to enhance their fighting prowess.

"Crickets must have female companions so their bodies can be strong," said Yang.

"I check them every day to see if their mood is good or not. If not, I have to find them a new partner."

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