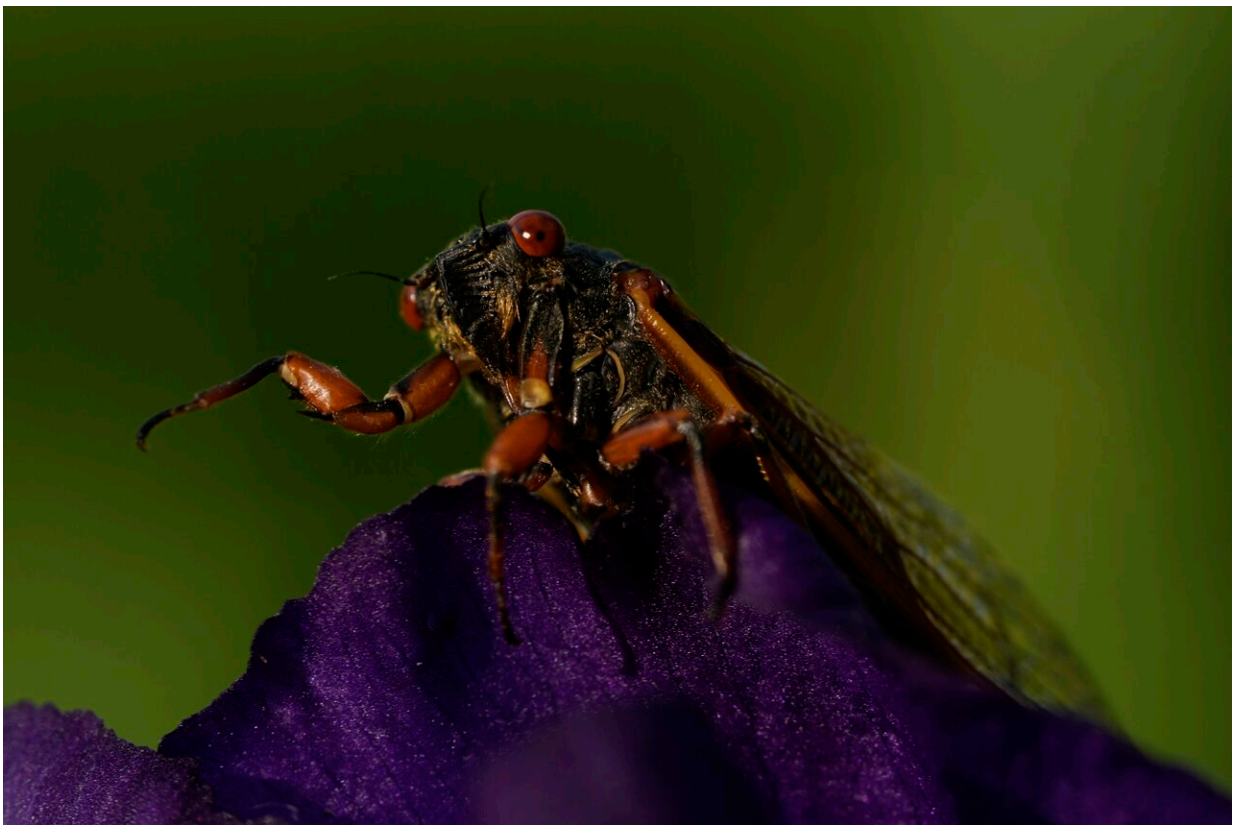


Up close and personal, cicadas display Nature's artwork. Discerning beholders find beauty in bugs.

May 25 2024, by SETH BORENSTEIN and CAROLYN KASTER



An adult periodical cicada waves its legs as it climbs over an iris in the afternoon sun on Friday, May 17, 2024, in Charleston, Ill. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

With rich reds, gentle greens and basic blacks, Nature's screaming, crawling artwork is the epitome of rare beauty—at least in the eyes of some beholders. To others, it may seem just creepy.

It's a colorful, ever-changing canvas of bugs. Lots of them.

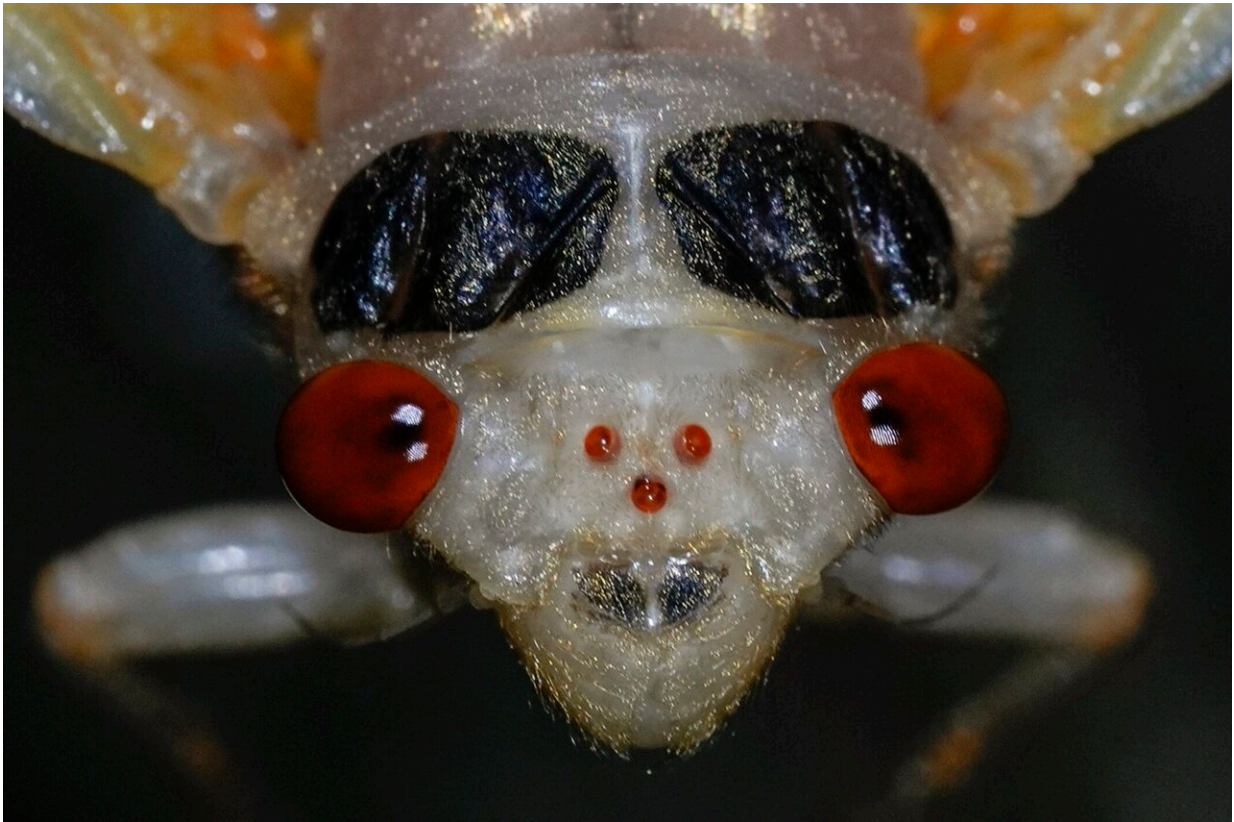
A [once-in-221-year convergence of two broods](#) of [periodical cicadas](#) are emerging at the same time. The big effect of the cicadas is the sheer numbers. Trillions are expected to populate 16 states by mid to late June. They can be overwhelming, messy and loud.

But individually, up close and personal, a cicada has splashes of color, subtle shapes and that special something that some scientists and [artists](#) say translate to beauty. Even if to the [average person](#) it's just a bug.

To artists and scientists, cicadas are more awe-inspiring than awful.

Periodical cicadas are "more otherworldly-looking" than other insects and then the fact they come out every 13 or 17 years adds to their allure, making "them feel like something out of a science fiction movie," said [Jonathan Monaghan](#), a Washington, D.C.-based visual artist.

"Up close, there is a subtle beauty, particularly with their vibrant cadmium red eyes," Monaghan said in an email. "Visually, they are at their best freshly molted because there is more contrast on their bodies, showing off some really interesting patterns. Overall though, I still think they are rather goofy looking."



An adult periodical cicada, in the process of shedding its nymphal skin, is visible on Saturday, May 11, 2024, in Cincinnati. There are two large compound eyes, which are used to visually perceive the world around them, and three small, jewel-like, simple eyes called ocelli at center. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



A periodical cicada appears in a hay field at Lincoln Log Cabin State Historic Site on Sunday, May 19, 2024, in Lerna, Ill. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



The underside of a periodical cicada is visible on Tuesday, May 14, 2024, in Cincinnati. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



A periodical cicada is visible on a leaf Friday, May 10, 2024, in Cincinnati.
Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



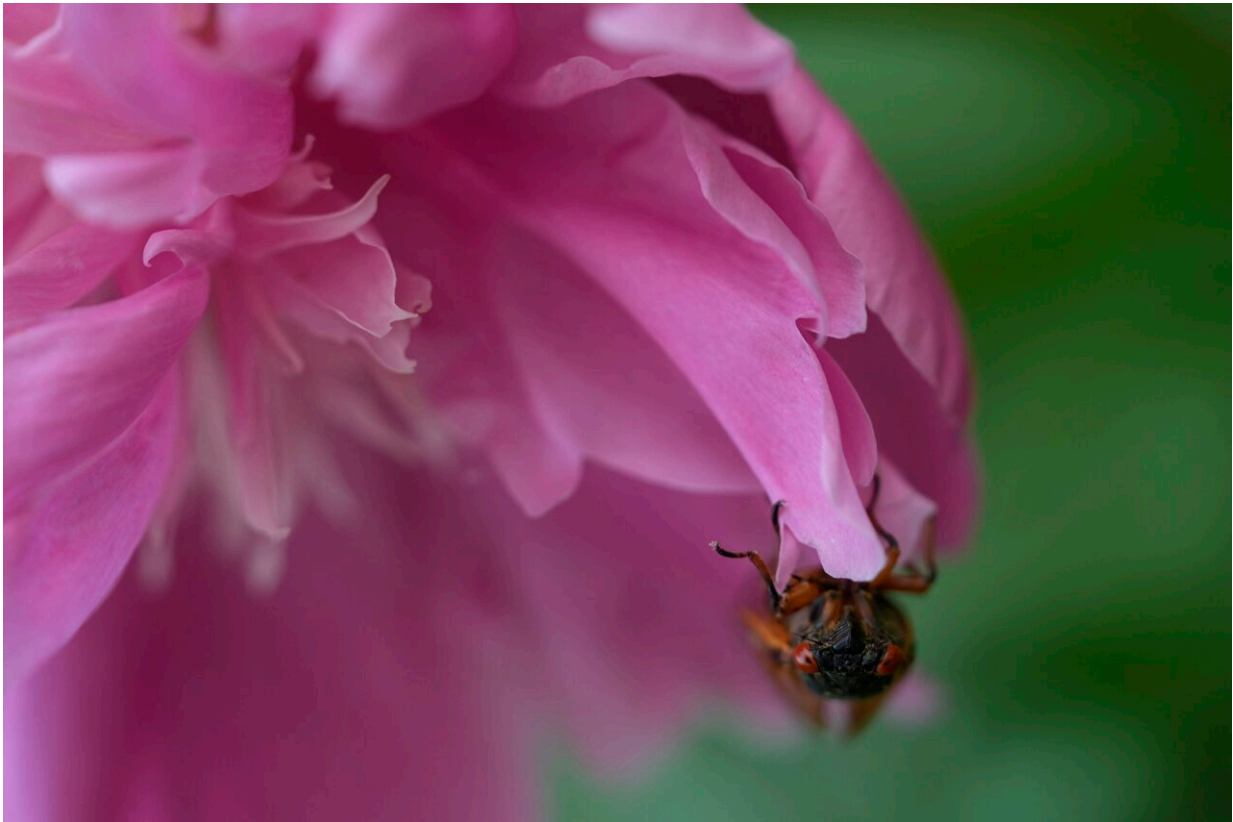
A close-up of an adult periodical cicada's compound eye, shortly after it shed its nymphal shell, is visible on Saturday, May 18, 2024, in Charleston, Ill. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



A detail of an adult periodical cicada's wings and anus, shortly after it shed its nymphal shell, is seen late Friday, May 17, 2024, in Charleston, Ill. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



An adult periodical cicada, just after shedding its nymphal skin, climbs over other nymphal shells at the base of a tree on Friday, May 17, 2024, in Charleston, Ill. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



An adult periodical cicada clings to a peony flower on Friday, May 17, 2024, in Charleston, Ill. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



An adult cicada periodical cicada sheds its nymphal skin on a tree, Friday, May 17, 2024, in Charleston, Ill. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



An adult periodical cicada, just after shedding its nymphal skin, is visible in the grass late Sunday, May 12, 2024, in Cincinnati. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster



The veins of an adult periodical cicada's translucent wings are silhouetted by a distant building light, shortly after shedding its nymphal skin, Saturday, May 18, 2024, in Charleston, Ill. Credit: AP Photo/Carolyn Kaster

When collage artist Luis Martin, [a self-described art engineer](#) in Brooklyn, first saw cicadas, he was entranced.

"They were just so beautiful and diaphanous that I kind of fell in love," said Martin, who sported a cicada bolo tie during a Zoom interview. "It looked like a fairy."

But it's a love/fear kind of thing. They also seem scary, he said.

"It kind of goes back to these beautiful colors that we tend to think is

kind of ugly, right? Because they're brown, they're kind of metallic, kind of like alien," Martin said. "As a brown person myself I find them absolutely beautiful. I can totally see myself in them."

Not just himself, but [Frida Kahlo](#), Martin said. He could see the artist's signature eyebrows in the close-up cicada face images.

Scientists are even more mesmerized.

"There's a lot of things in the world today to get freaked out about. Cicadas aren't one of them," said Mount St. Joseph University biologist Gene Kritsky, who [wrote a book on this year's dual emergence](#). "They're beautiful insects. They've got these red eyes, black bodies, orange-colored veins on these membranous wings. I love the way they come up in these big numbers. I like that I can predict when they come out. It's a scientific experiment every time.

"But what I really like about them, they got me tenure."

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