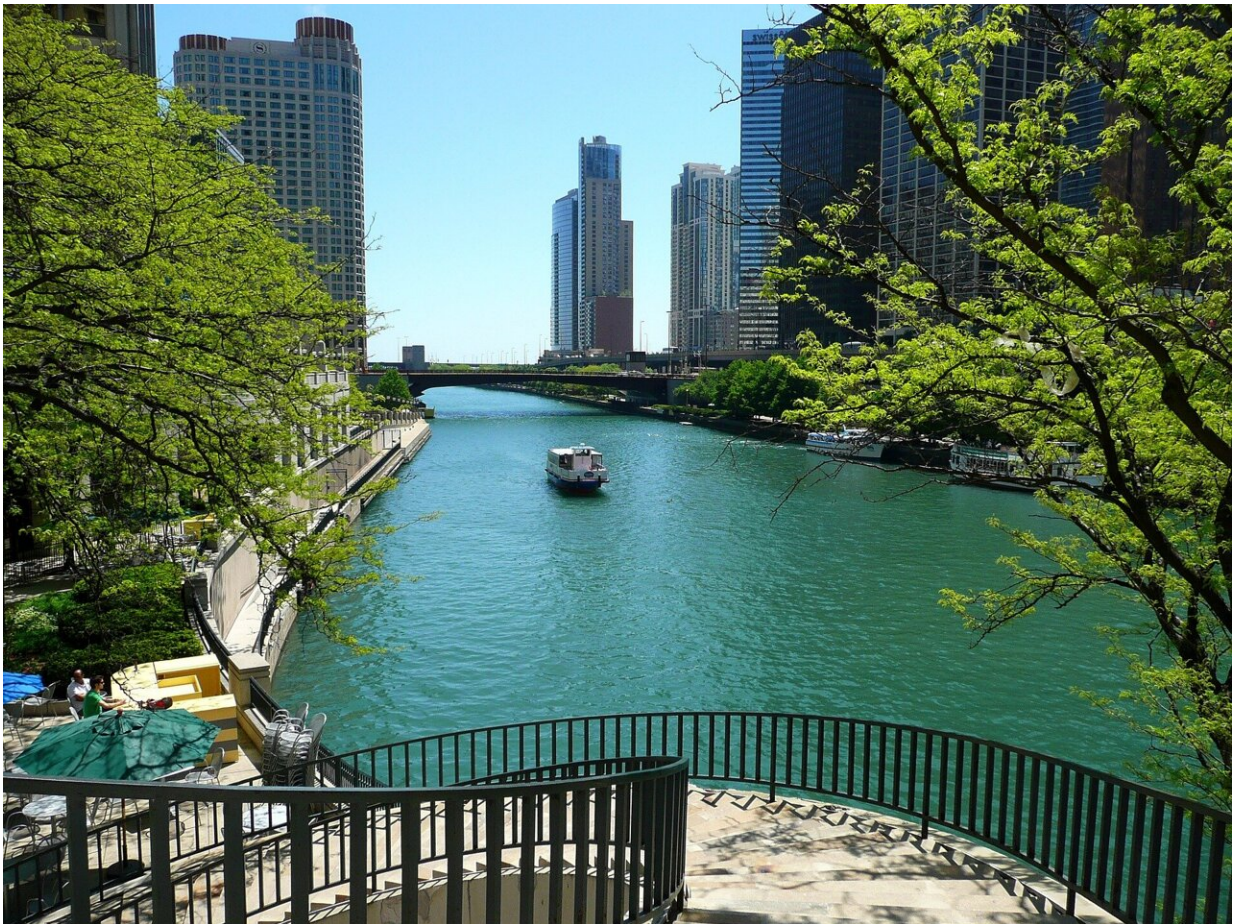


After a 17-year wait, cicadas emerge a little early in Chicago area: 'It's a milestone'

May 20 2024, by Kate Armanini, Chicago Tribune



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It's official, Chicagoland. Periodical cicadas have arrived.

The large insects, which last emerged in the area 17 years ago, have been spotted in droves in pockets of the city and suburbs. On certain streets on the Far Southwest Side Saturday, cicadas dotted the sidewalks and blanketed the trees.

"It's pretty exciting. It's natural systems at their finest," said Stephanie Adams, the plant health care leader at the Morton Arboretum. "You can just really appreciate them."

The staff at the arboretum in Lisle first noticed cicadas Monday. By Friday, certain areas were crawling with the insects. Due to [warmer weather](#), the insects appeared about a week earlier than anticipated, according to Adams. The timing of the emergence can be affected by even the slightest variances in soil temperature.

"I would say in people's neighborhoods, if they have a known host tree, and it's in a particularly sunny area, you're going to see emergence earlier," Adams said.

This year marks a rare double emergence, with the cycles of the 17-year and 13-year cicadas aligning for the first time in 221 years. The last overlap of Brood XIX, four species that appear every 13 years in the Southeast, and Brood XIII, three species that appear every 17 years in northern Illinois, was in 1803.

Brood XIX won't emerge in Chicago, but will be visible in central and southern Illinois. Periodical cicadas only exist in two other countries—Fiji and India.

Nature-lovers Luke Van Schaik and Yvonne Rae have always been fascinated by the insects. It's why they drove six hours from Ontario, Canada, to Illinois with their children this weekend. Saturday morning, their 8-year-old and 3-year-old played on a sidewalk in Beverly,

watching cicadas crawl up their arms.

"We thought we'd take the kids to get some deep dish pizza, see the sights in Chicago, and then see how many cicadas we could catch," Van Schaik said with a laugh.

Though females can damage [young trees](#) as they lay eggs, cicadas are harmless to humans. In fact, the insects are even edible.

Beverly resident Keith Lewis, a self-proclaimed bug enthusiast, brimmed with excitement when he first spotted cicadas in his yard Friday. His walkway on South Bell Avenue in Beverly was littered with tan shells. For Lewis, the insects mark the passage of time. He can't help but feel nostalgic.

"I've been waiting for them," he said. "The last time that the cicadas emerged, my son was 4. And now he's 21. It's a milestone for me, it really is."

After spotting the insects, Lewis has been posting the photos on the Cicada Safari app, a platform launched by researchers to track the historic double emergence. He also made cicada T-shirts to celebrate their arrival.

"I'm just so excited," Lewis said. "I'm trying to enjoy it."

Periodical cicadas have a [life cycle](#) of about four weeks, and are likely to remain visible through June. Most neighbors say they've yet to hear the insects' signature singing, which usually begins a few days after a mass emergence.

It's one of Karolyn Kuehner's favorite things about cicadas. The Morgan Park musician takes comfort in their chirping and trilling.

"I enjoy the sound," Kuehner said. "I was hoping we'd get both broods, because you have different songs. One sings higher than another. I think it's beautiful."

As Kuehner mowed her front lawn Saturday morning, her young crabapple trees were wrapped in delicate, protective netting. She first covered the saplings 10 days ago. Meanwhile, her oak tree was teeming with cicadas. Not that she minds.

"It's just sort of part of the cycle of nature," Kuehnr said. "I think when we can have that in the city, especially, that's particularly lovely."

Further north, Northbrook resident Linda Vering dodged cicadas in her driveway. They first appeared earlier this week and are already beginning to fly.

"We're trying to be careful not to step on the newly emerged ones, but it's kind of tricky," Vering said. "And I have had a cicada flying on my hair before, which is really unpleasant."

She mused that the Chicago area witnessed one natural phenomenon after another this year.

"It's like a second eclipse," Vering said with a laugh. "The eclipse, the northern lights and now the cicadas."

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