

Cicadas: Ugly, but harmless



A young cicada sits on Roads and Grounds employee Dave Shemanske's hand.

Every 17 years they come, emerging from their dark, underground homes to meet, mate and make a lot of noise. Although they might look frightening, with their glowing red eyes and locust-like bodies, cicadas are relatively harmless.

"They aren't dangerous, they are just a nuisance," said Bob Lootens of Roads and Grounds.

Brood XIII cicadas arrived weeks ago in some suburban areas of northern Illinois, plaguing areas dense with trees and drowning out conversations with their song. The red-eyed bugs have just begun to show themselves onsite and in other western suburbs during the past few days.

The cicadas are expected to live for about four to six weeks. During that time, area experts and those with good memories expect a lot of noise, and at the end of it all, a lot of crunchy cicada bodies to step on. But experts don't expect that the bugs will do much harm to trees, and certainly not to people, two reasons why Lootens doesn't see any need for people to take action against the bugs.

"There is no need to use pesticides," said Lootens, adding that the pesticides could harm the birds that eat the cicadas. Birds are among nearly a dozen of the cicada's natural predators, including spiders, snakes, moles and squirrels.

Rod Walton, Fermilab's ecologist, isn't sure why the cicadas took so long to appear, but he expects it has to do with the temperature, which has still been relatively cool in the area at night. "It just doesn't seem like it is shaping up to be as bad as other areas," he said. "I do expect we'll see more a couple of weeks from now, but I don't think we'll see the infestation that other areas have."

Anyone who remembers 17-year cicadas emerging at Fermilab during previous invasions can email their stories to [Fermilab Today](#).

-- Rhianna Wisniewski