



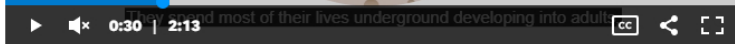
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NATION

Brood X: The Indiana Jones of cicadas prepares for their arrival

Keith BieryGolick Cincinnati Enquirer

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Cicadas Brood X 2021: What you need to know about the noisy insect

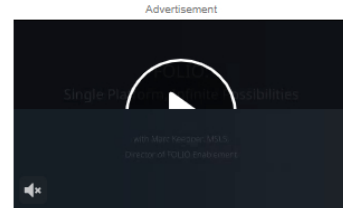
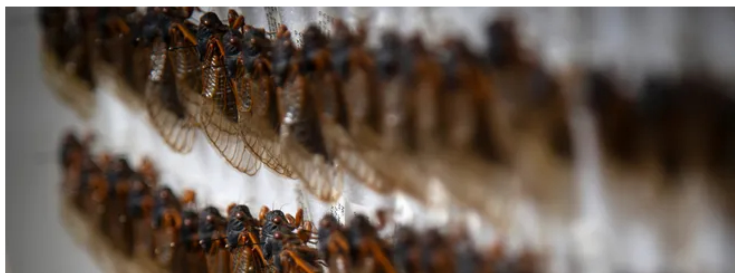
Cicadas are back after nearly 17 years underground. Here's everything you need to know about the very noisy and unique Brood X. Just the FAQs, USA TODAY

CINCINNATI – Gene Kritsky had food poisoning.

In 2004, he went to a cicada-themed happy hour at a TGI Fridays that has since been torn down. The next morning, a photographer drove from Chicago to take his picture for People magazine. The photographer offered to cancel, but this was People. And for a professor at a small college on Cincinnati's west side, the publicity was priceless.

Kritsky, who was 50 at the time, spent eight hours with the photographer that day. By then, cicadas had already emerged from the ground, climbing out of tunnels where they had lived for 17 years. Kritsky remembers the photographer catching bags of bugs and dumping them on him.

Between shots, Kritsky would walk into the woods and throw up.



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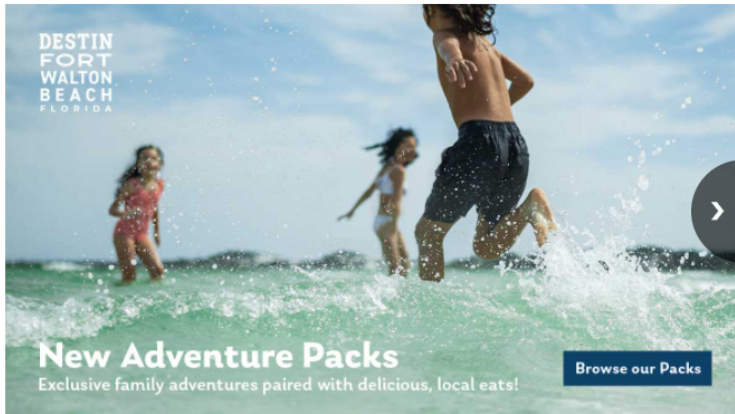




Dozens of cicadas are preserved in Gene Kritsky's office in Delhi Township, Ohio, on April 23, 2021. *Sam Greene/The Enquirer*

In the end, the magazine used one picture. Kritsky was standing in the grass, hands folded across his stomach like he was holding a baby. He wore a brown safari hat with a khaki shirt that had two chest pockets. In the photo, around 100 cicadas crawled up his shirt. Some crawled on his hat. Some crawled on his neck, through a beard that had started to gray.

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In the magazine, the headline splashed across the page in bold letters: “Big Bug Man.”

And in the picture, Kritsky was smiling.

**Brood X cicadas:** [Cicada swarms are coming to a state near you. Here's what to know](#)

[Gene Kritsky](#) holds a microphone close to his computer. He wants the crowd to hear it. It's a love song, he says, except with lawnmower buzzes replacing guitars. It's the [song of the cicada](#) – their mating call, their 17-year itch. Kritsky, 67 now, pulls the microphone away from the computer and mimics the call himself. He treasures that sound. He drives around listening for it in a car with a specialty cicada license plate.

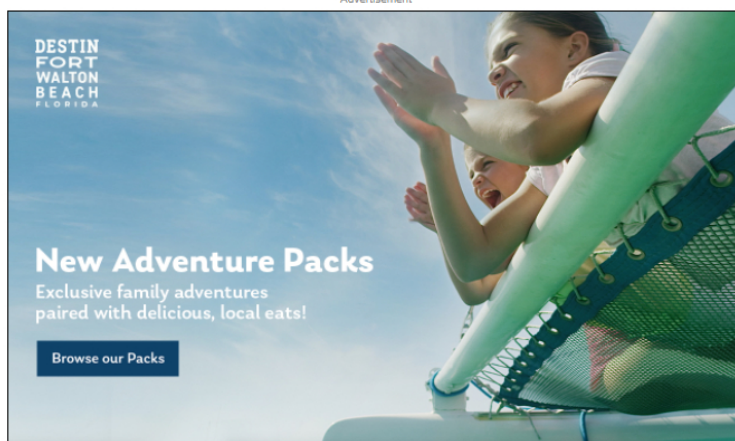


Gene Kritsky, dean of the School of Behavioral and Natural Sciences at Mount St. Joseph University, stands with a case of preserved cicadas in his university office in Delhi Township, Ohio, on Friday, April 23, 2021. Kritsky has a collection of thousands of samples, dating back decades. *Sam Greene/The Enquirer*

Kritsky has been called the Indiana Jones of cicadas, and he takes a safari hat with

him almost everywhere he goes. But what drives someone to devote their life to an insect most people hate?

In 1991, The Enquirer, which is a part of the USA TODAY Network, described cicadas as "horseflies on steroids" and a "gawd-awful looking thing with a black body, red eyes and hairy legs." The periodic insects, which are members of the same family as bed bugs, live underground and emerge only once every 17 years or, depending on the type of cicada, once every 13 years.

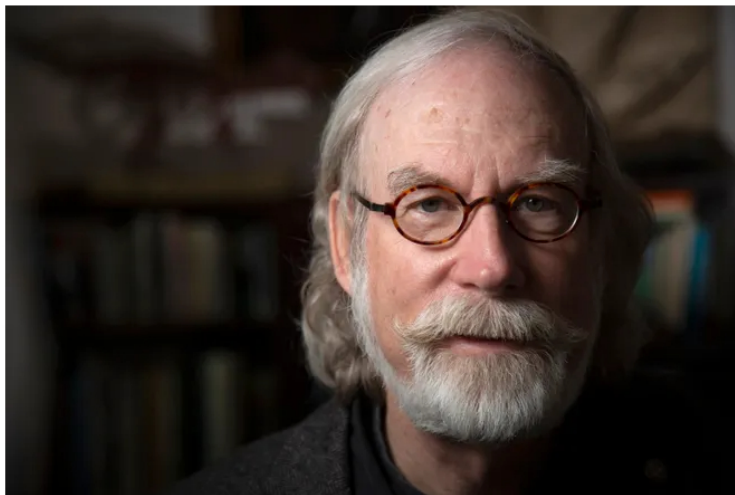


Here's the good news: They don't sting, don't bite and can actually [help your lawn](#).

Yet some people fear them, and they're often mistaken for locusts. And when they die, because of the sheer number of them, it stinks. But in other cultures, cicadas are an almost [holy symbol](#) sometimes used at funerals. In the 1700s, people believed cicadas could predict war.

Their genus, or generic scientific name, is magicicada.

In short: They are weird, and they are wonderful. At least to Kritsky, a dean at [Mount St. Joseph University](#), who jokes the insects got him tenure.



Gene Kritsky has studied cicadas for more than four decades. *Sam Greene/The Enquirer*

"Anybody who deals with cicadas eventually meets up with Gene," said Dan Mozgai, a 52-year-old online marketer in New Jersey who started a [cicada website](#) after a wedding in the '90s.

At that wedding, where children collected the bugs in buckets, bagpipes were the only thing that could cut through the cacophony of cicadas, he said. Years later, after becoming fascinated with the animals, Mozgai remembers watching cicadas crawl out of the ground in a cemetery at night. Kritsky was there, walking around and explaining to those gathered with flashlights what was happening. The man couldn't help himself.

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“Maybe he doesn’t inspire you to love cicadas,” Mozgai said. “But maybe he can help you find your own passion.”

**A visual guide to cicadas: They are weird, and they are wonderful.**

On this morning in April, about a month before billions of cicadas will fly around several states on the East Coast, Kritsky is speaking to a garden club. Even for a formal presentation, he wears a tan jacket, and his mustache curls up beneath his circular-rimmed glasses.

“I’m a big fan of cicadas,” says Sue Ann Vogt, the garden club member who booked Kritsky. “Some of the other ladies are not.”

During the presentation, Kritsky shows pictures of a cicada wriggling out of its shell on a tree. It looks like alien yoga. The cicada is creamy white, except for piercing red eyes. Its exoskeleton is soft at first, but will harden and darken over the next few hours. That hard skin is why dogs can sometimes get sick if they eat too many.



Periodical cicadas will emerge this year after spending 17 years underground. The latest group, Brood X, will crawl out of the ground in 15 states, including Ohio. *Provided/Gene Kritsky*

Kritsky flips to a picture of two cicadas mating, wings overlapping and facing away from each other. He tells the garden club that female cicadas have a serrated metal rod inside a slit in their abdomen. They use this to burrow into trees and deposit their eggs.

“Oh my God,” someone says.

In the back of the room, lunch is being prepared.

“Isn’t it great?” Kritsky says.

For a few weeks in May and June, the insects sing, have sex and die. But before they die, each female cicada will lay an average of 500 eggs. This is how they survive. By overwhelming their predators – and some of us.

In Cincinnati, there is a Facebook support group to help those dreading the noisy phenomenon. At the garden club, Kritsky tells the women they are all cicada scouts now, and he asks them to help document where the insects emerge.

“We don’t know when the pandemic will end,” Kritsky says. “But we know the cicadas are coming in May.”



**Watch: How cicada make that sound**

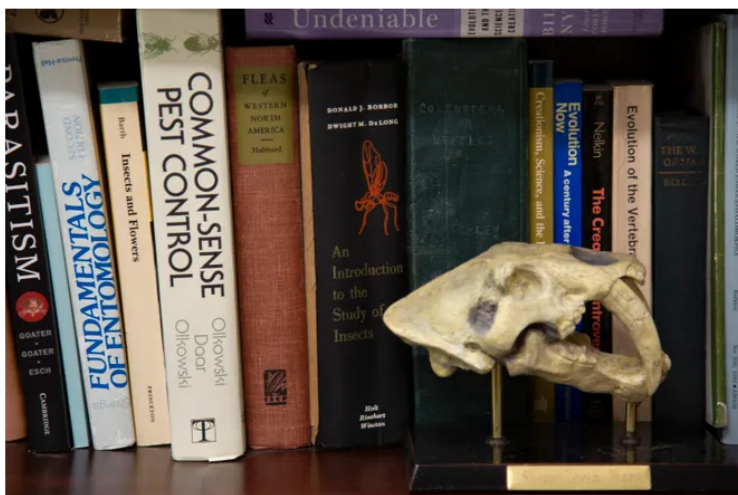
Ryan “The Bug Man” Bridge uses a live cicada to show how they make that loud buzzing sound. *Kate Penn*

About a month before the cicadas show themselves, Kritsky interrupts a campus tour near his office. He does this whenever he sees one. Kritsky wasn’t always a people person – as editor of the insect journal [American Entomologist](#), he only wanted pictures of bugs on the cover.

Now, he can talk to anybody.

“My life is all about cicadas right now,” he tells the prospective students. “But that’s beside the point.”

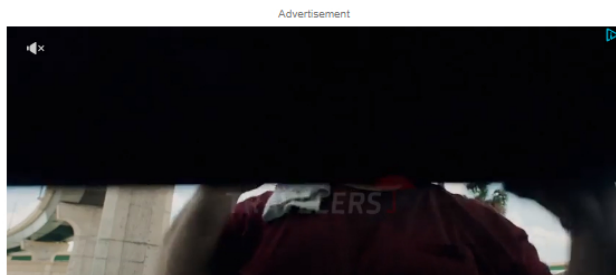
When Kritsky came to Mount St. Joseph in 1983, there was no biology major. Now, it’s the biggest department at the school. Cicadas helped him build it.



A collection of entomology books and a replica sabertoothed cat skull sit on a shelf in the office of Gene Kritsky, dean of the School of Behavioral and Natural Sciences, at Mount St. Joseph University in Delhi Township, Ohio, on April 23, 2021. *Sam Greene/The Enquirer*

After the People magazine article, Kritsky says the school had its largest freshman class ever. Now, the insect scientist responds to about 80 emails a day, and that number will likely increase in the next few weeks. In 2004, the last time this type of cicada brood emerged, the professor documented 736 media contacts.

If Kritsky hates these interviews, you can’t tell by talking to him.





### **Cicada protection: [4 easy ways to protect your garden from the cicada masses](#)**

When he was a kid, born during a cicada year, Kritsky and his dad attended a [Margaret Mead](#) speech. A famous anthropologist, Mead was the kind of scientist who appeared on "The Tonight Show" and advocated for women's rights. Kritsky asked for advice about school, and she gave him some. Then, she told him to learn how to take pictures of his work.

Share them with the public, she told him.

And so when cicadas finally emerge later this month, Kritsky will go behind his house with a flashlight, tripod and camera. He'll probably take a glass of scotch, too, and sit for hours.



The lacy wings of a 17-year brood cicada are visible as it emerges in Homewood on May 22, 2007. E. Jason Wambsgans / Chicago Tribune, TNS

Because this is a time to savor. This is a time to remember where you are, and where you were.


In 2004, during the last large emergence, Kritsky was only a few years into his second marriage. This year, he'll celebrate his 20th anniversary with a woman who sells [insect jewelry](#). Seventeen years ago, he never thought he would still be at Mount St. Joseph. Now, he's the longest-serving faculty member.

At the college campus in Delhi Township, Ohio, there will eventually be a cicada mural. A group of his colleagues walks by this spot where Kritsky was interviewed.

"There he is," a woman shouts. "There's the superstar."

Since the last cicada emergence of this kind, LeBron James [left Cleveland](#), came back and then left again. There have been four different U.S. presidents and three different actors who played Spider-Man.

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Kritsky used to have a dedicated hotline to report cicada sightings. This year, he has an app. A month ago, he did a virtual interview with a local television station. His [Zoom background](#) featured a cicada.

**Related story:** [5 tips for cleaning up the aftermath of Brood X](#)

The world has changed a lot since 2004, and cicadas reflect this – sometimes coming up early in small numbers, experts believe, because of global warming and deforestation. But if you’ve been reading closely, you know by now this is a story about the passage of time as much as it is about cicadas. Because while so much of our world can feel uncertain, cicadas seem inevitable.



Feel like you've been stuck inside forever and ready to get back out into the world? Our friends the cicadas know how you feel. [Kevin Necessary/The Enquirer](#)

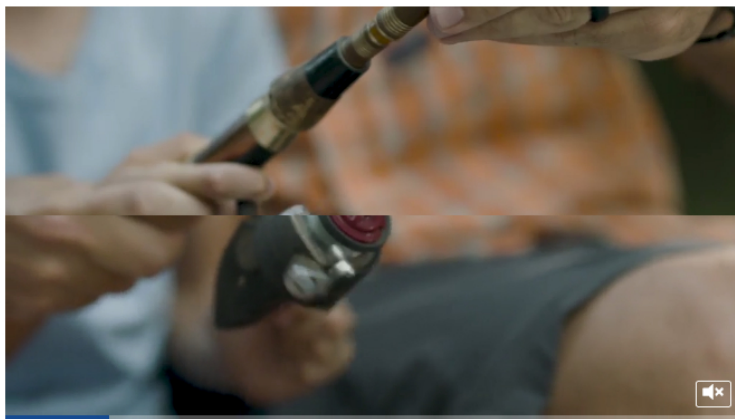
And when these cicadas emerge again in Cincinnati, the year will be 2038.

Kritsky will be 84. He often wonders if he'll ever hear them sing again.

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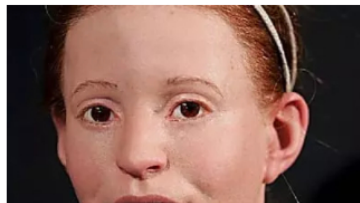
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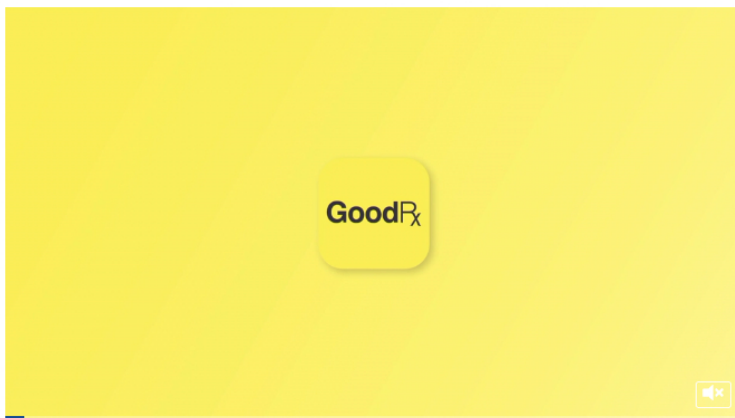


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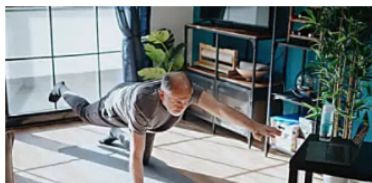
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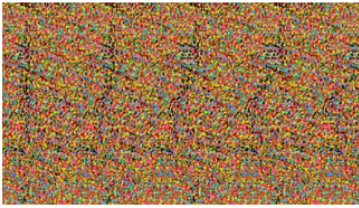


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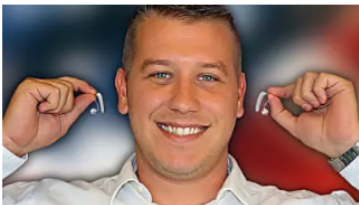
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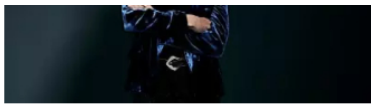


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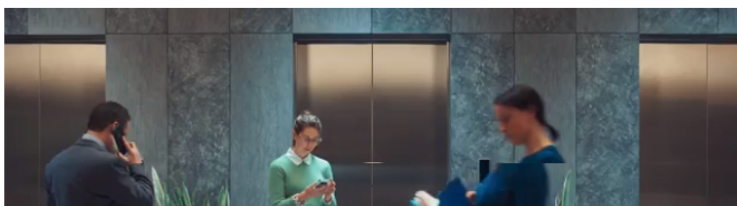
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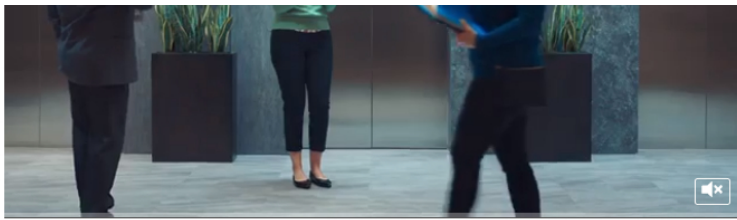
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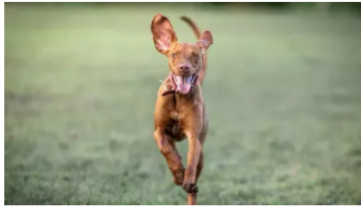
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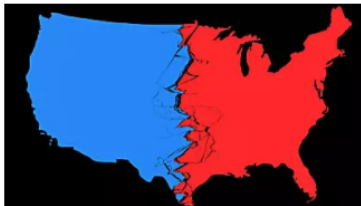
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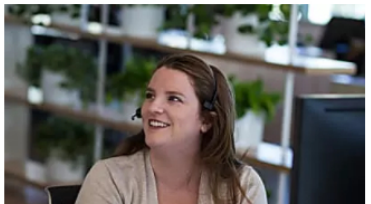
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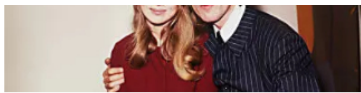
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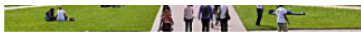
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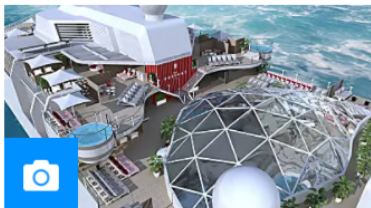
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