

MontclairPatch

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MSU Prof Helps Calm Four Cicada Fears

With millions of cicadas about to surface the earth in North Jersey in the coming weeks, some of us may be feeling a bit anxious about this summer's uninvited visitors. After all, it's been 17 years since Brood II periodic cicadas made their last appearance — and who really remembers

Montclair State University Associate Professor of Biology and Molecular Biology, Scott Kight, can help put those fears to rest.

Kight, an evolutionary biologist who specializes in insect reproductive behavior, says although the insects may spoil a picnic or two this summer, for the most part we should sit back and enjoy the long-anticipated show.

“It's a gift, if you will, from nature that we live in a place where something so unusual can happen,” Kight said Thursday.

He spoke enthusiastically about the insects as he helped calm four possible fears:

Fear: They are going to try to bite me or my children.

The periodic cicadas pose no harm to people, so there's no need to worry about being bitten or stung. In fact, they don't even have stingers.

Fear: The cicadas will destroy my garden.

The cicadas feed on long twigs of woody plants, such as young trees. “The damage these things cause is really relatively minimal,” he said. “They are not going to harm crop plants, flowering plants or ornamentals.”

He also does not recommend using pesticides. “I think pesticides are always a bad idea because it's just a poison you are putting into the environment,” he said.

Fear: The cicadas will be so loud they will keep me up at night.

The male cicadas can be quite noisy while they attempt to attract the females, there's no arguing about that. But the cicadas perform their mating songs mostly during the warmth of day. “They are more active where it's warm,” Kight said, often positioning themselves on branches exposed to direct sunlight.

Kight said in addition to females the song attracts other males who anticipate females to be in the area. He said you'll find branches covered with thousands of cicadas.

Fear: They'll spoil the summer of 2013.

Despite all the hype, cicadas won't be everywhere. "You might have neighborhoods in North Jersey that have millions of these things," he said, "and have a neighborhood that has none."

Still he said anyone planning a wedding or another outdoor event in the coming weeks should take precautions.

Kight suggested having an indoor back-up plan, covering food until it's time to eat, assuring guests that cicadas don't bite and having a PA-system on hand to avoid voices being drowned out by the noisy bugs.

Kight, a native Midwesterner who now lives in Wayne, is excited to witness Brood II cicadas for the first time. He said while some spottings have been reported he expects them to be here in real numbers in the next two weeks.

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