

August - Week 1

Cicadas

Early August is a typical time during which the Dog-day or Annual Cicadas create a loud buzzing chorus that accompanies the heat and humidity of a mid-summer afternoon. The chorus you hear is produced by male cicadas attempting to attract the attention of a female in order to mate. The cicadas are members of the order of insects known as True Bugs and their life story is truly amazing.

In summer immature cicadas called nymphs emerge from the soil where they have spent one to five years. Below ground, they use their long piercing mouthpart to feed on the sap in the roots of trees. After one to five years, the nymphs burrow to the surface and emerge from the soil. They then climb up onto a vertical structure, often a tree trunk, to shed their nymph exoskeleton and become a winged adult. Adults fly into the tree tops where they live only a few days, just long enough to mate and lay the next generation of eggs. When the eggs hatch, young nymphs continue the life cycle by digging themselves into the soil searching for a tree root to tap.

This week, listen for the buzzing of Cicadas. What time of day do you hear them? How long do they call? Time the length of an individual call. Time additional buzzing calls and find out the average length of a call. In the area where you hear Cicadas, search tree trunks for nymph exoskeletons. The empty shell-like exoskeletons are often left clasped onto the bark. If you find one, or several, note their location and sketch them. How big are they? How did the adult cicada emerge from the exoskeleton? If you remove one from the bark, turn it over and check out the shell of the mouthpart that is folded up under its body. What else do you find interesting about the cicada and its exoskeleton? Document your observations in your journal.

