

After 17-year wait, cicadas will return to Staten Island in the spring



By [Michael Sedon/Staten Island Advance](#)

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[Enlarge](#)[Bill Lyons](#)A visitor at the opening of the Staten Island Museum's "They're Baaack!!! Return of the 17-Year Cicada" exhibit uses his cellphone to get a picture of cicadas from the United States.(Staten Island Advance/ Bill Lyons)[Cicadas make the scene at the Staten Island Museum in St. George gallery](#) (9 photos)

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. - One of nature's more mysterious cycles will reach its climax in late spring and early summer, as the 17-year cicadas sprout from the ground, sing their way to buggie love and plant the seeds for their next emergence, in 2030.

And while this year's infestation won't be as big as 1979, due to the increased development on Staten Island, the Mid-Island and South Shore should still have a "good showing," according to Ed Johnson, the director of science at the Staten Island Museum, where an exhibit dedicated to the insects had its opening preview party Friday night.

"Each year, they lose a little more habitat," Johnson added.

Reports from 1979 suggest that a massive infestation of the bugs crushed the area. But in 1996, according to Advance archives, the North Shore saw very little cicada activity, and the emergence was staggered over several months.

[Related: S.I. Museum exhibit will commemorate cicadas' return](#)

From mid-to-late May, Staten Islanders will start to notice the noisy critters as millions dig their way out from a depth of about 18 inches. Once they emerge, the cicadas split their nymphal skins after feeding on tree-root sap for 17 years to become mature, winged adults.

The males waste no time looking for romance; their distinctive "singing" will continue throughout June. Waiting females hang back and listen for a male's song that particularly impresses them before choosing a mate.

The males' chorus is produced by vibrating membranes on their abdomens, and higher temperatures mean louder singing.

By the beginning of July, the crooning is all over, and the females have deposited their eggs into the tips of tree branches. The hatchlings fall to the ground and dig in until it is their time to continue the cycle in another 17 years.

Outside of their noise, cicadas hardly register with humans: They neither bite nor sting nor chomp plants, the museum's Johnson explained.

The enlightening and entertaining exhibit "They're Baaack! Return of the 17-year Cicadas" opens to the public Saturday with Family Cicada Day, which runs from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. and includes gallery workshops, hands-on science lessons and puppet films.

The exhibit will be up until spring 2014, by which time the cicadas should have long since retreated to obscurity.

Cicada cycles differ, as the southern part of the country experiences 13-year cycles.

The insects are grouped into "broods" based on region. Staten Island cicadas are known as brood II, which extends north through the Hudson Valley to Germantown, N.Y., west to eastern Ohio and south to the northern part of North Carolina.

There are 12 broods of the 17-year variety and three broods of the 13-year bugs.