

They're here, rare and beautiful. Meet the blue-eyed cicadas.

Insect lovers are abuzz over photos from an Illinois arboretum of cicadas with unusual and striking eyes.



By [Ben Brasch](#)

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A select group of cicadas have joined the likes of Paul Newman and Frank Sinatra as blue-eyed wonders that know how to attract America's attention.

An Illinois arboretum is abuzz after a blue-eyed cicada was photographed there, sparking online excitement about the unusual and visually striking bug.

Blue-eyed cicadas are fairly uncommon, differing from the usual reddish-tan eyes of periodical cicadas that swarm swaths of the United States. It isn't clear how rare the blue-eyed bugs are because [little research](#) has been done to count the population.

Stephanie Adams, plant health-care leader at the Morton Arboretum outside Chicago, told The Washington Post she has been interviewed about a half-dozen times since a blue-eyed cicada landed on her last week.

"Once everybody finds out something is rare, it makes it more intriguing," she said.

One of their three ol' blue-eyed bugs was donated by a 4-year-old Chicagoland boy who found it in his backyard. "He was really excited," Adams said — of the boy, not the cicada. (That cicada is now part of the [collection](#) at the Field Museum in Chicago.)

After handling the boy's blue-eyed cicada, Adams was walking between two buildings and saw a group of cicadas on a plant. Adams figured she'd look to see if she could find another. To her surprise, she did.

"I seem to be a cicada magnet," she said. "It's job security."

Adams said blue is certainly the rarest eye color for the insects. They usually range from dark red to almost tomato soup orange to tan.

Part of the public’s fascination, she said, is that the bug is rare enough that it’s special to find one but not impossible.

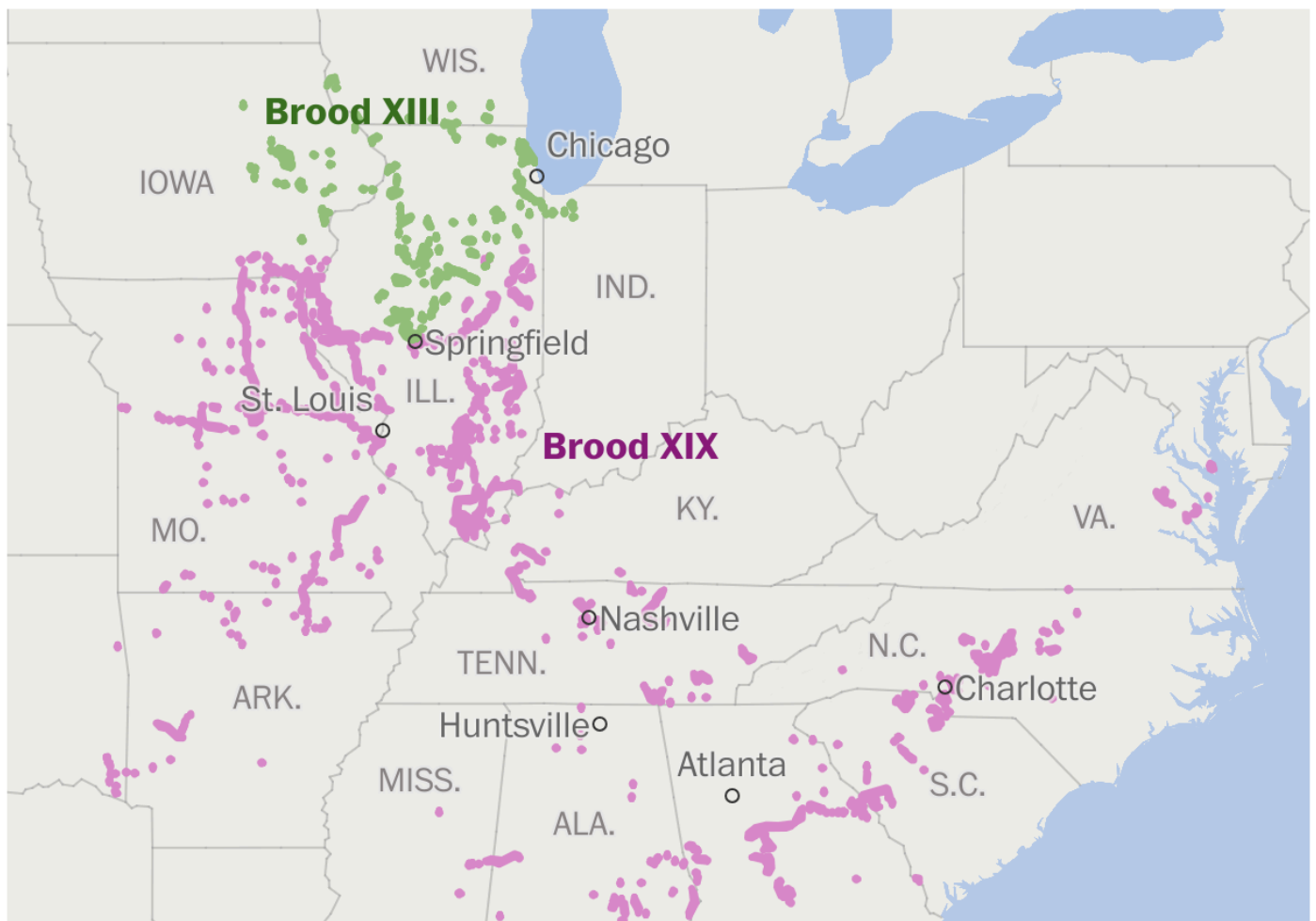
“It’s still pretty cool if you saw one, but it’s not — get ready — something out of the blue,” said Dan Young, director of the University of Wisconsin’s insect research collection.

It isn’t clear why some cicadas have blue eyes, he said. The explanation is possibly genetic or hormonal.

Some cicadas change their eye color when they go from underground and immature to terrestrial adults. One possible explanation is that the blue-eyed cicadas got stuck in that transition from white to reddish eyes.

If you live in the Midwest, you’re likely to see some red-eyed cicadas as two broods emerge together for the first time since 1803 — around the time of the Louisiana Purchase.

Brood XIII cicadas — centered in Illinois, Iowa and Wisconsin — come to the surface every 17 years, while their Brood XIX buddies come out every 13 years throughout the Midwest and Southeast. The stars have aligned this spring.



You’d know if you were in an area with cicadas considering they hit about 90 decibels, roughly equivalent to the volume of a lawn mower or motorcycle.

Periodical cicada nymphs feed off fluid from the roots of plants during their underground years. They then they tunnel up and wait until the soil hits about 64 degrees, after which they burst forth, molt and desperately look for a mate. The males start making a racket by vibrating a membrane on the sides of their bodies.

As can happen with humans, just-matured males make a lot of noise to attract females. After mating, the females make slits in tree branches and lay eggs, according to the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History. The eggs hatch six to seven weeks later, at which point the nymphs fall to the ground, burrow into the soil and keep the cycle going.

Young said his department is hosting Cicadapalooza, a public event on June 8 at cicada hot spot Lake Geneva featuring entomologists' talks and activity booths. In classic Wisconsin fashion, there will be beer — “Magicicada Buzz” Nut Brown Ale — brewed by Topsy Turvy Brewery especially for the occasion with dehydrated cicadas.

Maybe a blue-eyed cicada will show up to the party.

“We'll be on the lookout now,” Young said.