

# THE ILLINOIS PRAIRIE PATH NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 1973

## WHAT TO SEE -- CICADAS

Commuters from Chicago on the old C. A. and E., leaving the roar of the Loop, probably not conscious of the click-click of the train wheels, expected to step from the inter-urban into the quiet of the western suburbs. And, as a rule, this was true. But not in the summer of 1956, seventeen years ago. That was the year of the last explosion of the periodical cicada, better known as the 17 year locust.

This is an incredible insect. For every day it spends in freedom, in an orgy of singing, mating, and egg laying, it has lived almost a year underground as an immature, wingless nymph, sucking its food from roots. After 17 years, the nymph crawls out, sheds its outer skin, and emerges as an adult. We humans are suddenly aware of thousands of holes in the forest (20 to 40,000 have been counted under one tree), heaps of shards of cast-off skins, and a seemingly endless, rasping din that has been likened to the sound of a knife on a grindstone. Perhaps it is fortunate that only the male "sings" - the females are voiceless.

The name *locust* is unfortunate. One immediately thinks of the plague of locusts in the Bible stories. But the Bible locusts were like the grasshoppers dreaded by our own farmers, that can sweep across the fields eating everything green in sight. The 17 year locust does not eat leaves; what damage it does is to the branches. The female makes a series of pocket gashes in young twigs in which she lays her eggs. This does not kill the twig, but does weaken it so that a strong wind may prune the tree. Mature oaks usually suffer no permanent harm; young orchards can be severely damaged.

More accurate than *locust* is the name *periodical cicada*. The insect is a cicada and is like those we see and hear every fall. The fall cicada is larger and is a dark greenish color. The periodical cicada has red eyes and orange wings.

The third name for this insect is the appropriate scientific name, *Magicicada Septendecium*. It does seem to be magic, the longest lived of all insects. The species name, *Septendecium*, was given to it by Linneus because its 17 year cycle had been recognized by the American Indians.

The Indians and many other people were superstitious about this insect. Simple folks beat on pans in terror to drown out the noise. Some believed that the W patterned in the veins of the wings foretold a war.

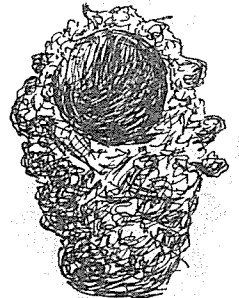


EGGS

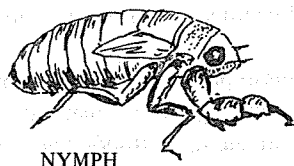
The cycle of this cicada is so predictable that broods have been designated. In northern Illinois we have brood XIII, seen in 1939, 1956, 1973, and due next in 1990. In other parts of the country the years are different even though they show the same 17 year cycle. In the south there is a 13 year locust.

Is there anything good about this noisy hoard? Perhaps. This is a year of plenty for their predators: snakes, insects, some birds, skunks, raccoons, and many other animals. Since they seem such choice tidbits, perhaps this explosion is an aid to survival. At least a few will live to mate and so assure the life of the next generation.

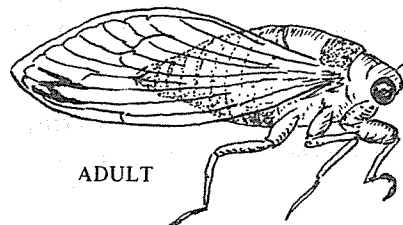
Great changes in the old right-of-way have taken place while the nymphs from the eggs laid in 1956 were living and growing underground. The passenger trains stopped running the next year, 1957, and the site of the old interurban is now the Prairie Path. Cicadas may not see the changes, but we who walk or ride on the Path do.



EMERGENCE HOLE



NYMPH



ADULT

There have been some changes in the Board of Directors: *Mrs. May Watts* asked that she be relieved of strenuous Path activities; in May the Board unanimously named her Chairman Emeritus. We will miss her active participation but will continue to turn to her for counsel and advice. *Mrs. August Sindt*, our valued speaker since the founding of the Path, has also resigned. We appreciate her long, dedicated service.

We warmly welcome *Mrs. Torkel Korling* and *Conrad Chester*, appointed to fill the two vacancies.

The Board also wishes to announce that the V.I.P. council of No. Illinois named *Helen Turner* as a Woman of the Year in recognition of her work for the Prairie Path.

#### ACTIVITY ON THE PATH

Hundreds of people are working to improve the Path; we wish we could name them all! In response to our cry for help in the last Newsletter:

1. a group from the *Chicago Friends of the Earth*, *Mary Slingerland*, chairman, volunteered to repaint our faded signs.
2. a committee led by *John Lengle* is preparing to construct a trail for the blind, working with *Mrs. Watts'* original suggestions.

There is continued progress in towns. The *Lombard Beautification Commission* is designing plantings at Main St. and at Westmore to screen the unsightly, create the beautiful.

And in rural areas, too. We're especially pleased the surface in some stretches is adequate for wheel chairs. *Mr. Muelhauser* of *Downers Grove South H.S.* led a group of physically handicapped two miles from Prince Crossing to Geneva Rd.

The *Charlotte Marous* (self-guiding) Nature Trail developed by *Naperville Senior Girl Scout Troop 488* is almost complete after months of work. It goes from Weisbrook Rd. to Orchard Rd. Chairman *Theresa Jones* is in charge of the project.

#### COOK COUNTY

The long awaited appraisal has been submitted and the mayors of the four communities are working to acquire the land.

#### PUBLICITY

Our picture exhibit was on display in the Villa Park library through May, is currently in the Berkeley library, and will be in the Wheaton library in July. Our other exhibit was displayed in the Geneva library last month and is now showing in the St. Charles library.

#### SECOND NATIONAL TRAILS SYMPOSIUM

in Colorado had *William Nemeč* as moderator for the panel on Development and Maintenance and *Helen Turner* as a panelist on Trails as a Way of Life, both representing our Path.

#### PATH PROBLEMS

We all seem to be faced with more and more problems; the Path is no exception. It's hard to understand why anyone gets pleasure destroying our signs. The sign for the Girl Scout Nature Trail was carried off within two days. We try, but find it almost impossible to keep motorcycles from the Path despite the County ordinance against them. Grass clippings and brush are piled along the Path. Some people think the Path is only ten feet wide and it is all right to treat the rest as an unsightly alley. This is wrong. Our lease is for the full width of the old right-of-way, except in some downtown areas where it is guaranteed a minimum ten feet.

Won't you help us maintain the Path as  
the unique recreational facility it now is?

*Helen Turner, Editor*