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Attack of the Cicada Killers

Cicada killers are active during July and August, coinciding with the appearance of cicadas which they sting and paralyze. Cicadas are large insects that sing in trees during late summer. The female cicada killer stings the cicada, then turns the cicada on its back, and drags the cicada into a burrow. The female cicada killers usually dig burrows in areas that are sandy, bare, and exposed to full sunlight. They prefer to nest in areas of little vegetation, compared to thick areas of turf. Each female captures at least one cicada and a single egg is laid in the cicada before being sealed off. Even though an area may contain many burrows, female cicada killers are solitary. This means that each female constructs a burrow and captures her own cicadas to serve as food for her developing young.

The cicada killer develops through complete metamorphosis: egg, larva, pupae and adult stage. In two to three days, the egg hatches. Depending on the number of cicadas in its burrow, the cicada killer larva can feed for 4 to 10 days. Pupation occurs in the spring and the adult emerges in mid-June to early July. Adults will continue to emerge throughout the summer until mid-August. There is only one generation a year.

Adult cicada killers feed on flower nectar and sap. The female wasps are usually non-aggressive and rarely sting unless touched or disturbed. Male cicada killers are usually aggressive and tend to defend nesting sites. However males lack a stinger, so they are harmless.

Non-Chemical Control Options:

Apply fertilizers and water to promote growth of turf. This will usually reduce the cicada killer populations found within an area. Also place mulch in flowerbeds and around shrubs to cover sandy soil to help reduce cicada populations.

Chemical Control Options:

Control is usually not recommended, since this is a beneficial insect. If control is necessary, locate the nests during the daylight hours. Then at night or before dawn, sprinkle about 1 tablespoon of carbaryl dust into the burrow and then close the entrance of the burrow with your foot. Other suggestions for spray treatments that are labeled for

wasp control include acephate, allethrin, cyfluthrin, cypermethrin, permethrin, and resmethrin as active ingredients. Repeat treatments may be needed for two to three weeks as new wasps move into the area.



Cicada killer, *Sphecius speciosus* (Hymenoptera: Sphecidae). Photo by Bart Drees.

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