# 2023 Macon Cicada Emergence: A Rare Natural Phenomenon Fueled by Parasitic Fungi



This spring, billions of periodical cicadas are set to emerge in Macon, Georgia, and surrounding regions after spending 13 to 17 years underground. These cicadas, part of 2023's simultaneous emergence of two different broods—one with a 17-year cycle and another with a 13-year cycle—will be observed together aboveground for the first time since 1803.

Research highlights an unusual aspect of some of these cicadas’ lives involving Massospora cicadina, a parasitic fungus. The fungus infects the cicadas by replacing their abdomen and genitals with fungal spores, thereby manipulating the cicadas into exhibiting hypersexual behavior. This infection turns the cicadas into vectors that disperse spores to infect future generations. Researchers, including Dr. John Cooley from the University of Connecticut and Dr. Matt Kasson from West Virginia University, describe the infected cicadas as exhibiting behaviors similar to those of a walking dispenser of fungal spores, or "saltshakers of death."

The intriguing, albeit grim, phenomenon includes a discovery by Kasson that the fungus-induced modifications in cicada behavior may be stimulated by an amphetamine produced by the fungus. However, it is unclear if the stimulant has the same effect on cicadas as it would in humans due to their different nervous systems.

Despite the gruesomeness of the infection, which affects up to 10% of the cicadas, Kasson encourages the public to view this natural occurrence as a biological spectacle, noting the unique opportunity to witness such a rare and fascinating natural event.