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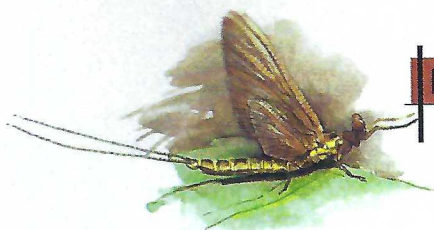
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## MATCH THE HATCH

Article & Photography by Greg A. Hoover

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THIS SPRING AND EARLY SUMMER, trout and bass that inhabit lakes and rivers within forested or wooded environments will be treated to a buffet of adult periodical cicadas. The fish will be lured from their cover by these unusual insects, and they will feed with reckless abandon. And believe it or not, even carp will feed at the surface on periodical cicada adults.

Periodical cicadas offer a time of feasting for a surprising array of creatures. Birds and fish feed ravenously on the adult stage of these insects. Grackles and crows voraciously dine on periodical cicadas. Trout will literally gorge themselves on the adult cicadas that fall onto the surface of the water from streamside trees and shrubs. Fly fishermen who cast floating effigies of adult cicadas will benefit from the fishes' fondness for these insects, especially on windy days.

### Memorable Fishing

Early one evening in June of 1991, my wife made the observation that my behavior was not what she was accustomed to, and she suggested that I may

# The Periodical Cicada

Discover how to match these amazing insects and catch some of the biggest fish of the season.

need to go fly fishing. Needless to say, she didn't have to make this suggestion twice. I gathered my gear and was off to Pennsylvania's Spring Creek. Brood XIV of the periodical cicada had emerged, and the adults were providing excellent dry-fly activity on many Central Pennsylvania trout streams. It was a little late in the day for a great deal of adult cicada activity, but I decided to fish with my periodical cicada pattern.

As I worked the imitation beneath some overhanging vegetation, every now and then I'd pick up a decent trout. As I approached some large, sweeping willows located on the far bank, I heard what sounded like a walnut falling into the water. I noticed there were no wal-

nut trees in the area, and it was too early in the growing season for that to be possible. I could only conclude that I heard a good trout surfacing beneath one of the willows. I stood motionless, and finally saw the fish take another adult cicada. The low, overhanging branches made it tough to make a presentation with a drag-free drift, so I punched a cast beneath one of the branches and the fly landed near the far bank. The imitation drifted a few feet and was suddenly interrupted by a large gulping sound. I raised the rod tip and was into one of the best trout I've ever

The periodical cicada is an important but often overlooked spring and early summer insect. Hoov's Cicada is an excellent imitation.





Maybe beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but we think the periodical cicada is one ugly mother. Fortunately, large trout and bass don't care about appearances, and they eagerly feed on these large insects.



hooked on a dry fly. After the fish made several runs up and down the pool, I was able to turn its head and get half the trout into my net. I couldn't believe my eyes: this brown trout was well over two feet long. I usually carry a camera with me, but on that trip I had none to document this huge fish. I thought about returning home to retrieve my camera, but my better judgment suggested that a trout of that size was too valuable and should be quickly released. But, its size and color are forever etched on my memory.

Also in 1991, while working on the book, *Great Rivers—Great Hatches*, I had the wonderful opportunity to fish the North Fork of the White River in southern Missouri with Shawn Taylor of Tecumseh, Missouri. As we floated the North Fork in Shawn's boat, we noticed heavy riseforms beneath some of the huge sycamores growing along the edge of this beautiful river. At one point I noticed some dog-day cicadas struggling on the surface, but didn't think too much about them until Shawn and I wondered if those aggressive trout were taking cicada adults. I told him I had some periodical cicada imitations in my fly box, and that I would give one of them a try. I made a few casts beneath one of those big sycamores, and the drifting fly was intercepted by a rising trout. After a short battle, we released a beautiful 16-inch brown trout.

"Now I've seen it all," Shawn said, "bass buggin' for trout."

## The Amazing Periodical Cicada

Periodical cicadas are spectacular insects, often making sudden and dramatic appearances. In 1962, researchers R. D. Alexander and T. E. Moore gave perhaps the best general description of these insects when they wrote in a paper titled, "The Evolutionary Relationships

of 17-Year and 13-Year Cicadas, and Three New Species":

*The periodical cicadas make up a truly amazing group of animals; since their discovery 300 years ago, the origin and significance of their extended life cycles have been a continual source of puzzlement to biologists. Their incredible ability to emerge by the millions as noisy, flying, gregarious, photopositive adults within a matter of hours after having spent 13 or 17 years underground as silent, burrowing, solitary, sedentary juveniles is without parallel in the animal kingdom.*

The periodical cicada, *Magicicada septendecim*, is native to North America. They are widely distributed over the eastern half of the United States and occur nowhere else in the world. It is



the longest-lived insect on the continent, and when they make their springtime emergence, no other insect generates as much interest and curiosity.

Periodical cicadas are commonly called "17-year locusts." The early American colonists had never seen these insects, but they were familiar with the biblical stories of locust plagues in Egypt and Palestine; they didn't know, however, what kind of insects the Bible was describing. When the cicadas appeared by the millions, some of the

colonists thought they were experiencing a locust plague, and some Native Americans believed their periodic appearance had an evil significance. The confusion between cicadas and locusts exists today; cicadas are commonly called locusts, but locusts are actually certain species of grasshoppers.

There are six species of periodical cicadas. Three species have 17-year life cycles, and three have 13-year life cycles. The three species in each life cycle group are distinctive in size, color, and song. The 17-year cicadas generally live in the north, and 13-year cicadas live in the south, but there is considerable overlap in their distributions. In fact, both life cycle types may occur in the same forest.

For convenience, each brood is designated by a Roman numeral. The numerals I through XVII are assigned to the 17-year broods, and XVIII through XXX to the 13-year broods. The numbering of the 17-year broods began in 1893 and was designated Brood I. Brood XVII appeared in 1909, and Brood I reappeared in 1910. There are at least 13 broods of 17-year cicadas and five of 13-year cicadas.

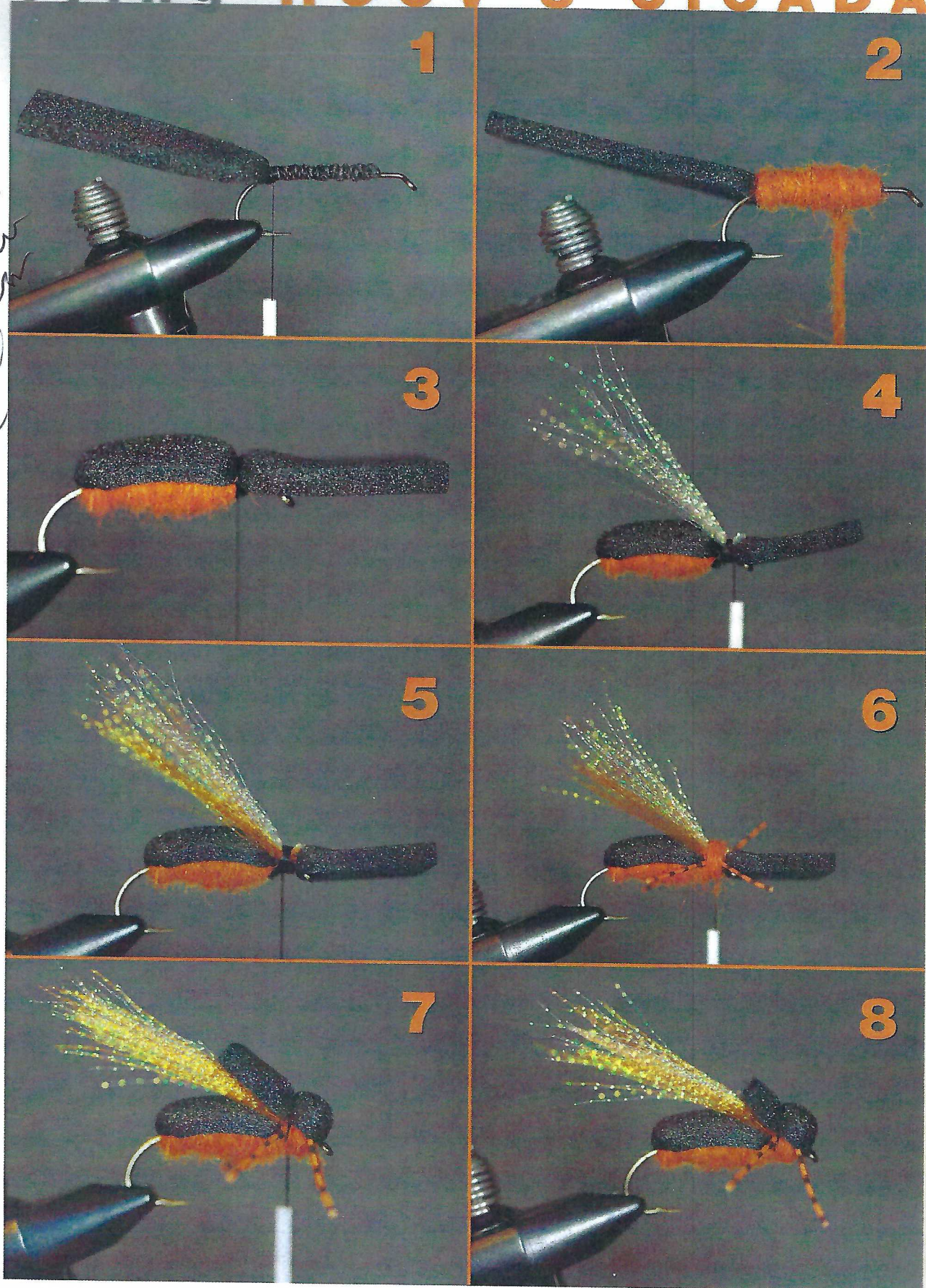
Periodical cicadas cluster on bankside branches and foliage. They are poor fliers, and many crash to the water and trigger the fish to feed.

This year's brood (2008) of periodical cicadas last emerged in 1991, and is referred to as Brood XIV. Based upon historic distribution records, members of this brood will emerge in northern Georgia, southern Indiana, most of Kentucky, most of Maryland, eastern Massachusetts (Cape Cod), most of New Jersey, eastern New York (Long Island), western North Carolina,



# Tying HOOV'S CICADA

*really  
so it  
don't  
slide*







**Hook:** Mustad 3906B, size 4; Daiichi 1560, size 6; or Tiemco 2302, size 6.

**Thread:** Black Flat Waxed Nylon, size A, or UTC Gel Spun.

**Body:** Black 1/4-inch-thick Fly Foam or another brand of closed-cell foam, and orange Awesome 'Possum or another type of shaggy dubbing.

**Wing:** Pearl and orange Krystal Flash.

**Legs:** Medium speckled orange Centipede Legs.

**1** Start the thread on the hook. Wrap a layer of thread on the entire hook shank; spin the bobbin counterclockwise every 10 to 12 wraps to keep the thread going on flat. Coat the thread base with cement. Next, tie on a 1/4-inch-wide piece of closed-cell foam; this strip should be about 2 inches long. Place the foam about 1/4 inch from the hook eye, and increase the thread tension as you work.

**2** Add dubbing to the thread; you want to construct a fairly thick body, so you might prefer using a dubbing loop. Wrap the dubbing up the hook, but don't crowd the hook eye.

**3** Slightly stretch the foam and pull it over the dubbed body. Tie off the foam; be sure increase the thread tension as you work.

**4** Wrap the thread to the base of the hook eye. Tie on 25 to 30 strands of pearl Krystal Flash so that the tips extend above the hook bend.

**5** Tie 12 to 15 strands of orange Krystal Flash on each side of the pearl Krystal Flash.

**6** Tie one orange speckled rubber leg on each side of the fly. Add more dubbing to the thread and wrap the thorax of the fly.

**7** Fold the foam back over the thorax. Tie off the foam. Note that the author wraps the thread between the legs.

**8** Wrap the thread forward under the thorax to the hook eye. Tie off the thread and clip. Apply head cement to the thread wraps on top of the thorax and behind the hook eye. Clip the excess foam so that a small portion covers the base of the Krystal Flash wing.

southern Ohio, most of central and eastern Pennsylvania, northern and eastern Tennessee, southwestern West Virginia, and northern, north central, and southwestern Virginia. That's a lot of territory, so if you live in the East, there's a good chance you and your local fish will encounter these insects.

Periodical cicada adults are about 1 1/2 inches long and have reddish orange eyes and wing veins. They are smaller than their cousin, the annual or dog-day cicada. The dog-day cicadas are mostly large, blackish insects with lime-green wing veins; these insects appear every year during the hot summer months.

The 17-year cicada nymphs live the soil from 2 to 24 inches deep. In April, the mature nymphs burrow to about an inch beneath the surface where they wait for the proper time to emerge. If the ground is too damp, the nymphs build protective earthen turrets. Their bodies undergo major changes in muscle structure at this time. When the signal for emergence occurs, the nymphs exit through about 1/2-inch diameter holes in the ground. The nymphs crawl a foot or more up tree trunks, weeds, or other upright objects, where they shed their skins and turn into adults. This shedding takes an hour or less. The newly emerged adults are soft and white, but in time their exoskeletons harden and become darker. During some years, practically an entire brood will emerge on the same night, or on two or three different nights.

Adult cicadas are rather clumsy fliers and often collide into objects, including the surfaces of rivers, streams, and lakes. Soon after emerging, the males begin their constant singing while the females remain silent. The sound is sometimes haunting. Adult periodical cicadas seldom or never feed; if they feed at all, they suck plant fluid from young twigs. About 10 days after emergence, cicadas mate and the females begin depositing eggs in twigs and branches of nearly 80 different preferred species of trees and woody shrubs; they usually do not deposit eggs in coniferous trees. One female will usually deposit 400 to 600 eggs.

The female will use the blades of a sawlike egg-laying device at the end of

her abdomen to puncture the bark of the twig and make a pocket in the wood. She may deposit from 24 to 28 eggs in two rows in one of these pockets. The insect then moves forward, cuts another pocket, and lays more eggs. The pockets are placed close together in a straight row, sometimes forming a continuous two- to three-inch-long slit.

Hatching occurs six to seven weeks after egg laying. The white, antlike nymphs work their way out of the slits and drop to the ground, where they enter the soil. To feed, the nymphs insert their piercing-sucking mouthparts into plant roots to draw fluid. The effect of this root feeding is considered inconsequential to most trees.

Adult cicadas live for approximately three to four weeks above ground, and most are usually gone by the beginning of July. Since adult periodical cicadas are more active from mid-morning through mid-afternoon, I suggest targeting these times to be on the water. The adults are clumsy fliers and will thrash around on the surface of rivers and lakes. Fishing an adult cicada imitation with a twitching or skating motion is an effective tactic. Driving the fly on the water beneath overhanging cover is another deadly method that often generates vicious rises.

Try fishing with my adult cicada imitation. Carry this pattern in your fly box from late May through July, and be sure to use at least a 3X tippet so that you can quickly land the huge fish that will attack this fly. And don't just fish for trout during this time of the year; be sure to sample some of the warmwater species that feed on these truly unique members of the insect world. 🐞

*Greg Hoover is widely acknowledged as one of North America's foremost fly-fishing entomologists. Greg teaches entomology at Pennsylvania State University's main campus (his master's thesis involved researching Penns Creek's famous green drake hatch), and he is the faculty adviser for the Penn State Fly Fishing Club. Greg coauthored the book, Great Rivers—Great Hatches, with fly-fishing legend Charlie Meck. Needless to say, we were very excited to receive Greg's article, and we've made him promise to send more.*