

Problem: Cicada Killer (*Sphecius speciosus* (Drury))



Identification: Large (1-1/3 to 1-5/8 inches long) wasp. Black body is marked with yellow across the thorax and abdomen. The wings are reddish orange.

Description: The cicada killer is a solitary wasp rather than a social wasp like yellowjackets. The female nests in burrows in the ground. These burrows are about the size of a quarter in diameter and can go 6 inches straight down and another 6 inches horizontally. Adults normally live 60 to 75 days from mid-July to mid-September. Adults feed on flower nectar and sap exudates. The adult female seeks cicadas on the trunks and lower limbs of trees. She then stings her prey, flips it over, straddles it and carries it to her burrow. If she has a tree to climb, she will fly with it; if not, she will drag it. She will lay one egg per cicada if the egg is left unfertilized. Unfertilized eggs develop into males only. Fertilized eggs develop into females and are given at least two cicadas. Cicadas are then stuffed into the female's burrow. Each burrow normally has three to four cells with one to two cicadas in each. However, it is possible for one burrow to have 10 to 20 cells. Eggs hatch in two to three days, and larvae begin feeding on paralyzed cicadas. Feeding continues for 4 to 10 days until only the outer shell of the cicada remains. The larva overwinters inside a silken case it has spun. Pupation occurs in the spring. There is one generation per year.

Though these wasps are huge, they usually ignore people. Males may act aggressive if they feel threatened but are unable to sting. Females are able to sting but are so non-aggressive that they rarely do. Even if they do sting, the pain is much less than that of smaller wasps such as the yellowjacket or paper wasp. The cicada killer sting is on par with that of a sweat bee.

Recommendations: Cicada killers are not dangerous but can be a nuisance. If control is felt to be necessary, treat the burrows after dark to insure the female wasps are in their nests.

The males normally roost on plants near the burrow sites. They can be captured with an insect net or knocked out of the air with a tennis racket during the day. Carbaryl (Sevin Dust) can be used for control.

References:

1. [Cicada Killer Wasps](#), University of Kentucky, Entomology Factsheet

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