SPECIES HANDBOOK

New Forest Cicada (*Cicadetta montana*)

Ecology, conservation, survey and management

Conservation Status

EXTINCT

- **Believed to be extinct in the UK**
- **Once found in the New Forest, but has not been recorded for over 30 years**
- **We are working on a captive breeding project, in the hope that we can one day reintroduce cicadas back into the New Forest**

Cicadas are not insects that are usually associated with the UK, instead, their distinctive calls tend to conjure up images of hot and exotic locations. However, there is one species of cicada that is native to England, the New Forest Cicada. In the middle of the 20th century, over a hundred of these insects were heard calling in one location in the New Forest, which must have been an incredible sound. Sadly, it has now been over 30 years since the cicada was last recorded in England. This means that there is a high chance that the species is now extinct. But we are not giving up hope and are continuing the search!

Description

The New Forest Cicada can be up to 3cm long and has clear visible gold rings and large transparent wings. In their last spring before emergence, the nymphs build a turret like structure from clay and leaf matter on the surface of the soil. These turrets are a reliable means of identifying breeding sites for the species, and can be found at any time between mid-March and late summer, even after the adults have long emerged.

Lifecycle

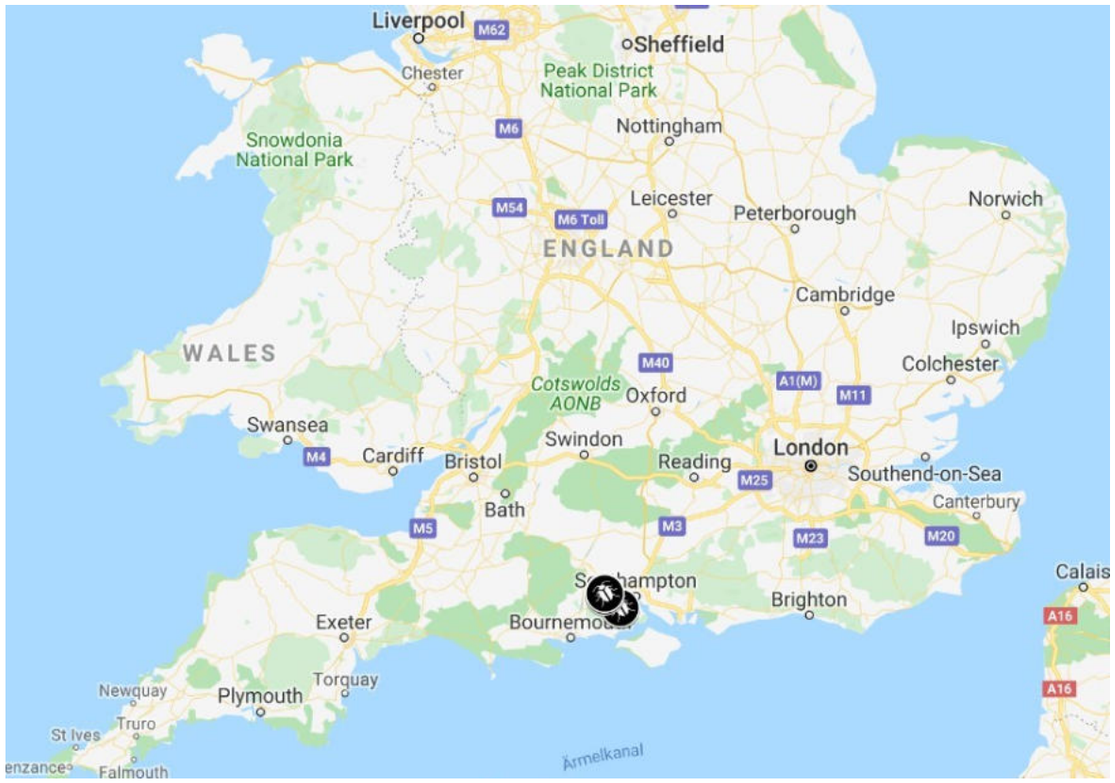
Adults emerge from late May to early July, breed during this time and feed on sap by making small scars in the bark of woody vegetation. Females will produce 200-300 eggs after mating and will oviposit in the stems of plants such as bracken or small trees and bushes. The eggs hatch in the autumn, the nymphs fall to the ground and make their way underground. They then develop in burrows in the soil for between 6-10 years, feeding on plant roots. In their last spring before emergence, the nymphs build a turret like structure from clay and leaf matter on the surface of the soil, which is believed to be important for male mating calls.

Habitat

In England, it has only ever been found in the New Forest. It inhabits woodland rides and glades that are in plenty of sunshine. It has also been found in sunny areas between open grass/heathland and woodland with a scrub edge.

Distribution

Globally found across the northern hemisphere and in mountainous regions of Europe. In Britain, where it is native, it has only ever been found in the New Forest. However, it has not been recorded in the New Forest for over a decade.



Status

This species is possibly now extinct in the UK.

IUCN RED LIST©

Reasons for decline

Year round over grazing reduces the availability of the plant species that eggs are laid on and nymphs feed off. Trampling of nymph turrets by livestock exposes them to predation from ground beetles. Finally, encroachment by bracken reduces the amount of open, warm ground for turret construction in early spring, and creates too much shade for oviposition sites.

Protection under the law

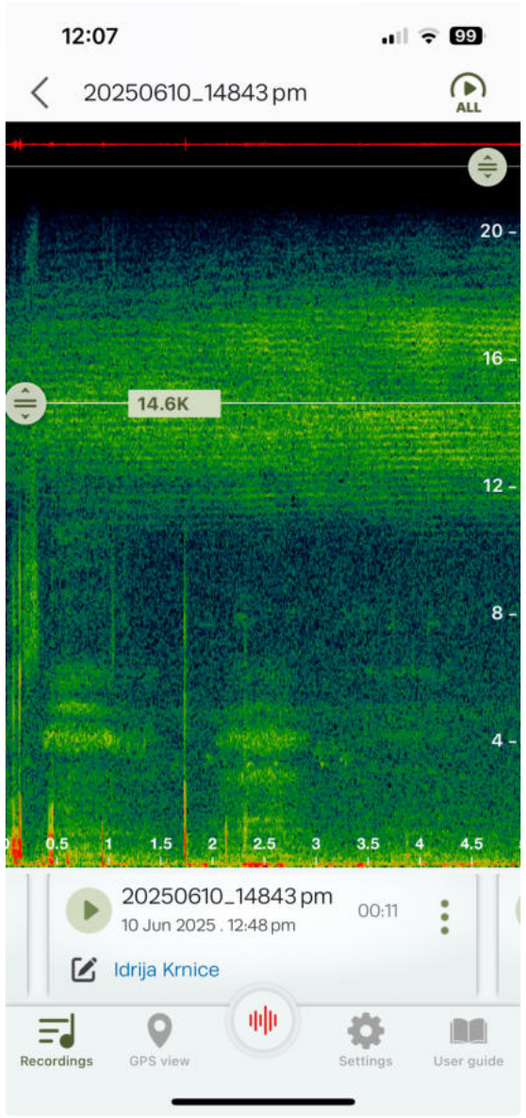
Protected under Schedule 5 of Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which makes it an offence to intentionally (or recklessly) kill, injure or capture this species. It also makes it an offence to have possession of anything derived from the species.

Bracken encroachment in the New Forest

SURVEY

Habitat

Target woodland rides, glades and areas between open grass/heathland and woodland with a scrub edge.



SURVEY

What to look for

Adults: Adults can primarily be identified from their call. It sounds a bit like air escaping from a hose and is very high pitched, so not everyone can hear it. There are various apps which can be used to listen for high frequency sounds, such as ‘Song Meter Touch’. The call will appear as a thick band around 13khz, coming to an abrupt stop after 15 sections or so.

Nymph pre-emergence turrets: Nymph pre-emergence turrets are funnels of soil formed by the final instar nymph in the spring before emergence. The structure of the turret can vary considerably. It can be a fairly flat dome shape, a taller column (up to about 4cm) or a long tube shape along the ground.

Larval exuvial: After hatching the larvae spilt out of their cases into their adult winged form, and these empty cases can be found, usually attached to vegetation or tree trunks.

Ovipositor scars: Scars in twigs where eggs are laid

SURVEY

When to survey

The best time of year to survey for adults is between May and July. Pre-emergence turrets can be found from March to September. Focus on days with hot, still, sunny conditions with the temperature above 18°C.

What to record

- Number of cicadas seen/heard
- Number of turrets seen
- Location (grid reference or GPS if possible)
- Take photos/videos or sound recordings if possible of the cicada, any turrets and the habitat

Confusable Species

There are no other cicada species native to the UK, and so there are no species with which it should be confusable in appearance. Its call can be confused with grasshoppers and crickets, and empty cases can resemble those of large Dragonfly species.

MANAGEMENT

Grazing

Grazing needs to be managed carefully and minimised or prevented over the spring and summer months. This is to prevent livestock from grazing off the ground flora, which provide an important food source for nymphs. This also prevents livestock from trampling nymph turrets, which exposes them to predation from ground beetles.

Overall habitat management needs to maintain a mosaic of that types, from grassland/heathland through scrub, grading into woodland edges.

OUR WORK

- **We are now working with Paultons Park on a reintroduction project for the species**
- **We have been working with partners in Slovenia to gain a better understanding of the ecology and conservation of the insects in their stronghold**
- **We hope to reintroduce adult cicadas back into suitable sites in the New Forest in future years**

In 2024, we started work on a captive breeding project for the New Forest Cicada. We are partnering with Paultons Park in Hampshire. The team have built a number of enclosures for cicadas in their zoo.

In 2025, we captured and imported 11 female cicadas from France and brought them over to the UK. We released them into their enclosures, and excitingly, some of the females laid hundreds of eggs.

We are now patiently waiting to see if any nymphs hatch out. They will drop down into the soil where they will spend anywhere between 4 and 10 years developing into adults.

Once they emerge, we hope to be able to reintroduce them into suitable sites in the New Forest.

Education work in Slovenia

The Species Recovery Trust is a charity set up to tackle the loss of some of the rarest species in the UK.

There are over nine hundred native species in the UK that are classed as under threat, with several hundreds more currently widespread but known to be in significant decline. The countryside is now bereft of many species that were a familiar sight a mere generation ago.

A small number of these species are on the absolute brink of existence, poised to become extinct in our lifetimes; our goal is to stop them vanishing.

Our aim is to remove 50 species from the edge of extinction in the UK by the year 2050. In addition we are reconnecting people with wildlife and the natural world through training programmes and awareness raising.









the species recovery trust

www.speciesrecoverytrust.org.uk

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