

Multi-year study launched to curb cicadas' emergence in Tampines Changkat

Efforts to break ground in managing the insects' numbers in urban tropical settings

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A years-long study to understand and control the mysterious emergence of hundreds of cicadas near HDB blocks in Tampines Changkat is under way.

This is part of an initiative launched by the constituency's office on March 1, which will also spend five months trialling novel ways to control the seasonal swarms of cicadas that fly into the homes near the PIE.

This will break ground for managing cicada populations in urban tropical environments, which are understudied.

The single-member constituency's MP, Mr Desmond Choo, told

The Straits Times: "After speaking to a lot of experts, and now that we are advised (on the measures), we want to do something that is more foundational and structural so that we know what works for us year on year.

"Our larger view is that we don't only want to care for Tampines Changkat residents, but we also want to build up a national understanding of the issue so that in the event that it spreads beyond Tampines, the rest of the country will be ready."

Addressing some 80 residents at a town hall on cicadas on March 1, Mr Choo said his team has tried many methods since late 2018, when they started receiving complaints about the annual emergence of cicadas.

STIFF COMPETITION

Because there are so many of them competing with each other, they tend to find quieter spaces, inevitably winding up in residents' homes as they use lights to navigate.



ENTOMOLOGIST FOO MAOSHENG, on the cicadas. Male cicadas are one of the loudest insects in the world when they mature into adults.

The problem typically occurs around March to June, although the scale has varied over the years.

The latest emergence was recorded in 2025, during which some 300

cicadas were caught on May 14.

But the use of fogging and insecticide that year did little to affect the cicadas, as they eventually returned and did not feed on the poison laid out for them, said Mr Choo, who is leading the new initiative.

While some trees were cut down in the past, removing all greenery is not a long-term solution as trees are important for dampening noise and cooling the area, he added.

Responding to calls to exterminate the cicadas, Mr Choo said the team has decided not to do so because the insects are part of the ecosystem.

Cicada nymphs burrow into the ground, aerating the soil and helping trees grow better. These insects, which do not sting or bite, also act as a food source for birds.

However, male cicadas are one of the loudest insects in the world when they mature into adults.

Said entomologist Foo Maosheng, insect curator of NUS' Lee Kong

Chian Natural History Museum: "If you imagine the trees as a dating scene, the males are trying to out-compete with each other in order to attract mates.

"Because there are so many of them competing with each other, they tend to find quieter spaces, inevitably winding up in residents' homes as they use lights to navigate."

To control the cicadas' numbers in an environmentally sensitive manner, the five-month trial will disrupt their life cycle at hot spots.

This was planned with the support of the National Parks Board and Mr Foo.

The plan is to encircle 120 trees with mats to prevent the cicadas – which spend their time as nymphs underground – from entering or emerging from the soil, as well as to cover the tree trunks with aluminium foil to prevent nymphs from climbing onto them.

This will be completed by mid-March, when the current season is slated to start, said Mr Choo.

Some adult cicadas will also be caught to monitor the effectiveness of the measures.

The bugs collected by these mats will also help researchers establish the resident population of cicadas, recently identified as the orange-winged cicadas (*Platypleura fulviger*) by Mr Foo, with the help of a South Korean cicada specialist.

While the other 10 species of cicadas found in Singapore are known to live for up to six years, spending most of their life underground, it is unclear how long these orange-winged cicadas can live for or how

many eggs they lay.

This is one of the many mysteries that Mr Foo will investigate in the study, which will shed more light on the species' biology.

Another key part of the study will look at how the cicadas arrived in Tampines Changkat, seemingly out of the blue, by analysing how usage of the land has evolved over the years.

While the species is native to South-east Asia, the only other country it has been confirmed to inhabit is the Philippines.

One theory for the swarms' sudden emergence is an imbalance in the ecosystem, said Mr Foo, noting that long-time residents reported issues in recent years.

Also driving the initiative is a new Nature Kakis chapter for Tampines Changkat – comprising grassroots leaders and residents – to help in the research, monitoring and implementation of measures to control the cicada population.

Among the pioneering Nature Kakis team members is Ms Khali-sah Shari, 23, who has had her sleep disturbed by cicadas repeatedly pelting themselves against her windows.

The National University of Singapore student said: "It can be quite a disturbance – the high-frequency noises they make, and how they fly around the lights.

"But I also don't want the solutions (to curb them) to be invasive for the environment, so I wanted to be part of the effort to make the estate a better place."

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