



## A “superb” southwestern Missouri cicada

*Ted C. MacRae*

Back in the summer of 2015, I made an early August trip to the White River Hills region of extreme southwestern Missouri. I was actually looking for one of Missouri’s more uncommon cerambycid beetles – *Prionus pocularis*, associated with shortleaf pine in the mixed hardwood/pine forests across the southern part of the state. I did not encounter the beetle in either my prionic acid-baited pitfall traps or at the ultraviolet lights I had set up the evening before, but while I was in the area I thought I would visit one of my favorite places in the region – [Drury-Mincy Conservation Area](#) in Taney Co. Sitting right on the border with Arkansas, the rolling hills of this area feature high-quality dolomite glades and post oak savannas. I’ve had some excellent collecting here in the past and hoped I would find something of interest this time as well. I didn’t arrive until after midnight, and since there are no hotels in the area I just slept in the car.

The next morning temperatures began to rise quickly, and with it so did the cacophony of cicadas getting into high gear with their droning buzz calls. As I passed underneath one particular tree I noticed the song was coming from a branch very near my head. I like cicadas, but had it been the song of a “normal” cicada like *Neotibicen lyricen* ([lyric cicada](#)) or *N. pruinosus* ([scissor grinder cicada](#)) I would have paid it no mind. It was, instead, [unfamiliar and distinctive](#), and when I searched the branches above me I recognized the beautiful insect responsible for the call as *Neotibicen superbus* (superb cicada), a southwest Missouri specialty—sumptuous lime-green above and bright white pruinose beneath. I had not seen this spectacular species since the mid-1980s (most of my visits to the area have been in the spring or the fall rather than high summer), and I managed to catch it and take a [quick iPhone photograph](#) for documentation. A species this beautiful, however, deserves ‘real’ photos, so I spent the next couple of hours attempting to photograph an individual *in situ* with the big camera. Of course, this is much,



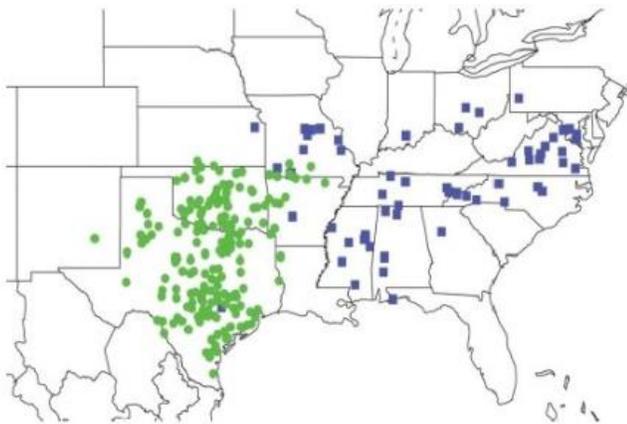
The “superb cicada (*Neotibicen superbus*).

much easier said than done, especially with this species—their bulging eyes give them exceptional vision, and they are very skittish and quick to take flight. Most of the individuals that I located were too high up in the canopy to allow a shot, and each individual that was low enough for me to approach ended up fluttering off with a screech before I could even compose a shot, much less press the shutter. Persistence paid, however, and I eventually managed to approach and photograph an unusually calm female resting – quite conveniently – at chest height on the trunk of a persimmon tree.

According to Sanborn & Phillips (2013, Figure 16 – reproduced above), *Neotibicen superbus*, is found in trees within grassland environments primarily in eastern Texas and Oklahoma, although records of it exist from each of the surrounding states – especially southern Missouri and northern Arkansas. Later the same day I would see the species abundantly again in another of the region’s dolomite glades – this one in [Roaring River State Park](#) further west in Barry Co., suggesting that



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Distribution of *Neotibicen superbus* (green circles) in the southcentral United States. From Sanborn & Phillips (2013).

dolomite glades are the preferred habitat in this part of its range. Interestingly, I think the Missouri records at least must be relatively recent, as Froeschner (1952) did not include the species in his synopsis of Missouri cicadas. This was all the information I had back in the 1980s when I first encountered the species in southwestern Missouri, its apparent unrecorded status in the state making it an even more exciting find at the time.

## REFERENCES:

Froeschner, R. C. 1952. A synopsis of the Cicadidae of Missouri. *Journal of the New York Entomological Society* 60:1–14 [[pdf](#)].

Sanborn, A. F. & P. K. Phillips. 2013. Biogeography of the cicadas (Hemiptera: Cicadidae) of North America, north of Mexico. *Diversity* 5(2):166–239 [[abstract](#), [pdf](#)].



## Natural History Group Activities

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### BOTANY GROUP

Chair—George Van Brunt

**Monday Botany Walks**, Leader—Fr. James Sullivan; now in his **51<sup>st</sup> year!** The WGNSS Botany Group visits many of the same locations as the Ornithology Group. Sign up for WGNSS Botany Group e-mails from Wayne Clark by contacting him at [wclark3@cs.com](mailto:wclark3@cs.com) or (314) 962-5443 and receive an e-mail no later than Sunday about the following Monday's trip.

### ENTOMOLOGY GROUP

Chair—Christopher Brown

The Entomology Group meets September through April on the 3rd Monday of each month at 7:00 pm. Important: the January meeting will be in the Carriage House at Shaw Nature Reserve in Gray Summit. The following link has a map including the Carriage House: <http://www.mobot.org/snr/PDFs/SNRVisitorGuide.pdf>. Contact Chris at [christopher.brown1@bayer.com](mailto:christopher.brown1@bayer.com) for more information.

- **January 21.** Ted MacRae and Chris Brown will co-present, “Highlights from nearly 20 years of chasing tiger beetles in Missouri”. Ted and Chris, who have been surveying and photographing the tiger beetles of Missouri since 2000, will cover some of the most memorable experiences of the project. Consider coming early for a hike at Shaw Nature Reserve before taking a break at the Carriage House for the presentation.