



Olly Hills, 11, with the butterfly net he uses to fossick for cicadas. Above left and right: Newly hatched chorus cicadas (*Amphipsalta zealandica*).

THE CICADA KID

Hamilton entomologist Olly Hills isn't in high school yet, but he's already a world expert.

Afearless Olly Hills has never had any problems with creepy crawlies. "When I was just a little kid, a grasshopper landed on my face," he recalls. "I didn't scream or recoil; I just picked it up and examined it."

The Hamilton schoolboy is 11 now and still mad about insects. He knows something about most of them, but one is a particular stand-out favourite. "Cicadas are cool!" he says. So cool he's written the first-ever field guide on the 42 named species found here – from the Southern snoring to the Northern dusky.

"I used to harp on to my mum, 'Why is there so little on the New Zealand cicada?'" says Olly, who's in Year 7 at Berkley Normal Middle School. "So one day she just sat me down in front of the computer."

He started to compile his own research, and then set off with his mother, Tara, on an expedition that took them all over the country. His two little sisters – Emma, eight, and Anna, five, who "don't like insects at all" – came along for the ride.

Olly was only 10 when *Cicadas of New Zealand* was published, featuring detailed descriptions of each insect, colour photographs, and information on how and where to catch them (nzcicada.co.nz). When this year's Entomological Society of New Zealand conference was held in Whanganui, he was given his own 25-minute slot.

Different cicadas make different sounds, he explains. Some snore, chirp, clap, click or bray; he loves them all. "Did you know that the high-pitched chorus of some cicadas like the April green can only be heard by children?" he asks. "I've tested this out on my mum."

His favourite species is the Campbell's cicada, which is easy to catch, not very aggressive, and seems to have a longer life expectancy. He even kept one as a pet and it lasted about three weeks. That's not bad for a cicada, given some species can live underground for years in their nymph stage and emerge as adults "only to live for a matter of days, or weeks if they're lucky".

At home, Olly also has a couple of pet frogs, some chickens and rabbits to look after. He loves David Attenborough's *Planet Earth* TV series, too; he sent Attenborough a copy of his book "and got a handwritten reply".

However, it's not all serious entomology at the Hills residence. Olly admits he's been known to use his love of bugs as a weapon of terror, mainly against his sisters. "I've played all sorts of tricks on them, like placing dead cockroaches on the door handle of my room," he laughs. "That keeps them out." And he once removed a spider from his sister's room after she promised to do his share of the chores.

Armed with a butterfly net, he fossicks for cicadas in the reserve behind their house and recently discovered a new species of red-tailed cicada – although he'd have to publish a scientific paper on it first before getting naming rights. "Most likely it would be named after a local entomologist," he says.

And despite his extensive research, Olly reckons he still hasn't seen or heard every cicada in New Zealand yet, so that's his next mission. "I'm planning another trip to the South Island, and perhaps another edition of my book next year."

KEN DOWDIE