

CRICKETS

Crickets are omnivorous feeding on organic materials as well as decaying plants.

They live under rocks and logs in meadows, pastures and along roadsides. They are nocturnal. Crickets predate on spiders, ground beetles, birds, small rodents, wasp and lizards. Crickets break down plant materials, renewing soil minerals. They can also injure seedlings and numbers can be destructive.

Like all insects, crickets have 6 legs, 2 antennae, and 3 body parts. Crickets are distinctive because of their large back legs. In fact, jumping legs like these are only found on crickets, [grasshoppers](#), and their relatives. Crickets and grasshoppers also have leathery front wings (called "tegmina") which help protect the delicate back wings. Females have a long "ovipositor" at the tip of their abdomens which is used to lay eggs.

Crickets are very closely related to grasshoppers, and it can be difficult to tell them apart. Although crickets are usually darker in color than grasshoppers, there are several examples of bright green crickets, as well as dark brown grasshoppers. In fact, grasshoppers and crickets are so closely related that some of the insects that we call "grasshoppers" are actually more closely related to crickets than they are to other grasshoppers. The best way to identify crickets is to simply become familiar with the three different families of crickets: [Gryllidae](#) (field, house, and tree crickets), [Gryllacrididae](#) (camel crickets and cave crickets), and [Gryllotalpidae](#) (mole crickets). Distinctive characters of these three families are detailed in the [common types](#) section below.

SIZE: Body length of Kentucky crickets, ½" - 2" long

LIFE CYCLE

Simple metamorphosis: young crickets hatch from eggs and resemble small, wingless adults. Crickets shed their skins as they grow, usually molting several times before emerging as winged adults. Most kinds of crickets lay eggs in the soil. Tree crickets slice holes into plant material and deposit their eggs inside. Some kinds of cave crickets lay eggs in bat guano. Male crickets "chirp" to attract females. The familiar chirping sound is produced with a "stridulating organ" located at the base of the wings.

ECOLOGY

Crickets are omnivores, feeding on a variety of plant and animal materials, including insects and their eggs. They are very common in Kentucky, and are an important food source for a many animals, including spiders,

centipedes, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and small mammals. Most crickets are active at night and hide during the day under rocks and logs, except for tree crickets, which usually remain on vegetation all day and night.

PEST STATUS

Although they do not infest food or harm humans, field and house crickets are considered pests when they wander into homes, especially when their chirping causes a disturbance. Camel and cave crickets will commonly live in dark cellars and in crawlspaces, but they cause no harm and prefer to stay out-of-the-way of people.

The best way to deal with cricket pests is to keep them from entering a home.

COMMON CRICKETS:

FIELD CRICKETS AND HOUSE CRICKETS

FAMILY: Gryllidae

These are some of the most commonly encountered insects in Kentucky.

They are active at night and hide during the day under rocks and logs, and occasionally in basements, barns, and other structures. They feed on discarded food, dead insects, and almost anything else. Field crickets and house crickets are very similar, but field crickets tend to be darker in color.

House crickets were introduced to North America from Europe, and are commonly raised as fish bait and pet food. The house cricket is sometimes referred to as "cricket on the hearth" and the "brown cricket."



Field Cricket (R. Bessin, 2002)



House Cricket (R. Bessin, 2000)

TREE CRICKETS

FAMILY: Gryllidae

Although they are in the same family as house and field crickets, tree crickets are often mistaken for grasshoppers because of their bright yellow and green colors. Tree crickets live in trees and tall plants where they feed on leaves and small insects. Some tree cricket species are active only at night, others are active at all times of the day.



Tree Cricket (R. Bessin, 2000)

CAMEL AND CAVE CRICKETS

FAMILY: Rhaphidophoridae (formerly Gryllacrididae)

These large (1 1/2"), wingless crickets are common in dark, moist places like caves and basements where they scavenge for decaying plant and animal materials. Despite their fearsome appearance, they are harmless.



Camel Cricket (R. Bessin, 2000)

MOLE CRICKETS

FAMILY: Gryllotalpidae

Mole crickets look very different than other crickets. Like real moles, they spend their time burrowing underground and feeding on plant roots. Some can grow to be 2" long.



Mole Cricket (R. Bessin, 2000)

Field and house crickets are easy to find and collect. They are almost always present around buildings, where they hide under boards and rocks during the day. Similarly, camel and cave crickets are also very common, but you may have to crawl into a basement to find them! Tree crickets can be more of a challenge: their green color allows them to hide in plants very well. Look for them a few feet off the ground in trees and other plants. Mole crickets are common, but difficult to find because they are usually underground. They are sometimes seen flying during warm months. Although crickets are able to move quickly, they will often remain still for a photograph if they are not startled.