

Grasshoppers, Crickets and Katydid **by Lloyd Eighme, retired entomologist**

The cool, moist climate we live in is not the best place for grasshoppers. The few kinds of grasshoppers and crickets we have here are not usually very abundant, but they do feed on vegetation, so they are not welcome in our gardens. A sure indication of warm weather and low humidity is the snapping and crackling sound made by the larger grasshoppers as they hover in the air and flutter their wings. They do that only when the humidity reaches a low level.

Grasshoppers lay their eggs in the soil to overwinter and hatch into tiny nymphs the next spring. These eggs are subjected to many hazards and very few will be left to hatch. The damp winter weather subjects them to many fungus diseases and foraging mice, moles and shrews will devour most of them. The nymphs resemble the adults except for the wings which start out as small flaps and gradually enlarge until the full sized adult stage. They have well developed jaws for biting off bits of vegetation and when they are abundant they can strip plants of leaves rapidly. The pioneers moving westward faced devastating plagues of the Rocky Mountain Locust which devoured their crops and migrated in huge swarms. Changes in climate and ecosystems brought about the extinction of the Rocky Mountain locust and only its remains are now seen frozen in the glaciers on the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains.

Several different kinds of grasshoppers may be seen in Skagit Valley each summer and occasionally they multiply enough to become a pest during drier years. The red-legged grasshopper and the two-striped grasshopper are common in gardens and fields. The pygmy grasshopper is common near ponds and streams or areas of damp vegetation. It is only about 1/2 inch long when fully grown and is often thought to be the young of larger grasshoppers. Its front wings are very small, but the hind wings are covered by a spine-like extension of the front part of the body, unusual for a grasshopper. It is never a problem in the garden.

The crickets we have in Skagit County are found mostly in damp, dark places such as under buildings or leaf litter. They are called cave crickets even though they live in many places besides caves. They are active mostly at night when they come out to feed on vegetation. They can damage small plants in the garden, but are usually not abundant enough to be of concern. Our crickets are wingless and do not chirp like those in warmer, drier climates.

We do have katydids here, but they do not chirp about Katy. Ours is the fork-tailed katydid and it only lisps out a soft clicking sound. It is green and has long legs and antennae and the body including wings is 1 1/2 inches long. It is difficult to see it in the dense green foliage when it hides and feeds on tender young leaves and stems. It is rarely abundant enough to be of concern to gardeners, in fact

most people have never seen one. It inserts its eggs into the edges of leaves (quite a feat) in the fall where they overwinter on the ground and hatch into nymphs in the spring. Adults are not usually seen until late summer or early fall.

We have a rare cricket in our area that is often sought by insect collectors. The books call it a Grylloblattid, but it is commonly referred to as the snow cricket. Some friends of mine collected some in August at Mount Baker on the surface of a glacier at midnight in the rain. That is the typical time, place and circumstances to find them crawling on the snow. Now I am sure every one of you will be diligently searching for a snow Cricket!



The 2-lined grasshopper
1 3/8 inches long.
The lines extend backward from the eyes.



Our Pygmy Grasshopper
1/2 inch long
Notice the thoracic spine above the wings.



A Cave Cricket found in the
garden.
3/4 inch long



The Forked Tailed Katydid
2 inches long