

Mormon Cricket



The **Mormon cricket** (*Anabrus simplex*) is a large insect that can grow to almost three inches in length. Despite its name, the Mormon cricket is actually a shield backed katydid, not a cricket. The Mormon cricket is flightless, but capable of traveling up to two kilometers a day in its swarming phase, during which it is a serious agricultural pest and traffic hazard.

Mormon crickets have variable coloration. The overall color may be black, brown, red, purple or green. The "shield" behind the head may have colored markings. The abdomen may appear to be striped. Females have a long ovipositor, which should not be mistaken for a stinger. Both sexes have long antennae. Mormon crickets may undergo morphological changes triggered by high population densities, similar to those seen in locusts.



New research shows that Mormon crickets move in these migratory bands, firstly to find new sources of the critical nutrients of protein and salt, and secondly to avoid being eaten by hungry crickets approaching from the rear. The Mormon cricket's cannibalistic behavior may lead to swarm behavior because crickets may need to move constantly forward to avoid attacks from behind. The Mormon cricket prefers to eat forbs, but grasses and shrubs such as sagebrush are also eaten, as are insects and other Mormon crickets.

Biological control

Mormon crickets have many natural enemies that play an important part in keeping them in check. Eggs are destroyed by some species of parasitic wasps and flies, and the larvae of many predatory insects.

Nymphs and adults are preyed upon by many animals including game birds, hawks, sea gulls, wasps, ground beetles and robber flies. Some parasitoids, such as hairworms, tachinids, and flesh flies attack nymphs and adults. Diseases can also keep populations down.

Management

Insecticides are most effective against younger nymphs. The best strategy is to control Mormon crickets in the nymphal stages by spraying or baiting egg hatching beds if they are found.

History

There have been isolated and or scattered infestations of mormon crickets over the past several years primarily on the south end of the Big Horn Mountains and a few colonies in the Powder River Area of Johnson County. They have not seemed to have caused any major economic or environmental threat to date. However, treatment programs have been necessary in other counties, therefore their presence needs continual monitoring.