

Jerusalem Crickets

Status

- Neutral
- No health threat

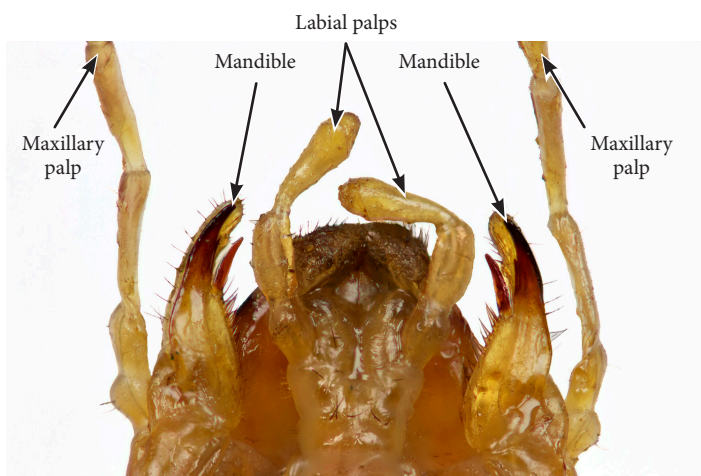
These are stout-bodied insects with massive heads and strong legs adapted for digging in soil. They are known for their large, rounded, shiny head; tiny eyes with poor eyesight; long antennae; spine-tipped legs; and plump abdomen. North American species have no wings. Most species grow to about 5 cm (2 inches) in length as adults, but two of them approach 7.6 cm (3 inches). They live in the western U.S., from California to Oklahoma, and south into Mexico. About 100 species are known, many of them recently discovered and currently under study. They are known by many other names such as potato bug, niño de la tierra (child of the earth), and cara de niño (child's face).

Their strong mandibles are used to cut into plant roots and tubers, their primary food sources. They also feed on other insects, even their own kind. If roughly handled or annoyed, they will give a strong bite. Contrary to the many urban legends about them, they are not venomous, they do not sting, and you will not die if they look at you.

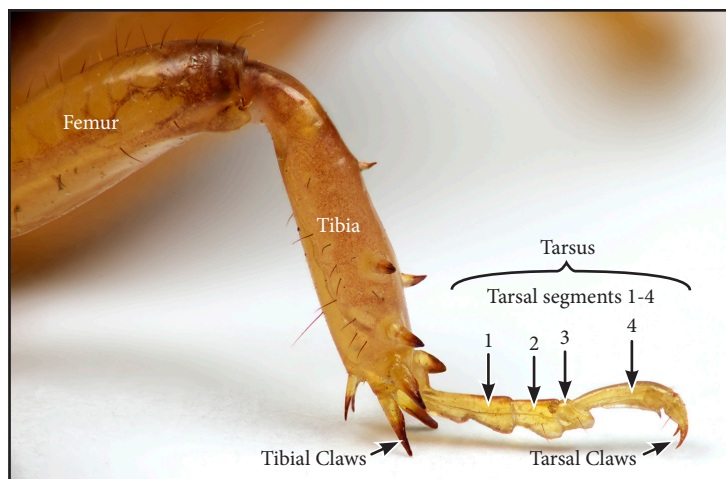
They live in shallow soil burrows, often beneath rocks or logs. In fall and winter, they are often found roaming about during late afternoons and evenings. Sometimes their wanderings take them into ponds and swimming pools, where they drown since they cannot swim. They also stray through open doors and under bad door seals and appear in garages and homes, much to the surprise of the human occupants. If you find them indoors, do them a favor by capturing and releasing them into a garden or in a natural area.

Mouthparts

Like all insects, Jerusalem crickets have several mouthparts. In this view from below, we can see maxillary and labial palps, jointed appendages that act like chopsticks to manipulate food into the mouth. The heavy mandibles have strong muscles that help the insect bite and defend itself.



Dark Jerusalem Cricket
Stenopelmatus fuscus



Life Cycle

Jerusalem Crickets have three stages in their life cycle: egg, nymph, and adult. To find a mate, adults strike their abdomen on the ground (this behavior is called drumming). The vibrations travel through soil and are used to locate each other. Since soil drumming vibrations do not travel far, the insects must already be near each other to detect them. After mating, the female lays eggs in loose soil. Weeks later, the nymphs hatch from the eggs, break out of the egg case, and seek food. As they eat and mature, they outgrow their skin, grow a new skin layer, and shed the old one, a process called molting. Following each molt, the nymph is larger. After the last growth-molt cycle, up to 2 years later, the Jerusalem cricket reaches full size (adult). The process of changing body forms while maturing is called metamorphosis.

