

## Colorado Insect of Interest

# Jerusalem Cricket

**Scientific Name:** *Stenopelmatus fuscus*  
Haldeman

**Order:** Orthoptera (Grasshoppers, Crickets, Katydid, and Relatives)

**Family:** Stenopelmatidae (Jerusalem, Sand or Stone Crickets)

### Description and Distinctive Features:

The Jerusalem crickets (Figure 1, 2, and 3) are arguably one of the most bizarre looking insects you can find in Colorado. They are large insects (about an inch long), flightless with spiny legs. Their bulbous abdomen is often banded but the most noticeable feature is their very large, round and somewhat humanlike head (Figure 2). These odd insects usually attract attention when encountered and are called by many common names including “child of the earth”, “potato bug”, “skull head” and “old bald-headed man”.



Figure 2. Jerusalem Cricket head-on view. Photo courtesy of Howard Evans.



Figure 1. Jerusalem Cricket side -view. Photo courtesy of Gene Nelson.

**Distribution in Colorado:** Within Colorado, Jerusalem crickets are most common in the western counties bordering Utah. They are also known to occur in extreme southeastern Colorado.

**Life History and Habits:** Jerusalem crickets spend almost their entire life below ground. Females lay eggs in small masses in soil and early stages burrow through the soil. The front legs of Jerusalem crickets are thickened to allow them to dig, and they have large and powerful jaws. Much of their food consists of roots and tubers but they are omnivorous

and will eat other insects as well as scavenge dead plant and animal matter.

The adult stage is likely reached in about 1 ½ years after eggs hatch. The early instar nymphs remain below ground and periodically molt, which they do on their back. Adults and late stage nymphs may be active above ground at night, particularly when soil is moist from recent rains. Adults will live about 2-6 months during which mating occurs and females lay new clutches of eggs.

Jerusalem crickets can produce several sounds. When disturbed they can produce a hissing noise by rubbing the femur of their hind legs along the side of their abdomen. Mating calls are produced by drumming their abdomen against the ground and these are detected as vibrations through the soil.

Despite some widespread legends, Jerusalem crickets are not poisonous. They can pinch with their mandibles if handled and the jaws are strong enough to draw blood.



Figure 3. Jerusalem cricket being held.

**Related Species:** Recently the number of described species of Jerusalem crickets in North America has greatly increased with the recognition that most cannot be distinguished by external features. However, the songs produced by drumming are unique to each and can be used to separate many of the 20+ Jerusalem crickets now known to occur in the southwestern US. It is possible that more than one species is present in Colorado.