

## Colorado Insect of Interest

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# Soldier Beetle

**Scientific Name:** *Chauliognathus basalis* LeConte

**Order:** Coleoptera (Beetles)  
**Family:** Cantharidae (Soldier beetles)



**Figure 1.** An adult soldier beetle, *Chauliognathus basalis*.

### Description and Distinctive

**Features:** *Chauliognathus basalis*

(Figures 1, 2) the most common and conspicuous soldier beetle in Colorado, has a long body form with straight sides. They are predominantly yellow or yellow-orange with variable dark markings on the prothorax, base and tip of the fore wings. These wings are relatively soft compared to most beetles, leading to a common name for members of this family “leatherwings”.

**Distribution in Colorado:** *Chauliognathus basalis*, sometimes called the “Colorado soldier beetle”, is an extremely common species throughout eastern Colorado.



**Figure 2.** Mating pairs of soldier beetles.

**Life History and Habits:** Soldier beetles are most frequently seen on flowers, particularly yellow flowers of the family Asteraceae. The adults are strictly pollen feeders and may be seen from midsummer through early fall, sometimes in large numbers and usually on yellow flowers. Very often soldier beetles are found in pairs, either mating or the male guarding the female from other potential mates. The males are a bit smaller and tend to be darker than females; when coupled the male is carried on the back of the female (Figure 2).



**Figure 3.** Soldier beetle egg mass

The life history of this common species is very poorly known. From late August through September eggs are laid, as masses on the soil placed under leaves and other sheltering debris. Similar to some other *Chauliognathus* species, the larvae are assumed to be predators that search for small invertebrate prey on the soil surface or in loose soil. Defensive compounds to deter predation by spiders and other potential enemies are known to be produced by some other members of this genus.

**Related Species:** *Chauliognathus scutellaris* LeConte (Figure 4) is a less commonly encountered soldier beetle with Museum records at CSU including Teller and Weld counties, and the Sand Dunes National Monument area.

Other soldier beetles that occur in Colorado are in the genus *Cantharis*. These are generally a uniformly dark gray color often with the head and prothorax a dark red/orange. Adults of *Cantharis* spp. are predators on other insects, such as aphids.



**Figure 4.** Soldier beetle with reddish coloration, possibly *Chauliognathus scutellaris*