

Colorado Insect of Interest

Pseneo punctatus (A Leafhopper-hunting Wasp)

Scientific Name: *Pseneo punctatus* (Fox)

Order: Hymenoptera (Bees, Wasps, Ants, Sawflies)

Family: Sphecidae (Hunting Wasps)



Figure 1. *Pseneo punctatus*, a solitary wasp that hunts leafhoppers..

Identification and Descriptive Features: *Pseneo punctatus* is a small (ca 10 mm) black wasp with a very slender constriction between the thorax and end of the abdomen. The wings are clear and only extend about 1/2-2/3 of the way to the tip of the abdomen.

This tiny black wasp is sometimes found in homes during late winter and early spring, often around windows. These originate from the soil of nearby plants that had been kept outdoors for a period the previous year.



Figure 2. *Pseneo punctatus* on a penny for size comparison.

Distribution in Colorado: Probably statewide and often common in yards and gardens, although infrequently noticed unless found indoors.

Life History and Habits: *Pseneo punctatus* is a hunting wasp that captures leafhoppers, paralyzes them with a sting, then caches the prey in belowground burrows to feed its young. Existing soil cracks apparently are preferred and this wasp often will create nest cells in the soil cracks that form at the edge of potted plants. The developing wasp larvae feed on the paralyzed leafhoppers captured by the mother.

Normally adults emerge in late spring. However, when nesting in the soil of plants that have been brought indoors, the extra warmth can cause the wasps to emerge much earlier. The number of generations produced is unknown.

Like all hunting wasps, *Pseneo punctatus* is not an aggressive wasp and will never sting unless confined against the skin. If stings occur it is very mildly painful, like a pin prick.