

Crickets: Prevention & Management

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Occasionally, the lab receives phone calls about insects such as crickets that do not have a significant pest history (at least in western Washington). Concerned individuals ask if they damage goods, particularly fabrics. Field or house crickets can and have been serious fabric pests from time to time, and it is probably wise to not become complacent about their apparent lack of pest history.

While we know that crickets can become plant pests, nuisance pests, and sometimes welcome guests with their pleasant chirping, crickets have been reported to damage a broad array of fabrics and some other household articles. Affected materials have included nylon, wool, plastic, fabrics, leather, cotton, fur, carpeting, silk, synthetic fabrics, upholstered furniture, and stored food items. Crickets seem to be particularly attracted to clothing stained with perspiration. They have also been known to eat holes in paper and rubber. In some areas, they have also become garden pests, occasionally feeding on fruits and vegetables. It is also interesting to note that battery-powered smoke alarms begin to emit sounds like a cricket when the battery runs down.

The most common cricket found in the home is the field or house cricket (sometimes regarded as two different species by some experts). These grasshopper-like insects (Fig. 1) exhibit a light yellowish-brown color with three dark bands on the head. Sometimes, they may appear to be quite dark. Adults are winged and reach about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in length, with antennae longer than the body. Males have two tail appendages, while females have a third or middle one called the ovipositor. The ovipositor shows more prominently than the other two, and appears somewhat spear-shaped. They can jump and fly with the most capable insects.



**Fig. 1. A male house cricket.
By A.L. Antonelli.**

Another cricket, the camel (or cave) cricket, is also commonly found in the home. While considered less troublesome, it has been observed damaging fabric and upholstery. Camel crickets (Fig. 2) measure about an inch in length and appear as brown, wingless, grasshopper-like insects with long antennae. The head is bent down between the forelegs and the back is strongly arched. They exhibit prominent hind legs, modified for jumping. They do not sing like house crickets. Camel crickets prefer damp areas, and therefore may be found inhabiting damp cellars or basements homes.



Fig. 2. Camel cricket. By K. Grey.

Sanitation comprises an effective first step in avoiding crickets. This entails the elimination of feeding, breeding, and hiding spots such as piles of bricks, stones, wood, and dense vegetation located close to the home. Bug-proofing your home may also prove to be beneficial. Caulk or weatherstrip cracks and openings where they may enter. Ensure tight fits or seals on thresholds where windows or doors close. A myriad of nuisance insects enter homes through those openings. Crickets can maintain themselves inside indefinitely, so management is a logical course of action. One may physically destroy them, or use a household insecticide. When commercial fabric holdings are threatened, consult with a reputable pest control operator (PCO).