

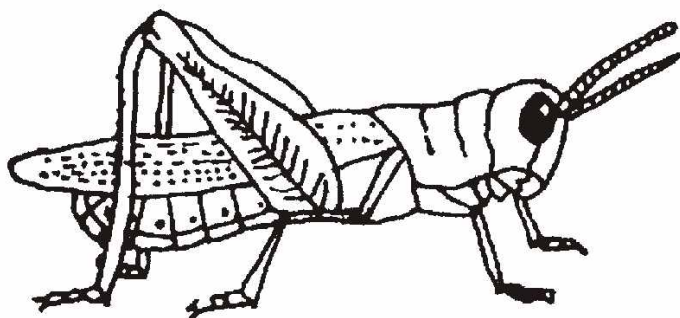
Nature Notes

Junior Ranger

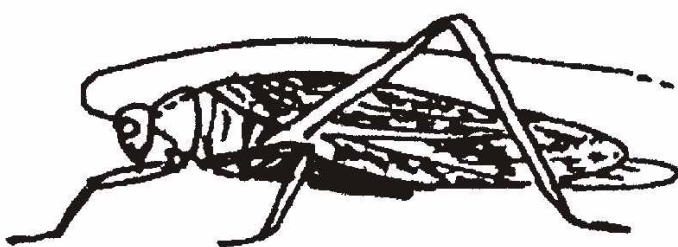
GRASSHOPPERS

Australia has hundreds of different species of grasshoppers. They are one of the greatest consumers of plant material in the Northern Territory. Grasshoppers and termites eat more than all other grazing animals combined, including cattle.

Grasshoppers come in all shapes and sizes and vary in colour from bright blues, yellows and reds to dull browns and greens. Grasshoppers are often food for many animals and sometimes it is safer for them to be a dull brown so they can hide from their predators.

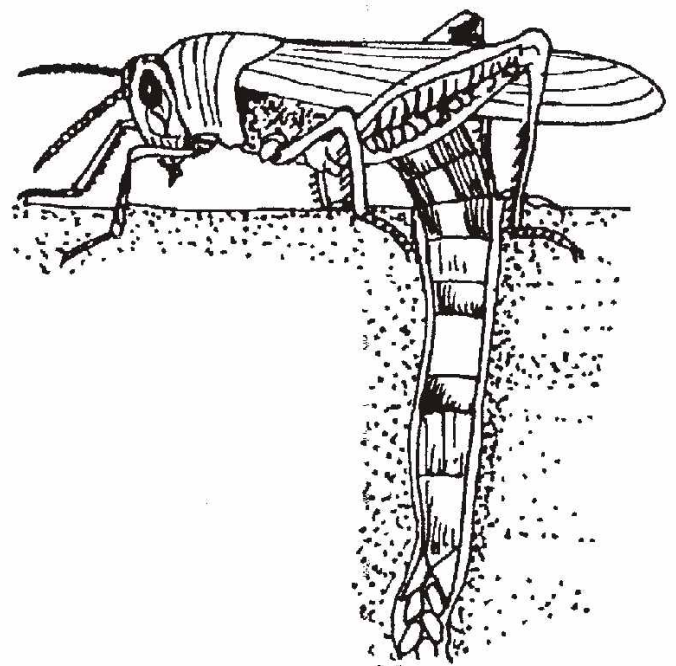


Grasshoppers belong to a group (Order) of insects that scientists call **Orthoptera**. There are two families, the short-horned grasshoppers (above), commonly known as locusts which are entirely vegetarian; and the long-horned (below) which includes katydids and crickets, some of which feed on other insects as well as vegetation.



In the Top End by the start of the build-up (Oct-Nov) you will start to see more and more grasshoppers around. The female grasshoppers, which are bigger than males, lay their eggs in a hole in the ground. The first rains trigger the hatching of the eggs.

During the dry season they lay dormant in the soil. The baby grasshoppers, called nymphs, look like miniature adults, but lack wings. They dig their way out of the ground and feed on green plants. It takes a few weeks for a nymph to grow wings and become full-sized adults.



LUNCHING LOCUSTS

The most damaging of the Australian grasshoppers is the **Australian Plague Locust** *Chortoicetes terminifera*, which is common in eastern Australia. Locust outbreaks are irregular events that follow heavy rains in inland areas.

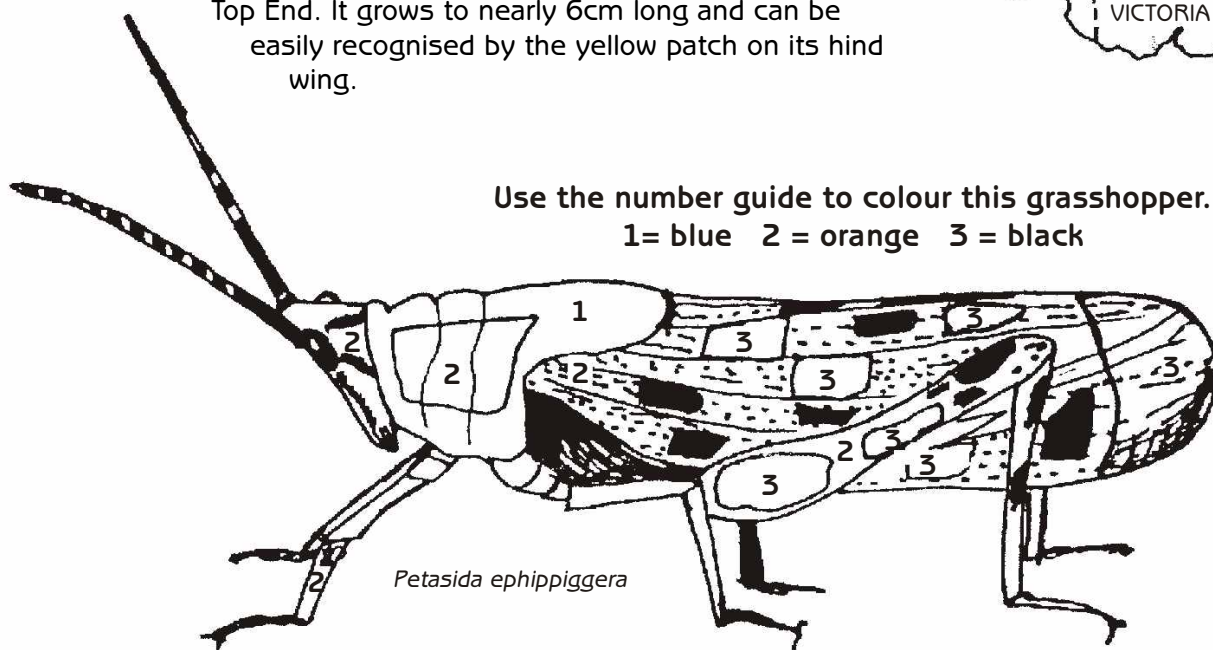
A typical area of origin is the Channel Country of southwest Queensland. Good rains there will induce a lot of plant growth and the locusts multiply quickly. When the food supplies run out they migrate to other areas. Three generations of locust were involved in this particular migration - shown in the attached diagram.

When the locusts are swarming they are a dull brown colour but at other times they are green in colour.

Less damaging is the **Yellow-winged Locust**, *Gastrimargus musicus*, of the Top End. It grows to nearly 6cm long and can be easily recognised by the yellow patch on its hind wing.



Use the number guide to colour this grasshopper.
1 = blue 2 = orange 3 = black



Petasida ephippigera

Use the grid to decode this strikingly colourful insect's common name (to decode each letter find the square where the letter row meets the number row - you can look up the scientific name below the picture to see if you got it right).

C2 A5 B4 A3 B3 B3 A1 D3 A4 D5 D4

B2 D3 A1 D4 D4 B3 C5 D1 D1 A5 D3

	1	2	3	4	5
A	A	B	C	D	E
B	F	G	H	I	J
C	K	L	M	N	O
D	P	Q	R	S	T
E	U	V	W	X	Y

Want to learn more about Grasshoppers?

Check out the reference book *Grasshopper Country: The Abundant Orthopteroid Insects of Australia* by D.C.F. Rentz.