

# Flora & Fauna of Spain

## Mole Cricket

The mole cricket (*Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa*) is an unusual looking creature, which is found in Europe, the UK, and other countries where it has been introduced, such as the eastern US. The scientific name derives



from the Latin 'gryllus' meaning cricket and 'talpa', mole, and comes about because of its similarity to a mole in both looks and subterranean habits.

They are fairly common but rarely seen above ground as they live in shallow underground borrows. Mole crickets are omnivorous and their general diet consists of insect larvae and earthworms as well as grass roots and young vegetable roots and tubers too, such as potato, carrot and turnip. For this reason they are considered a pest in some countries because of the damage done to crops.



An adult will grow to about 4-5cm long. They have a dark brown coloured body which is covered with fine silky hairs, and the forelegs have shovel-shaped claws adapted for rapid digging. The adult develops short strong wings and although they can fly some distance it is said to be fairly clumsy and generally only performed at night.

Males can be distinguished from the females by the open vein area in the forewing known as the 'harp', females lack the external ovipositor of other crickets.

Eggs are laid in underground chambers from early spring to the end of July. These are tended by the female until they hatch two to four weeks later. Nymphs begin to mature from the following spring onwards; but some may not mature until their third spring. Adults and nymphs can be found throughout the year in extensive tunnel systems that may reach a depth of over one metre.

Males occasionally produce a soft, but far-carrying 'churring' song from within a specially constructed chamber in the burrow system, which acts as an amplifier for the song and is likely to be used for attracting females. The song is typically produced on warm mild evenings in early spring between dusk and dawn, and it is similar to the song of the nightjar.