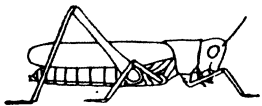


Turvey Bush Crickets

Late summer and autumn are often signalled for me by the short chirps of Dark Bush Crickets - seemingly all over Turvey, especially in areas of rough vegetation by roads and gardens at dusk. A search will often lead to their discovery as they are large insects given to sitting around on the vegetation as well as in it. Two males were found in early August in our garden doing just this - serenading two females also sitting out on leaves nearby, for all the world like boys and girls courting at a street corner. The males can be up to two cm. in length with glossy dark bodies, huge legs and antennae, and wonderfully contrasting yellow undersides. The females are less colourful but decidedly fiercer-looking because of their huge sword-like ovipositors. These are not weapons at all but merely for making slits in leaves in which they also then use them for laying eggs. Adult Dark Bush Crickets can be found until as late as November, but only the eggs survive the winter.

Three other species of bush cricket also inhabit the parish of Turvey but are perhaps less likely to be seen as two tend to be found higher up in shrubs and trees and one is still a relative newcomer. Of the former, the Oak Bush Cricket is largely nocturnal but occasionally comes to light. It is more fragile-looking than the Dark Bush Cricket - being smaller and a pale green throughout. The Speckled Bush Cricket is similar but covered in tiny black spots and the female has a shorter and broader ovipositor. The third species, the Roesel's Bush Cricket, is a relative newcomer to Turvey and can be found both by roadsides and in wetter areas. I've yet to see it locally but did come across one in Hatfield Forest a few years ago. It has both a flightless and a winged form and seems to be spreading northwards and westwards from the Thames Basin. Its song is unmistakeable: a continuous high-pitched stridulation which has been likened to the buzz heard from pylon cables in damp weather. It has a cream-coloured band around the side-margins of the pronotum - the saddle-like covering of the first thoracic segment. Two other species of bush cricket occur in Bedfordshire: the Short and Long-winged Cone-heads, of which the latter, like the Roesel's, seems to be expanding its range at the moment, perhaps in response to global warming. Watch this space!

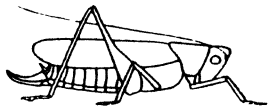
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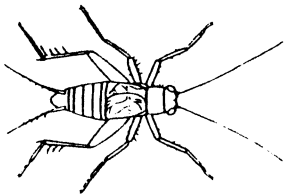
(GRASSHOPPERS)



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