

Invertebrates of Grasslands

Invertebrates (animals without backbones) may be small on body size, but they are big on species diversity in practically all ecosystems. Grasslands are no exception. Insects constitute the major group of invertebrates, and a walk in summer through any grassland will probably disturb some grasshoppers, while small cicadas may be heard singing on grass stems. On the ground, spiders search for prey. But the majority of these animals lead inconspicuous lives: many are microscopic, and may pass a part or the whole of their lives hidden under the litter layer or in the soil. Those that come out may do only under cover of darkness, and sometimes only for a short period each year.

Table of Important Grassland Invertebrate Groups

Habitat	Soil	Litter layer	Above-ground (vegetation)
worms	*	---	---
Spiders	* (burrowers)	*	*
Mites	*	*	*
Centipedes	*	*	---
Sprintails	*	*	---
Termites	*	*	---
Crickets, grasshoppers, etc.	* (eggs; mole crickets)	* (crickets)	* (grasshoppers, katydids)
Beetles	* (immature stages)	*	* (mostly adults)
Moths	* (immature stages)	---	* (mostly adults)
Ants	* (nests)	*	*
Bees & wasps	* (nests)	---	* (adults)

Temperate native grasslands have suffered massive alteration in Australia over the past two centuries, and they now occupy only a small fraction of their original extensive area. Although there are no known cases of man-induced extinctions of grassland-dependent invertebrates in Australia, some declines have been documented, and it is reasonable to assume that many of the lesser-known species (and most invertebrates are very poorly known) have suffered range contractions and declines in abundance.

Notable grassland insects of local conservation concern include the following:

Golden sun moth (*Synemon plana*): requires *Danthonia*, on which the subterranean larvae feed. Now restricted to small pockets within its formerly extensive range; the ACT is a stronghold.

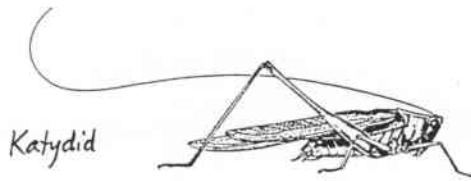
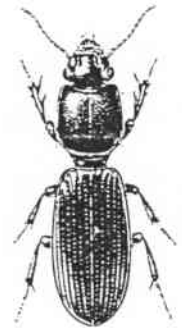
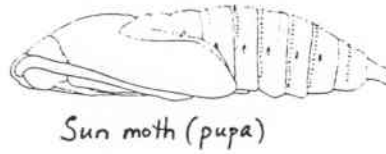
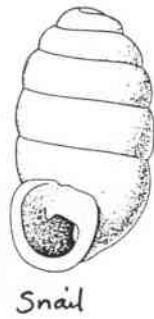
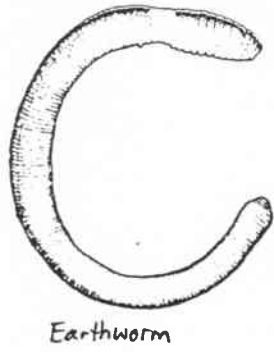
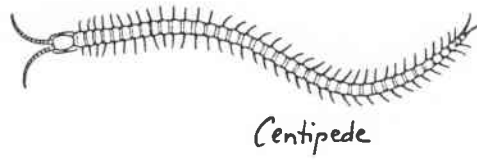
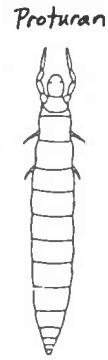
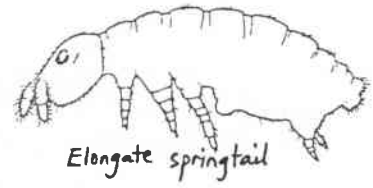
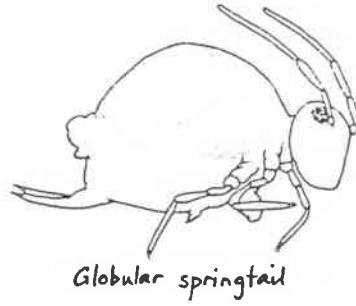
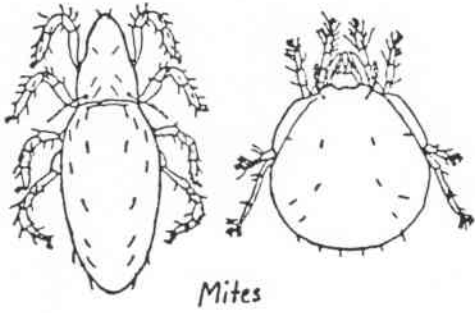
A morabine grasshopper (*Keyacris scurra*): associated with *Themeda* grasslands where it feeds on "yellow buttons" (*Chrysocephalum*); the *Themeda* provides shelter. Not uncommon in certain areas, but easily eliminated by grazing or mowing.

A short-winged grasshopper (*Perunga ochracea*): a poorly known, flightless species. Seems to have disappeared from former known localities.

Canberra raspy cricket (*Cooraboorama canberrae*): a large, conspicuous, flightless cricket. Was more common before urbanisation replaced large areas of its habitat in the Canberra valleys.

Kim Pullen
2/1/11

Some Grassland Invertebrates



Carabid beetle

