

# Ecuadorian Lubber Grasshopper (*Chromacris psittacus pacificus*)

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## Background

This species is an Orthopteran introduced to culture in 2008 and became available in 2010. It belongs to the family Romaleidae which are commonly called Lubber grasshoppers and includes the giant *Tropidacris collaris*. The genus *Chromacris* is found in various habitats including tropical rainforests of South America. This species heralds from the Andean mountain slopes of Ecuador.

## Description and life History

A medium sized species which is strikingly attractive striped in green and yellow and with a body length of up to 40mm. It has very beautiful bright orange hind wings which are normally hidden from view until it jumps or flies. It lives and feeds gregariously on the edge of forests where it sits in an exposed position on Solanaceae shrubs. When disturbed individuals jump off, however they rapidly reassemble when the threat has gone. Toxins are likely to be obtained from the foodplants (Solanine alkaloid) and it is probable that this provides a defence against predators. Bright warning colours and the gregarious nature of the nymphs support this hypothesis. No song has been observed in captivity. Nymphs hatch after about 3 months, in groups of 12 - 40 from an egg pod laid underground. The nymphs are black on hatching and about 4mm long. They take about 3 - 4 months to mature and during this time become progressively more colourful developing red/black colouration in 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> instar which gradually becomes replaced by blue then green and orange/yellow colouration from 4<sup>th</sup> instar to adult. Adults live for 5 – 9 months.

## Culture Instructions

This species tolerates a range of temperatures from room temp (15C) to very warm (34C) but that humidity with reasonable ventilation is important at all times. The species is gregarious, arboreal and rests on foodplant which it consumes during the day. At night time they migrate to the sides or roof of the cage where they rest in communal groups. Feeding is relatively straight forward provided plants of Solanaceae can be offered. A good option is to offer plants of the genus *Cestrum* which can be readily obtained from plant nurseries trading in hardy exotics and is easily propagated by cuttings. *Cestrum* is the foodplant for glasswing butterflies (*Greta otto*) and is often grown in butterfly houses. It also has the advantage that it will remain evergreen all year in a frost free greenhouse. *Buddleia* and members of Solanaceae such as Tomato plant, Aubergine, *Datura*, *Solanum*, Christmas cherry, and wild flowers like bittersweet (woody nightshade) are acceptable alternatives. Potato plants are also taken and the fruits of sweet peppers used in cooking and available in supermarkets are eaten. *Buddleia* is eaten if no Solanaceae is available. Matings happen regularly and copulation may last for many hours. Egg laying occurs in sandy material on the base of the cage. Eggs are laid in batches and best incubated in situ. A humid but ventilated environment must be maintained.

