

The Farallones Cricket

The Farallones Island Cricket, *Farallonophilus cavernicolus* Rentz, was described as new in 1972. It is a Camel Cricket. Dozens of species are known from many different habitats in mainland California. All known species are nocturnal in their habits. *F. cavernicolus* was found to be endemic to the Farallones, the only known member of the Order Orthoptera from the islands and determined to be a primitive member of its tribe, the Ceuthophilini.

The Farallones are geologically similar to the granitic outcrops at the tip of the Pt Reyes Peninsula which is about 20 miles to the northeast of the islands. If the Farallones Cricket exists elsewhere, it would be likely to be found at Pt Reyes. Trips to several localities on the Pt Reyes Peninsula failed to locate the cricket there. However, that does not prove it is not there and more searching is necessary to determine if it is there.

The Farallones Cricket is a nocturnal insect. It occurs in considerable numbers in two caves on South Farallones. A hypothesis suggesting evolution of such a habit might involve Cassin's Auklets, *Ptychoramphus aleutica* (Pallas), oceanic birds that burrow and make extensive tunnels to make their nests. The island population was estimated at around 100,000 birds in 1970. The burrows are dormant for most of the year. They would be ideal for occupation by the crickets which are opportunistic feeders and unused burrows probably contain all the sustenance the crickets need to survive and propagate. Since the crickets are nocturnal, perhaps they moved into the caves secondarily. But where did the progenitors of the crickets come from? Do they occur on the mainland? These are all questions that remain to be answered.

A word of caution. Apparently, a population of mice has invaded the islands. If they are like the mice that occur on Australia's Lord Howe Island, they consume all potential food sources, including insects. Recent attempts to gain control of the mice on the Farallones using poison baits could have disastrous secondary consequences involving the cricket. In the laboratory, I was able to raise the crickets using oatmeal and muesli to feed them. The crickets probably

would readily eat poison grain and this could spell their demise. Hopefully, tests would have been made to determine if Camel Crickets consume the bait prior to its use to control the mice.

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Literature.

Rentz, D. C. 1972. A new genus and species of camel cricket from the Farallon Islands of California. *Occasional Papers of the California Academy of Sciences*, 93:1-13.