



International Journal of Biology Sciences

ISSN Print: 2664-9926
 ISSN Online: 2664-9934
 NAAS Rating (2026): 4.82
 IJBS 2026; 8(3): 139-142
www.biologyjournal.net
 Received: 10-01-2026
 Accepted: 14-02-2026

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Diversity and altitudinal distribution of Acrididae: Orthoptera from Himachal Pradesh (India)

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DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.33545/26649926.2026.v8.i3b.609>

Abstract

In a hilly state, Orthoptera distribution shows a zonation of species from lowland to upland i.e. altitude-specific adaptations and environmental constraints. The present study deals with the 82 species of Acrididae representing 11 subfamilies. Sub family Oedipodinae stands for 27% of the species, followed by subfamily Acridinae with 21%. *Calliptaminae*, *Tropidopolinae* sub families symbolize the least one. The altitudinal gradient studied revealed a remarkable decrease in the number of species from 500-meter masl to 4600-meter masl. *Bryodema luctuosum indum* (Sauss.), *Sphingonotus savignyi* Sauss, *S. kashmirensis* are the typically altitudinal indicator species.

Keywords: Orthoptera, acridoidea, diversity

Introduction

India's immense biological diversity encompasses 75-80% insects of the total animal species on this planet. Insects are predominant biota on all continents including Antarctica. The Himachal Pradesh is with varied physiographic of foothills to the high mountain peaks and trans Himalayan ranges. The Orthopterans are an important group of insects known as pests of agricultural crops, vegetables and forests. They play a dominant role in the socio economic of country and have a significant contribution to the sustainable development of the environment. Family Acrididae is commonly called grasshoppers. All of them have large hind legs for jumping. They have short antennae and short ovipositor. Males sing during the day by rubbing their legs against the sides of their forewings. Some species include a visual display of bright colours on legs or wings. Female's ovipositor egg masses protected by a foamy substance, under the ground or in plants. Most of them have an annual life cycle. Most species feed on grasses. Some species feed on other vegetation including leaves and stems. Some even feed on dead eucalyptus leaves. Some species, under some conditions, will migrate in a dense swarm's form, known as locusts, bring large damage to the crop. In general, the maximum species are in solitary phases and not damage to agriculture and forest. The gregarious phases are exclusive pests on the primary productivity of nature. The pests are famous as locust. The ectothermic nature of grasshoppers makes them good biodiversity indicators of minor climate changes in the region. The distribution of 82 orthopteran species in the state is analyzed on the basis of quantitative data on their vertical distribution at altitudes of 500 to 4600 m above sea level. Plain and mountain species, as well as those widespread at any altitudes, are distinguished by the pattern of the altitudinal distribution. It deals primarily with the altitudinal gradient but considers other ecological aspects. It is the first comprehensive summary of the distribution of Orthoptera along an altitudinal gradient in the Shivalik to Himalayan mountains.

Materials and Methods

The present study is based upon the collection of Orthoptera brought by various survey parties of ZSI, Solan, India. The collections of Orthoptera are habitat specific and the state habitat is sub mountainous to mountainous, forest, scrub jungles, adjoining agricultural field and river basins etc. Orthoptera are basically terricoles (Ground); aquatiles (Floating leaves); arborescens (Trees); herbicoles (Herbs and shrubs) and graminicoles (Grasses). Altitudinal studies were made from 500 masl to 4600 masl. The grasshoppers were fixed by

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ethyl acetate and were usually preserved dry in paper packets in the field. For study, the insects were preserved dry after relaxation and pinned, labelled and stored in the collection boxes with insecticides.

Results

Classification followed here is after Dirsh (1965) ^[12] and Uvarov (1966) ^[20]. Bhowmik (1985) ^[4] is also a useful guide for family Acrididae. Worldwide 29,676 validated species of Orthoptera are available (Cigliano *et al.*, 2026) ^[8]. In India Bolivar, (1917) ^[25], Henary (1940) ^[15], Chopard (1969), Tandon and Shishodia (1976) ^[19], Bhowmik (1985a, 1993) ^[4, 5], Julka *et.al.* (1982) ^[16], Bhowmik and Halder (1983) ^[3], Shishodia *et.al.*, 2003 ^[23], Saini & Mehta, 2007 ^[22], Shishodia & Gupta, 2009 ^[24], Shishodia, *et al.*, enumeration 1033 species belonging to 400 genera and 21 families and 1274 species belonging to 442 genera and 23 families (Chand *et al.*, 2024) ^[9]. Present studies divulge the total of 82 species of family Acrididae with 11 sub families are

reported in *in-vivo* and literature from Himachal Pradesh. Table 1 illustrates the concise outcome of current species from the state, with percentage distribution of sub families in figure 1.

Table 1: Species distribution

Subfamilies	No of Species
Acridinae	17
Oedipodinae	22
Gomphocerinae	10
Hemiacridinae	05
Oxyinae	04
Coptacridinae	02
Tropidopolinae	01
Cyrtacanthacridinae	05
Eyprepocnemidinae	09
Catantopinae	06
Calliptaminae	01

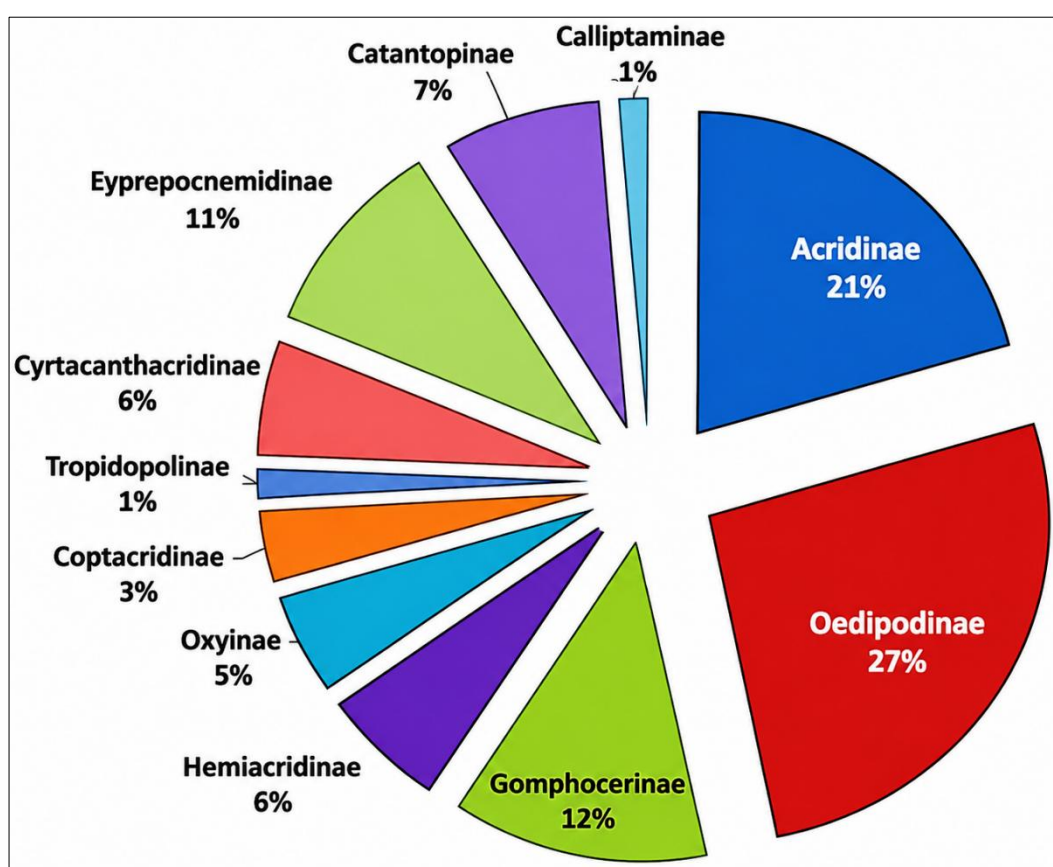


Fig 1: represents the percentage distribution of species

Altitudinal gradient of 11 sub families reveals the significant habitat of the species distribution. Table 2 authenticates the gradient distribution of species. *Oedaleus abruptus* (Thunberg), *Trilophida annulata* (Thunberg),

Xenocatantops humilis humilis (Serville), *Catantops pinguis innotabilis* Stal are typically euryaltitudinal species. *Bryodemus luctuosus indum* (Sauss.), *Sphingonotus savignyi* Sauss, *S. kashmirensis* are the altitudinal indicator species.

Table 2: Shows the species distribution along altitudinal gradient

Altitude Gradient	Habitat	No. of Species
500 masl to 1200 masl	Sal missed Forest, Grassland, Riverside, Stony, Agriculture Field	37
1300 masl to 2600 masl	Chir pine and Deodar Forest, Grassland, Semi aquatic	32
2800 masl to 3800 masl	Sub mountain to mountain meadows and pastures	16
3800 masl to 4600 masl	High altitude passes, alpine meadows and pastures	11

Discussion

Present study is the addition to the earlier study of Bhowmik and Halder (1983) ^[3] in which he studied the 29 species from the state. According to the Bhowmik (1993) ^[5] the Western Himalaya (Kumaon (U.P.) to Kashmir and also western part of Tibet) including Himachal Pradesh comprised of 59 species of family Acrididae with a 25 endemism species. Foreign influence on the grasshopper fauna in the state is also recorded. The endemic *Oedipoda himalayana* and *Eyprepocnemis rosea* species are representation in Africa and Palaearctic regions are available here. Studies on the habitats of Orthoptera revealed that *Acrida exaltata* was most abundant in the open grassland and *Gastrimargus a. africanus* in the stony dry riverine. *Oxya fuscovitata*, *Ceracris nigricornis*, *Trilophida annulata* and *Eyprepocnemis rosea* were mainly found in the agricultural fields. Beside these other who evenly distributed in the forest area, open grassland and cultivation fields are *Eyprepocnemis a. alacris*, *Spathosternum pra. prasiniferum*, *Atractomorpha cranulata*, *Cantantops pingus innotabuls*, *Xenocatanopus h. humilus*.

Although our collecting did not give us numbers per unit area, our qualitatively exhaustive technique did provide a basis for comparing relative population densities as well as species numbers at different altitudes. In the present study there is a rapid drop in numbers of orthoptera species with increasing altitude. Several studies have found a decreasing trend in species richness with altitude (Kikkawa and Williams 1971; Hagvar, 1976; Wolda 1987; Bruhl, *et al.*, 1999; Nathan, and Werner. 1999) ^[17, 14, 21, 7, 18]. Grasshoppers are generally feeders of vegetation and most of the species have a very wide range of host plants, particularly those to agricultural crops of Graminae. Several species are pests of seedlings and saplings of forest trees. Important species of forestry are *Oxya velox*, etc. The Orthoptera is one of the most important groups of herbivorous insects living in these grassland systems. Herbivorous insects are involved in “bottom-up” resource control, which makes them sensitive to changes of habitat structure particularly changes of the grass layer, such as occurs during grazing and mowing (Bock & Bock, 1991; Chambers & Samways, 1998; Gebeyehu & Samways, 2002) ^[6, 10, 13]. Based on their sensitivity, relative high species richness and easy sampling and identification orthopterans are commonly used indicators of habitat heterogeneity, ecosystem biodiversity and environmental stress (Andersen *et al.*, 2001) ^[1]. The significant results would suggest that some Orthoptera could be considered as “Climatic bioindicator” as they are very sensitive to regional climate. However, the interpretation of the results should be tempered as the whole relationship is not well understood and probably involves very complex interactions at different scales. Therefore, they might be bioindicators of other environmental factors. The family Acrididae is the dominant inhabitant of high-altitude areas. An endemic species *Bryodema luctuosa* found in many stony localities and may be collected up to an elevation of 4600 meters.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Director, Zoological Survey of India, Kolkata for providing encouragement and facilities during the surveys. The authors are also thankful to the team members of the surveys and the insect setter of the department.

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