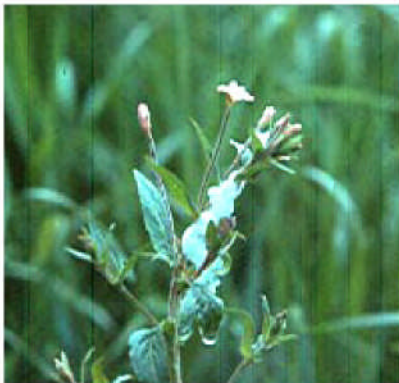




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Common Froghopper (Spittle Bug) – *Philaenus spumarius*



True bugs have mouthparts that are specialized for piercing and sucking: most feed on plant juices though some are predators. They include plant-bugs, bed-bugs, water-boatmen, aphids, leafhoppers, froghoppers, and (in warmer climates) cicadas.



What do they look like?

The adult Common Froghopper is not often seen by the casual observer. Although it is 6 mm long, it can move so quickly when disturbed that it seems just to 'disappear.' It is also not distinctively coloured: indeed, its pattern of coloration is very variable, often being various shades of mottled pale and dark brown, but also ranging from pure sandy brown to dull black. However, the nymph of the Common Froghopper is well-known for the distinctive white frothy 'cuckoo-spit' it produces – and hides within – on the stems of its food plants.



Where do they live?

The Common Froghopper is found in a variety of habitats, but it is perhaps most abundant on waste ground and road-side verges where its weedy herbaceous food plants, such as thistles and mugwort, are often plentiful. Within the 'cuckoo-spit', the nymph of this species feeds by sucking sap from the food plant.



Where can they be found?

This species is widespread and common in the British Isles and across many parts of neighbouring continental Europe.



When can you see them?

The 'cuckoo spit' of the nymphs can be seen in May and June. The adult insects are first seen in late June, and reach maximum numbers in July, but can still be found in late September and October.



What do they do?

The Common Froghopper nymph produces 'cuckoo spit' by mixing droplets of excreted plant sap with a substance similar to egg white. A single nymph lives inside each spittle mass, which is believed to protect it from predators and desiccation.

The many different colour forms of the adults are interesting because they are genetically inherited and appear to be adaptations to the local population's environment.



Did you know...?

When disturbed, the adults can jump as high as 70 cm with enormous force using their powerful back legs. Recent research has shown that within a millisecond they can accelerate to over 14 km/h! Very few potential predators could catch the Common Froghopper once it has jumped.