

Colorado Insect of Interest

Pelecinid Wasp

Scientific Name: *Pelecinus polyturator*
(Drury)

Order: Hymenoptera (Bees, Wasps, Ants, Sawflies, etc.)

Family: Pelecinidae (Pelecinid Wasps)

Identification and Descriptive Features:

The pelecinid wasp is glossy black wasp of unique appearance. Females have an extremely long and very narrow abdomen that may give the insect a body length of over 2.5-inches (7 cm).

Distribution in Colorado: The pelecinid wasp is likely widely distributed across eastern Colorado. However, it is normally found in relatively restricted sites of shaded irrigated turfgrass.

Pelecinus polyturator is the sole North American representative of the insect family Pelecinidae. It occurs over an extremely wide geographic range and is known to occur in much of South and Central America, as well as the eastern half of the US and Canada.

Life History and Habits: The pelecinid wasp is a parasitoid of beetle larvae that live in soil and, perhaps, in rotten wood. It is most known to be associated with grubs in the scarab genus *Phyllophaga*, which produce adult forms more familiarly known as May or June beetles. The long abdomen of the female is used to insert eggs into the soil onto white grub larvae.

The adults are present in mid-late summer, and are usually observed as they make their slow flights across a shaded lawn area, later resting on foliage of trees and shrubs. Populations in Colorado are almost entirely female and they normally reproduce asexually. However, males are known from the state (probably about 2% of the population) and can easily be distinguished by their smaller size and much shorter abdomen.

This wasp is harmless. If handled the female may probe the hand with the tip of the abdomen but they lack venom glands and cannot sting.



Figure 1. Adult female pelecinid wasp.



Figure 2. Adult male pelecinid wasp. Photograph by David Leatherman.