

Facts about Praying Mantids:

Text by Catherine D. Hughes



Praying Mantis – Blend in with their surroundings.

General Facts

These insects get their name because they have very long front legs that they hold in a position that reminds people of praying. There are about 1,800 species of praying mantids around the world. People often refer to any mantid as a praying mantis, but mantises are part of a smaller group within the **mantids**.



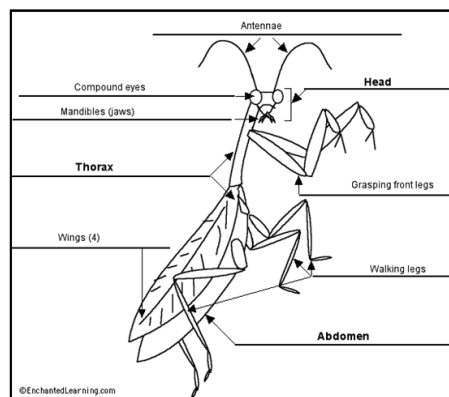
Praying Mantis Range

Diet

Praying mantids are **carnivores**, eating mainly insects and other small animals. Many gardeners and farmers welcome mantids, because the insects they eat are often pests that hurt crops. In addition to insects such as crickets and grasshoppers, mantids eat spiders, frogs, lizards, and even small birds.

Body Features

Praying mantids have long necks topped by a triangular head. They can turn their heads 180 degrees—an entire half circle—which, along with exceptional eyesight, helps them spot prey. They're well-**camouflaged**, adapting colors that help them blend with the plants they live near. Some also have amazing body shapes that make them look like leaves or branches.

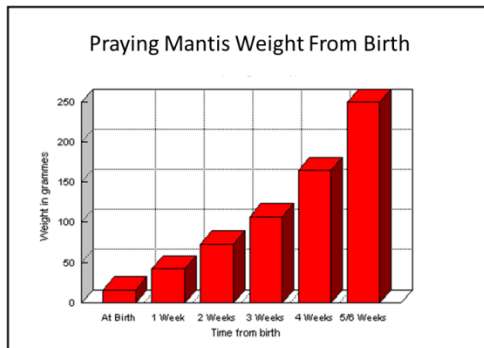


Hunting

To hunt, mantids either sit and wait for an insect to pass by, or they **stalk** them. They're nearly invisible when they sit still, looking like part of a leaf or stem. When they are close enough, they strike so quickly—about one-twentieth of a second—you probably couldn't even see it happen. It's just a blur of motion. Their front legs have rows of sharp spines to help them hold on to their prey, which they usually begin to eat head first!

Size

Most mantids range in length from 0.5 to 6 inches (1.2 to 15 centimeters). There is a species of mantid in Asia though that can reach 10 inches (25 centimeters) long. Female mantids are generally larger than the males of their species.



Size Comparison ~ 3/4 in.



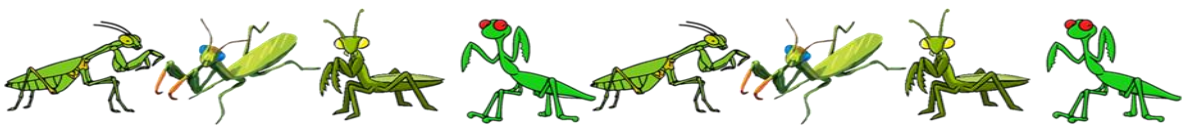
Mating

When a pair of praying mantids mate, the female sometimes chomps off the male's head. Some scientists think that this source of food gives the female a boost of energy to produce her eggs.

Reproduction

Mantids lay eggs in a frothy substance, which turns into a hard case that protects the eggs. Females lay their eggs in the fall, and the eggs can survive through winter in these cases. When a mantid hatches, it looks like a miniature version of the adult, without wings. (These grow later.) Sometimes a young mantid's first meal is one or more of its siblings!



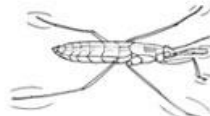
stalk₁: to proceed in search of or approach prey in a slow and steady manner.



FAST FACTS

- The scientific name of the order of praying mantids is *Mantodea*.
- Most species, or kinds, of mantids live in tropical areas of the world.
- Africa has 880 species, while only 20 species live in North America.
- On average, mantids live for about a year.
- Most praying mantids have wings and can fly.
- There are three main parts of a mantid's body: the head, the thorax, and the abdomen. Part of its thorax looks like a neck.
- While mantids are predators, they also have enemies that eat them. Bats, rodents, birds, frogs, and spiders eat adult mantids.
- Mantids are close relatives of the cockroach.



Insect	Environmental Factor	Adaptation
Praying Mantis 	Fast-moving prey	Trap-like front legs to quickly snatch prey
Flea 	Feeds on the blood of much larger animals	Biting and sucking mouthparts, plus powerful back legs for jumping around host animal
Water Strider 	Lives on the surface of still, fresh water	Long, water-resistant legs for "striding" on water's surface