

10 Fascinating Praying Mantis facts



1. Praying Mantises live in the tropics

Of approximately 2,000 species of mantids described to date, almost all are tropical creatures. Just 18 native species are known from the entire North American continent. About 80% of all members of the order Mantodea belong to a single family, the Mantidae.

2. The Mantises We See Most Often in the U.S. Are Exotic Species

You're more likely to find an introduced mantid species than you are to find a native praying mantis. The Chinese mantis (*Tenodera aridifolia*) was introduced near Philadelphia, PA about 80 years ago. This large mantid can measure up to 100 mm in length. The European mantid, *Mantis religiosa*, is pale green and about half the size of the Chinese mantid. European mantids were introduced near Rochester, NY nearly a century ago. Both the Chinese and European mantids are common in the northeastern U.S. today.

3. Mantises Can Turn Their Heads a Full 180 Degrees

Try to sneak up on a praying mantis, and you may be startled when it looks over its shoulder at you. No other insect can do so. Praying mantids have a flexible joint between the head and prothorax that enables them to swivel their heads. This ability, along with their rather humanoid faces and long, grasping forelegs, endears them to even the most entomophobic people among us.

4. Mantises Are Closely Related to Cockroaches and Termites

These three seemingly different insects – mantids, termites, and cockroaches – are believed to descend from a common ancestor. In fact, some entomologists group these insects in a superorder (Dictyoptera), due to their close evolutionary relationships.

5. Praying Mantises Overwinter as Eggs in Temperate Regions

The female praying mantis deposits her eggs on a twig or stem in the fall and then protects them with a Styrofoam-like substance she secretes from her body. This forms a protective egg case, or ootheca, in which her offspring will develop over the winter. Mantid egg cases are easy to spot in the winter when leaves have fallen from shrubs and trees. But be forewarned! If you bring an overwintering ootheca into your warm home, you may find your house teeming with tiny mantids.

6. Female Mantises Sometimes Eat Their Mates

Yes, it's true, female praying mantids do cannibalize their partners. In some instances, she'll even behead the poor chap before they've consummated their relationship. As it turns out, a male mantid is an even better lover when his brain, which controls inhibition, is detached from his abdominal ganglion, which controls the actual act of copulation. Cannibalism is variable across the different mantid species, with estimates ranging from about 46% of all encounters to none at all.¹ It occurs among praying mantids between 13–28% of natural encounters in the field.

7. Mantises Use Specialized Front Legs to Capture Prey

The praying mantis is so named because when waiting for prey, it holds its front legs in an upright position as if they are folded in prayer. Don't be fooled by its angelic pose, however, because the mantid is a deadly predator. If a bee or fly happens to land within its reach, the praying mantis will extend its arms with lightning quick speed, and grab the hapless insect. Sharp spines line the mantid's raptorial forelegs, enabling it to grasp the prey tightly as it eats. Some larger mantids catch and eat lizards, frogs, and even birds. Who says bugs are at the bottom of the food chain?! The praying mantis would better be called the preying mantis.

8. Mantises Are Relatively Young Compared to Other Ancient Insects

The earliest fossil mantids date from the Cretaceous Period and are between 146-66 million years old. These primitive mantid specimens lack certain traits found in the mantids that live today. They don't have the elongate pronotum, or extended neck, of modern-day mantids and they lack spines on their forelegs.

9. Praying Mantises Are Not Necessarily Beneficial Insects

Praying mantids can and will consume lots of other invertebrates in your garden, so they're often considered beneficial predators. It's important to note, however, that mantids don't discriminate between good bugs and bad bugs when looking for meals. A praying mantis is just as likely to eat a native bee that's pollinating your plants as it is to eat a caterpillar pest. Garden supply companies often sell the egg cases of Chinese mantids, touting them as a biological control for your garden, but these predators may do as much harm as good in the end.

10. Mantises Have Two Eyes, but Only One Ear

A praying mantis has two large, compound eyes that work together to help it decipher visual cues. But strangely, the praying mantis has just a single ear, located on the underside of its belly, just forward of its hind legs. This means the mantid cannot discriminate the direction of a sound, nor its frequency. What it can do is detect ultrasound, or sound produced by echolocating bats. Studies have shown that praying mantids are quite good at evading bats. A mantis in flight will essentially stop, drop, and roll in midair, dive bombing away from the hungry predator. Not all mantids have an ear, and those that don't are typically flightless, so they don't have to flee flying predators like bats.



Mantis species

There are around 2300 species of praying mantis on the Earth of which a few hundred are being kept as pets. Here are some of the species:

African Mantis

The African Mantis, or more specific and scientific *Sphodromantis lineola*, is a large and fierce species of mantis. It is commonly kept as a pet because of its size and fierce hunting techniques and its relatively easy care. Her natural habitat lies in sub-Saharan Africa.



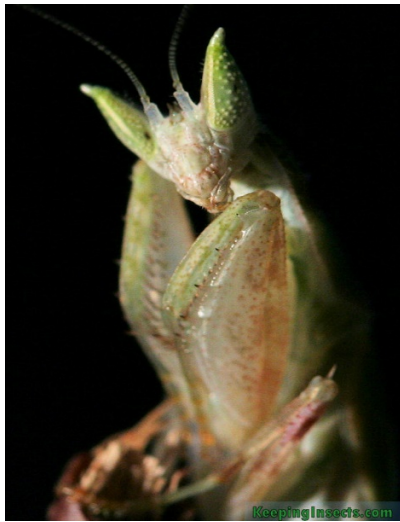
Dead Leaf Mantis

The Dead Leaf Mantis, or *Deroplatys desiccata*, is a large mantis from Malaysia that is camouflaged as a dead leaf. It looks amazing! They are not very easy to keep and breed, but it is definitely possible.



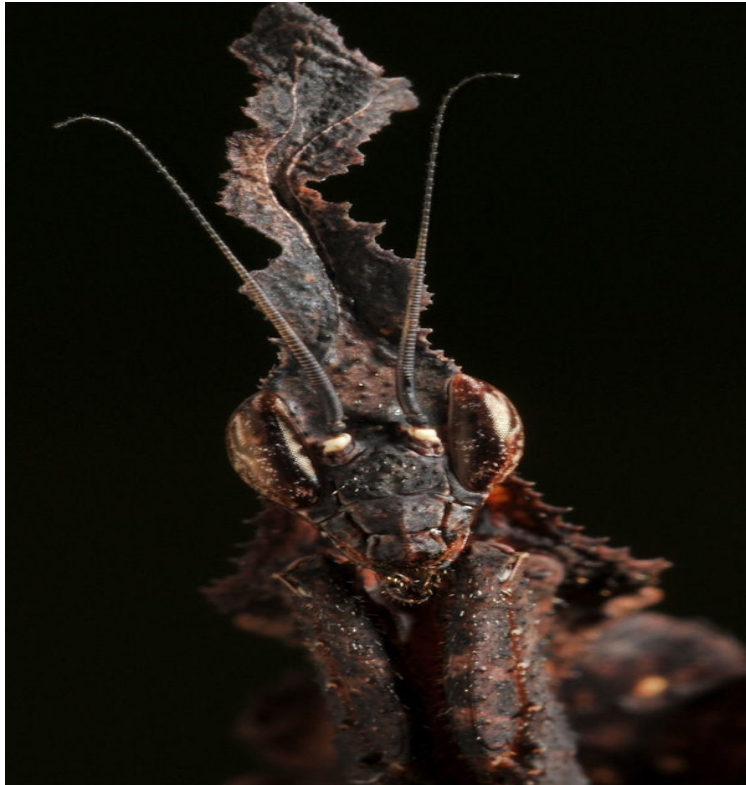
Gambian Spotted-Eye Mantis

The Gambian Spotted-Eye Flower Mantis, or *Pseudoharpax virescens*, is a small mantis species from Gambia (West Africa).



Ghost mantis

The Ghost mantis, also known as *Phyllocrania paradoxa*, is a species that has a beautiful leaf-like body. Its color is usually dark brown, but can also be sand, light brown or even green. The natural habitat of the Ghost mantis is Madagascar and continental Africa.



Giant Asian Mantis

Giant Asian Mantis, or more scientifically *Hierodula membranacea*, is one of the most common mantis pets. Its large size and the relative easiness of keeping this species contributes to its popularity. Sometimes this species is incorrectly referred to as *Hierodula grandis*.

It will not surprise you that the Giant Asian Mantis has its natural habitat in Asia.



Indian Flower Mantis

The Indian Flower Mantis, or *Creobroter pictipennis*, is a mantis species in the flower mantis group. *Creobroter gemmatus* is very similar to *Creobroter pictipennis*, only the pattern on the wings is different. The care for both species is the same, therefore you can use this caresheet also for *C. gemmatus*.



Orchid Mantis

Orchid Mantis, or *Hymenopus coronatus*, is a beautiful pink and white mantis with lobes on its legs that look like flower petals. Although this species does not live on orchids, it does look remarkably well like a flower or orchid. This species is very popular and loved as a pet because of its beautiful bright colors and amazing camouflage. In the wild *Hymenopus coronatus* is found in Malaysia.



Sphodromantis baccettii

Praying mantids of the genus *Sphodromantis* are among the most commonly kept praying mantis. Most people keep *Sphodromantis lineola*. The species of this caresheet, *Sphodromantis baccettii*, is uncommon as a pet. *Sphodromantis lineola* is similar to *S. baccettii* in care and size, but there are some differences in coloration.

Sphodromantis baccettii is endemic to West Africa.



Spiny Flower Mantis

The spiny Flower Mantis, or *Pseudocreobotra wahlbergii*, is a beautiful and colorful flower mantis. They are white with orange and green stripes, and as adults they have a beautiful patch of color on their wings that looks like an eye.



Arizona Unicorn Mantis

The Arizona Unicorn Mantis, or *Pseudovates arizonae* is a stick-like praying mantis from North America. It carries the name “Unicorn Mantis” thanks to a small cone in the middle of his head, resembling a unicorn horn! If you take a

closer look, you can see the mantis actually has two tiny “horns” next to each other.

Pseudovates arizonae occurs naturally in North America, especially Arizona. It is not common in captivity. Some other mantis species, like *Phyllobates* sp, are also referred to as Unicorn Mantis.



Thank you for reading