

# Flora & Fauna of Spain

## The Praying Mantis



The Mantids are a group of 1,800 carnivorous insects. Most mantids are from tropical countries although a few do occur in cooler climates. Their closest relatives are the stick insects, grasshoppers and cockroaches. Like their relatives the mantids undergo simple or incomplete metamorphosis; they do not have a maggot or caterpillar but go through several stages all of which look like miniature, wingless adults.

The praying mantis is named for its prominent front legs, which are bent and held together at an angle that suggests the position of prayer. The larger group of these insects is more properly called the praying mantids. Mantis refers to the genus mantis, to which only some praying mantids belong.

By any name, these fascinating insects are formidable predators. They have triangular heads poised on a long "neck," or elongated thorax. Mantids can turn their heads 180 degrees to scan their surroundings with two large compound eyes and three other simple eyes located between them.

Being a carnivorous insect, the praying mantis feeds primarily on other insects such as Fruit Flies, Crickets, Beetles, Moths and Bees. However, it is not uncommon for larger mantids to consume small reptiles, birds and even small mammals.

To capture their prey, mantids use their green or brown camouflage to blend in with the surroundings and wait for the prey to be within striking distance. They then use their raptorial front legs to quickly snatch the victim. It then uses the front legs to help position the victim so it may eat it better.

However, the insects will also eat others of their own kind. The most famous example of this is the notorious mating behavior of the adult female, who sometimes eats her mate just after—or even during—mating. Yet this behavior seems not to deter males from reproduction.

Females regularly lay hundreds of eggs in a small case, and nymphs hatch looking much like tiny versions of their parents.