

# PRAYING MANTIS

Gail Brock '11

Early autumn, many large praying mantises can be seen in gardens. By then they have become voracious eaters of nearly anything that has the misfortune to come close enough to be snared: bees, butterflies, moths. Though considered by many to be beneficial insects, they are indiscriminate feeders, and will eat nearly any insect. They do not stalk their prey; they simply sit motionless, waiting for a meal to come within range.

An almost ancient looking insect, the praying mantis (or mantid) is found in most parts of the world. Those found in the United States are not native but were introduced from China about 180 years ago. A few weeks from now, the



female will mate, often consuming her mate in the process. She will deposit her eggs, between 70 and 200 of them, on a twig or branch. Then she will encase the egg mass in a styrofoam-like substance secreted from her body and there the eggs will safely overwinter. Come spring, hundreds of tiny copies of the adults that that produced them will emerge and begin their endless search for food.

## Here are some other interesting facts about the praying mantises:

- They are called praying mantises because of the posture their front legs take when the insects are at rest.
- Though they may look benign, those “praying” forelegs can reach out very rapidly to grab a meal when one comes within range. These legs are covered with spine-like projections that help keep prey from escaping once it is caught.
- Mantises can turn their heads nearly 180 degrees. This is very helpful when looking for prey and also for protection from being preyed upon. Two large compound eyes further assist in discriminating food from foe in the mantises’ surroundings.
- Praying mantises can fly but only as adults. Their wings don't develop until the insects are mature.

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Praying mantises are not endangered and in most states are not protected in any way. However as good stewards the planet and the creatures on it, we do have a responsibility to protect living things.