

MANTODEA

The Order Mantodea are the praying mantids. These have been lumped with the Orthoptera in the past, or sometimes they have been lumped with the cockroaches in an order called the Dictyoptera. There are more than 1500 species in the world with only 17 known from North America. All North American species belong in the family Mantidae, except one in southern Florida which belongs in the Mantoididae. In fact, most of our common species belong in the subfamily Mantinae.

A. Family Mantidae: Praying mantids are usually fairly large and somewhat stick-like. The prothorax and front coxae are very long; and the front femora and tibiae are armed with strong spines and fitted for grasping prey (ie. they are raptorial). They have the tarsi 5-segmented; the antennae are relatively short; the head is wider than the pronotum, and is highly movable (Mantids are the only insects that can "look over their shoulder"). Many species exhibit mimicry of their surroundings. Some will look like leaves or even the petals of a flower.

They are predaceous, and are generally considered to be beneficial, but they are non-discriminate predators and will feed on both pest and other beneficial insects (including bees). In fact, these have been reared and released for biological control (with limited success). They are sometimes sold commercially to local home gardeners. [I have an old flyer advertising the sale of/and instructions for rearing and releasing mantids in a home garden - 1974 prices were: 5 egg cases for \$2.50, 10 egg cases for \$4.00, 35 or more egg cases would be 0.35 cents each].

They lay their eggs within a brown frothy mass called an ootheca. This is the stage in which they overwinter. Also, it is true that often the female will eat the male either during or right after mating.