



*Angel Marie

Mantids/Mantises (Order Mantodea)

Classic and Colorful Ambush Hunters

Mantids, or mantises are an extremely large and diverse group of carnivorous, predatory insects consisting of over 2,400 species overall! Mantids are extremely diverse in size, shape, color, and pattern, as well as their biology, habits, and natural history depending on the species. Many species of mantids can have extremely cryptic coloration and/or appearances, lending many to resembling tree bark, while others may resemble sticks, leaves, or even colorful flowers! Most species of mantids are ambush predators of other insects and other invertebrates, and use these cryptic disguises to both remain undetected to prey, as well as render them much more difficult to detect to predators. Some, however, are more active predators in seeking out prey. Some mantids can also fly, while others may be either wingless, or have wings but seldom fly. There is also often sexual dimorphism among many mantid species in regards to their size, colors, patterns, or other appearances between males and females, and cannibalism can also be common, particularly during times of limited resources or following mating (i.e. sexual cannibalism). All mantids, however, have large triangular heads, bulging eyes, and a pair of specialized, distinctively modified fore limbs and stationary upright postures used for capturing, grasping, and consuming prey. Mantids also possess keen stereo eyesight, compound eyes, and vision for locating prey. The folded forearms and statured upright appearances of these insects have often lent them the common name of “praying” mantises. Furthermore, when threatened, many species will either remain cryptic and behave in manners as to mimic a leaf, twig, or other piece of vegetation in the wind, or will rear themselves up while displaying their fore limbs and often spreading their hind wings as well to appear larger, with the hind wings often having bright colors and/or patterns as a further warning display. Mantids are among the largest and most intriguing group of insects to keep as pets, and an entire ancillary sub-group of dedicated mantid keepers and enthusiasts has formed as a result.

Taxonomy

Life: All living, physical, and animate entities

Domain: Eukaryota

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Arthropoda

Class: Insecta

Order: Mantodea

Family: Mantidae

**Taxonomy subject to change and revision.*

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Lifespan and Longevity

Depending on the species, as well as sex, longevity for mantids can range anywhere from 4 to 8 weeks up to approximately 1 year.

Distribution and Habitat

Depending on the species and taxa, mantids can be found in a wide variety of temperate to tropical habitats and environments throughout most of worldwide except Antarctica and colder regions depending on species.

Conservation Status

Conservation status dependent upon the species. Some species are IUCN Least Concern (LC). Some are IUCN Near Threatened (NT), Conservation Dependent (CD), Vulnerable (VU), Endangered (EN), to Critically Endangered (CE). Some Not Evaluated for the IUCN Red List (NE) or otherwise Data Deficient (DD).

Experience Level Required

Novice/Beginner to Advanced (depending on species).

Size

Mantids vary greatly in size depending on age, sex, and species. They can range from 1 ½ to 5 ½ inches depending on the species.

Housing and Enclosure

Housing must be sealed and escape proof, as well as adequately ventilated. A secured 2 to 10 gallon aquarium, terrarium or similar sized tub or container with an appropriate lid is recommended, and should be least 3 times the width of the mantis, and at least 2 times wider. Several of the acrylic displays and enclosures that are now manufactured for housing arachnids, insects, and other invertebrates can also be used. Nearly any substrate can work for mantids if it is non-toxic and not treated with chemicals or pesticides. In addition, furnishings for allowing these insects climbing and hiding opportunities should also be provided, and can include artificial or live foliage, branches, twigs, or other cage decor. For water and hydration, misting at least once every few days is also recommended, or more frequently in areas of drier humidity. Mantids are typically aggressive toward one another, and can oftentimes be cannibalistic, and should therefore not be housed in multiples unless for breeding attempts.

Temperature, Lighting, and Humidity

Temperature and humidity requirements vary greatly depending on the species of mantid being maintained. Some species require damper, higher humidity environments, while others may require drier setups with lower to moderate humidity. Further research into these requirements for the specific species of mantid of interest is best recommended. More specific lighting, heating, and humidity product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well. Spot clean the enclosure for wastes, feces, or uneaten food at least once per week. Be sure to periodically replace the substrate, clean, and disinfect the enclosure and its furnishings at minimum every 2 to 3 months.

Feeding, Diet, and Nutrition

Insectivorous to Carnivorous; Mantids tend to be insectivorous, feeding on smaller insects and other invertebrates they can capture and consume using their specialized pair of front forelimbs. Some species can even capture and consume small vertebrates as well. In captivity, a variety of live feeder insects can be offered either in the enclosure or via tongs including crickets, fruit flies, roaches, caterpillars, spring tails, waxworms, superworms, mealworms, moths, and

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butterflies. Do not provide any food items which may be too large for your mantid, or are venomous or toxic. Feeding frequency depends on the age, sex, and size of your mantid, and can be every 1 to 4 days depending on these factors. Mantids also do not typically require any additional calcium vitamin D3, or other nutritional supplementation, but providing it can help with their exoskeleton growth and development. More specific dietary and supplementary product suggestions and recommendations that can best suit one's needs, as well as those of one's animals can be given as well.

Handling

Most mantids are fragile animals that should be handled quite carefully, if at all. Always scoop or cup them gently, and allow them to sit/walk freely without restraint if handling these insects is absolutely necessary.

****Also be sure to practice basic cleanliness and hygiene associated with proper husbandry after touching or handling any animals or animal enclosures to prevent the possibility of contracting salmonellosis or any other zoonotic pathogens****

Contact

Authored by Eric Roscoe. For any additional questions, comments, and/or concerns regarding this animal, group of animals, or this care sheet, please email and contact the Madison Area Herpetological Society at info@madisonherps.org

Disclaimer: Note that the information provided in these, or any care sheets, are not intended to be all-exhaustive, and further research and care should always be sought and provided when it comes to any species one may prospectively be interested in. These care sheets are also not intended to serve as substitutes for professional veterinary medical care and husbandry should any animal require it. Always seek proper and professional veterinary care for any animal should the need arise, and be prepared ahead of time for any and all husbandry costs and expenses that may occur with any animal beyond the initial purchase. Any animal owned is ultimately a matter of personal/individual care and responsibility.

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