

Praying Mantis (Mantis religiosa)

A big predator moving across the south.

The Praying Mantis, a distant relative of grasshoppers and cockroaches, is spreading through southern British Columbia. You might catch a glimpse of this insect in tall grasses bordering roads or uncultivated fields. Or you might see the egg sac of a mantis: a hard, papery case glued to a branch or a fence post.

The slow-moving Praying Mantis is a carnivore that eats only living insects. Using large, spiny forelegs, it captures and holds its prey before devouring it.

Impact on Communities and Native Species

It is hard to say if the Praying Mantis is having any effect on our native BC mantis, the Ground Mantis (*Litaneutria minor*). This rare little wingless species has shared its habitat with the Praying Mantis for decades, apparently without declining. The increase of the Praying Mantis, however, introduces a new competitor to many areas—time will tell if it causes any observable problems.

Invasion History

The Praying Mantis was introduced accidentally to New York from Europe in 1899 and spread to eastern Canada soon after. In the 1930s, the Praying Mantis arrived in BC when federal entomologists in the Okanagan and Shuswap regions imported them in an attempt to control the grasshoppers eating agricultural crops. Mantids quickly disappeared from most of the region, but by the 1970s, there was a small population between Okanagan Falls and Osoyoos in the south Okanagan.

In the last decade, however, the Praying Mantis has spread farther afield, moving as far north as Kamloops and east to the Kootenays. In 1999, these mantids were recorded on south Vancouver Island, perhaps the result of people transporting egg cases or adult mantids. Others sighted in the Vancouver area probably spread from western Washington State where the species is common.



A Praying Mantis with prey.

Identifying Characteristics:

- long, slender, neck-like thorax
- spiny, grasping front legs
- prominent compound eyes
- threadlike antennae
- adults are 47–56 mm long
- both brown and green forms occur
- both sexes have wings
- camouflaged; will blend in with grasses and leaves