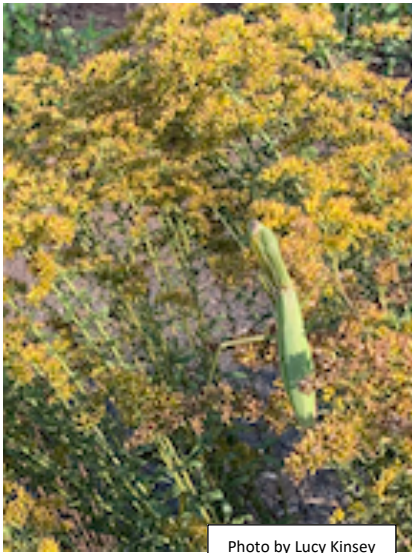


INSECTS - Praying Mantises at Ivy Creek

Created for use by the Ivy Creek Foundation

Praying Mantises are so unusual looking. It is fun to look for these insects during the summer. At Ivy Creek, they can be found in the Pollinator Garden or the meadow area of the North Field on the lavender Field Trail. However, you must look carefully to find them. They stay very still so that they look like a leaf or stalk of a plant. Their green or brown color camouflages (hides) them from both predators and prey. They can grow up to six inches long, so larger ones can be a little easier to find. Once you spot their triangular shaped head and long body, you will probably find more.



INTERESTING FACTS about Praying Mantises:

- They are insects. They have a head, a thorax, an abdomen, eyes, mouth, two antennae, and six legs.
- Their name comes from how they hold their two front legs. They look like they are praying. Their forearms are spiny to allow them to grab and hold onto their prey (food).
- Their head is triangular. They can turn their heads 180°, just like humans
- They have two really big eyes that are easy to see. They also have three smaller eyes, which are harder to see, located between the two big eyes and behind the antennae. All these eyes and the fact that they turn their heads mean they have great eyesight!
- They do not hear very well though. They have one ear and it is located on its abdomen.
- They are carnivores, meaning they eat other insects, spiders and even small creatures like frogs and lizards. Among insects, they eat crickets, moths, bees, caterpillars, butterflies, beetles, aphids and even other praying mantises. When they capture their prey, they tend to bite its head off first.



- They are food for frogs, bats, snakes, larger birds and spiders.
- They live between six months to a year. A few may hibernate under fallen logs. Most end up being eaten by predators or other praying mantises.
- The female lays eggs in the fall on plant stems. She encases them in a foamy substance that then hardens to protect the eggs through the winter. The egg sac is called an ootheca. It is fun to look for these in the meadow of North Field during the winter. It looks like a brown or gray styrofoam blob.
- The ootheca sacs can hold between 100-400 eggs! The eggs usually hatch in May. Once the egg sac starts to hatch, mantis nymphs emerge from little crevices on the ootheca. The nymphs are about 1/8" long, but otherwise look just like their parent. They will molt (shed their skin) five to ten times before they become an adult. To watch a fascinating video of praying mantises hatching, go to either of these links:

https://youtu.be/Phm4Xd_Ffm0

https://youtu.be/_vLK9ONu8Us

- Both male and female adults have wings, but the female can't fly.
- Some people have been known to keep a praying mantis as a pet. Know that they will bite if provoked, though their bite is not venomous. They require so many insects to eat, it is best to leave them in the wild and enjoy observing them in their habitat.



Photo by Bob Gore

NOTE TO PARENTS: Praying Mantises are attracted to Marigolds, Angelica, Cosmos, and Yarrow. Check those plants when searching for them. Take a magnifying glass with you on your nature walks. You never know when it will come in handy.

RELATED BOOKS:

[Praying Mantises](#), by Lisa J. Amstutz (Nonfiction)

[My Awesome Summer, by P.Mantis](#), by Paul Meisel (Informative Fiction)

On the next page we have provided a praying mantis for you to color, courtesy of Virginia Masterston.

