

Male mantids try to avoid sex cannibalism

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Female praying mantids are notorious for sexual cannibalism and U.S. researchers have determined male mantids try to avoid that fate.

State University of New York-Fredonia biologists Jonathan Lelito and William Brown studied male risk-taking behavior in a praying mantis by altering the risk of cannibalism and observing changes in behavior. They found males can assess the risk of cannibalism and become more cautious in the presence of hungry females.

"We know hungry females are more likely to cannibalize and a head-on orientation makes it easier for her to attack the male with her predatory front legs," said Brown.

The researchers therefore varied female hunger and physical orientation to assess how male mantids behaved. They found males responded to greater risk by slowing their approach, increasing courtship behavior and mounting from a greater -- and possibly safer -- distance.

"This shows that male mantids actively assess variation in risk and change their behavior to reduce the chance of being cannibalized," said Brown. "Males are clearly not complicit, and the act of sexual cannibalism in praying mantids is an example of extreme conflict between the sexes."

The research appears in the *American Naturalist*.

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