

Study shows orchid mantis more attractive to their prey than real orchids

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(Phys.org) —The orchid mantis is famous for its remarkable similarity to the orchid flower, but researchers from Macquarie University have now discovered that its' unique form of deception not only attracts its prey by resembling a blossom, but is in fact even more attractive to pollinators than the real flower.

Since its discovery in South East Asia more than a century ago, the rarity and elusive nature of the orchid mantis has made it difficult for scientists to understand why and how it has evolved this bizarre appearance.

Researchers James O'Hanlon and Marie Herberstein from Macquarie University, along with Gregory Holwell from the University of Auckland mounted an expedition to Malaysia to study the orchid mantis. They observed that the body of the orchid mantis was attractive to flying insects, demonstrating how their flower-like appearance has evolved to lure in unsuspecting [pollinators](#) searching for nectar in flowers.

"What really surprised us was the fact that the orchid mantises were even more successful at attracting pollinators than real flowers," said O'Hanlon.

"Their bright floral colours and petal shaped legs create a tantalizing lure for insects. So it seems that orchid mantises not only look like flowers but also beat [flowers](#) at their own game.

"After more than a century of conjecture we provide the first experimental evidence of pollinator deception in the orchid mantis and the first description of a unique predatory strategy that has not been documented in any other animal species."

Their findings have been published in the *The American Naturalist*.

More information: O'Hanlon, J., Holwell, G. and Herberstein, M. (2013) Pollinator Deception in the Orchid Mantis, *The American Naturalist*. [www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1 ... true&jpdConfirm=true](http://www.jstor.org/stable/pdfplus/1...true&jpdConfirm=true)

Provided by Macquarie University

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