

Care guide

Mallee Grass Mantis, *Archimantis sobrina*



Mallee Grass Mantids are long slender praying mantids, growing up to around 90mm in body length. They are found throughout mainland Australia, generally in dryer areas and arid or semi-arid habitats. They favour tall grasses and also frequent small eucalyptus and acacia trees. They feed on a wide variety of other invertebrates, but due to their relatively delicate build, they usually prey on animals considerably smaller than themselves.

Like other mantids this species lays its eggs encased within a foamy ootheca. Unlike the oothecae of many other mantids, *Archimantis* oothecae remain relatively soft and spongy. The ootheca is usually attached to a branch or some other solid surface. The young hatch several months later, and begin feeding soon after emerging. They will tolerate each other for a short time, but once they disperse any chance meetings of the siblings will often result in one eating the other.

These mantids grow by shedding their outer skeleton (exoskeleton). This process is called ecdysis or moulting. To moult successfully they need to hang uninterrupted beneath a leaf or branch. This can take 10mins to half an hour. Maturity has been reached once the mantids have developed wings. Males and females can be identified as they get larger; males have 7 segments in the abdomen, and females have 6.

Like most mantids, females of this species may consume the male during the mating process. Usually when this occurs, the male can still continue to copulate without much of the front half of his body. Although tis practice isn't as common in this species as it is in some other mantids, the males sacrifice serves to aid the development of the young he is fathering through the nourishing meal he is providing his partner.

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Food: Live or freshly dead insects. Crickets, cockroaches and flies are ideal. Dead insects must be fed to the mantid via forceps or tweezers, as they will not pick up dead insects off the ground. This species can be deterred by prey insects that are too large for it to manage easily, so insects no greater than 1/4 the mantids size should be used as food.

Water: Mist spray around your mantis each day – it will drink the droplets.

Enclosure: The enclosure needs to be large enough to allow your mantid to shed its exoskeleton properly. An enclosure should be higher than it is wide, as mantids like to climb upwards. Add branches or sticks to the enclosure to give the mantis something to climb on. Place the enclosure in a spot where it gets a bit of daylight each day, but be careful it doesn't over heat in direct sunlight. Make sure there is plenty of ventilation in your enclosure.

Temperature: This species will do best at 22 – 28 degrees C, but will tolerate 15 – 30 degrees. Cooler temperatures will result in a slower growth rate.

Life span: 9 -12 months.

Handling: These insects can be handled, but care must be taken when picking them up. They can be nervous at times, and want to jump off your hand. They should be picked up gently, by coaxing them onto your hand. They always prefer to climb up, so use this to your advantage when picking them up and putting them back into their enclosure. They do have small claws on their feet that they use to hang on with. Females tend to be more easily handled than males; males can fly and are a little more nervous.

Reproduction: Adult males will mate with adult females all year round. Pairing them requires a large enough enclosure to allow the male to be introduced well away from the female so that he can make his own way towards her. Cramped conditions may lead to the female consuming the male before mating occurs. The female will produce an ootheca 14 - 20 days after mating. Unmated females may also produce an ootheca, but it will not hatch. Fertile oothecae can take 1 to 2 months to hatch; incubation periods are temperature dependant. A hundred or so nymphs can emerge, and the nymphs can be left together for a while, but should be separated relatively soon to avoid excessive cannibalism.

Common issues: Sometimes mantids will not shed their exoskeleton properly. To avoid this, ensure that there is enough space for the mantis to do this, and that it has sufficient branches etc to hang from. Other causes can be that their environment is too dry, so ensure daily misting takes place. Live food insects can also interrupt them during moulting, so remove insects if they have not been eaten.

NOTE: These animals are captive bred, and should not be released into the wild.

For more information contact Minibeast Wildlife at info@minibeastwildlife.com.au