

PRAYING MANTIDS IN SASKATCHEWAN

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Until last year, no praying mantids had been recorded for the Prairie Provinces but, surprisingly, two were collected in Saskatchewan in 2002.

On August 13, in the west block of Grasslands National Park along a coulee that branches off the Frenchman River Valley, I swept a small brown praying mantis from Skunkbush (*Rhus aromatica*). This was about 2 km north of the Montana border.

The specimen was sent to Dr. Vernon Vickery, retired McGill University entomologist. He confirmed it to be the Minor Ground Mantis, *Litaneutria minor* (Scudder).^a This is a species native to western North America, previously known to range north to southern British Columbia and

northern Montana along the Milk River Valley just south of the Saskatchewan-Alberta border.³ The Frenchman River drains southeastward into the Milk River, so I expect that this praying mantis naturally occurs where I found it and was previously missed by collectors.

The specimen is about 25mm long, a male with the wing covers (fore wings or tegmina) reaching to the end of the abdomen (Figure 1). It lacks the dark central blot usually present on the hind wing.

Amazingly, a second praying mantis was captured a few weeks later in Regina on September 9, 2002. It was on Brad Owen's window along Dewdney Avenue. He brought it alive to Jeanette Pepper at the

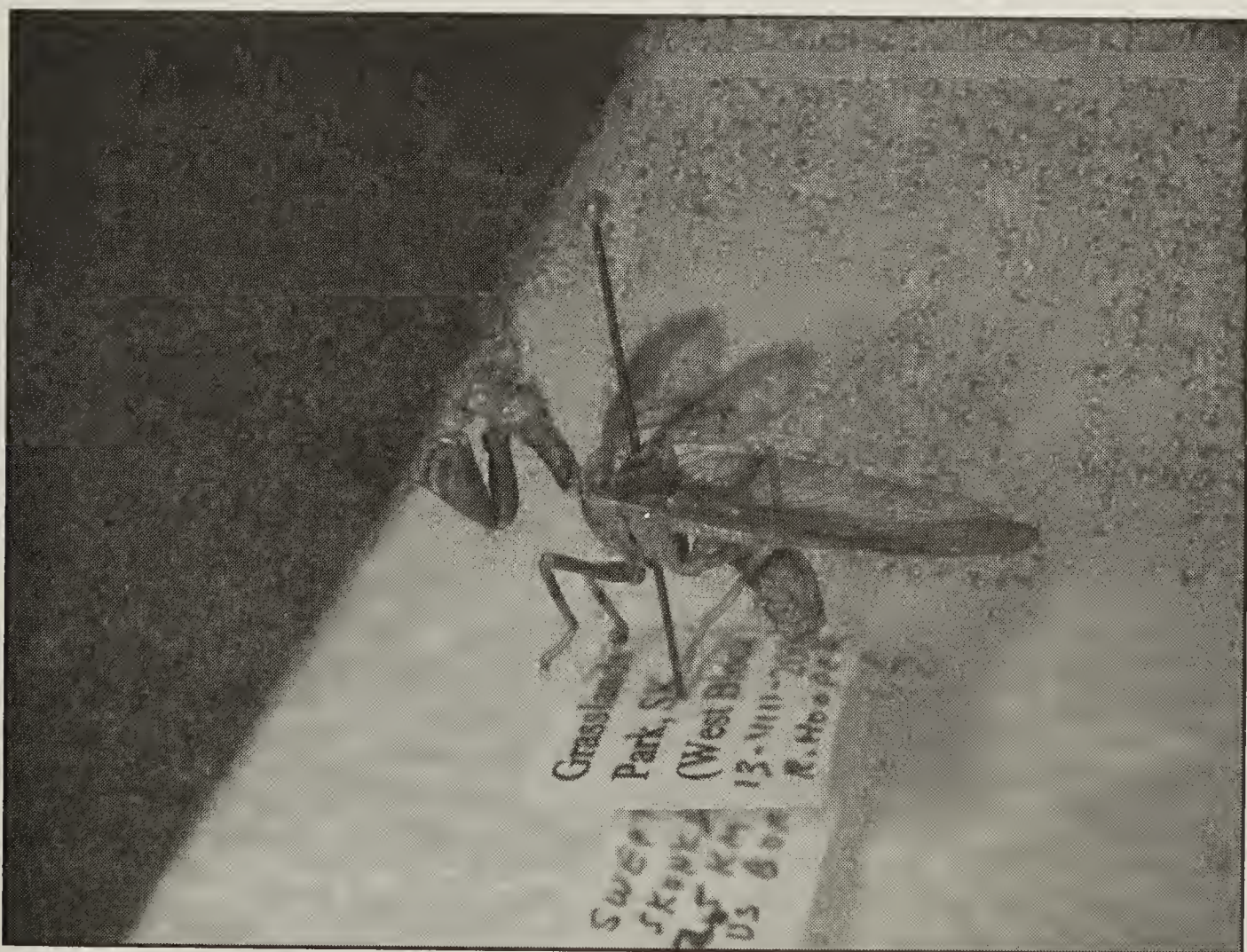


Figure 1. Minor Ground Mantis collected in Grasslands National Park in 2002

Jeanette Pepper

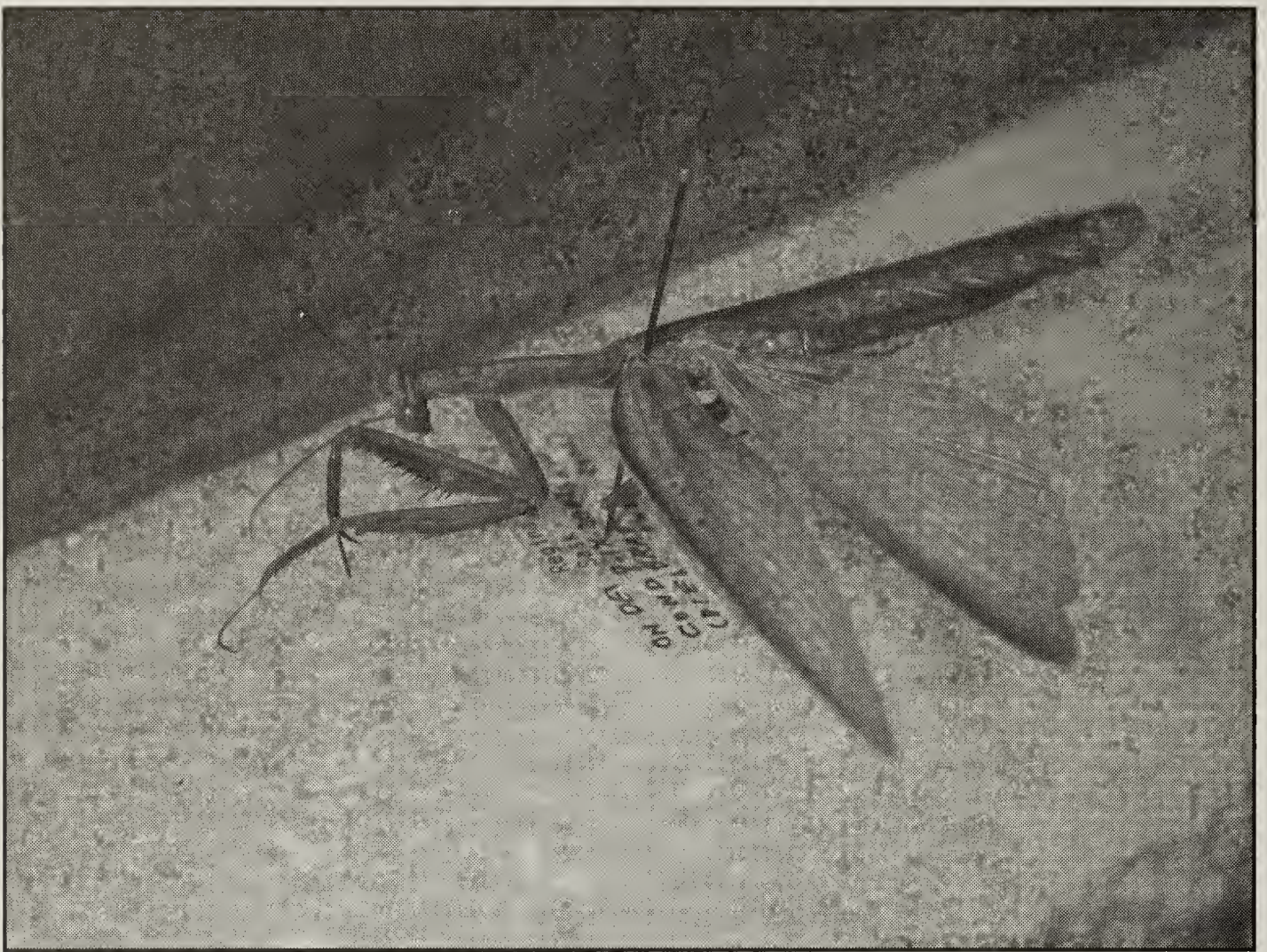


Figure 2. European Mantis collected in Regina in 2002

Jeanette Pepper

Saskatchewan Conservation Data Centre. She mounted it and brought it to the Royal Saskatchewan Museum. This specimen is a brown colour phase of the European Mantis (*Mantis religiosa* Linnaeus) and is about 50 mm long (Figure 2).

The European Mantis ranges across Europe, Asia and North Africa, and was introduced accidentally into America.¹ It was first reported in 1899 at Rochester, N.Y. and is now widespread across temperate areas of the United States. In 1985, Vickery and Kevan reported it for Quebec, Ontario and Michigan, and also for the state of Washington and south-central British Columbia.³ Perhaps our Saskatchewan specimen indicates that it may have spread north from the United States. On the other hand, it could possibly have blown into the province and therefore may not be established here at all. Another possibility is that it is an escaped pet. If anyone in the Regina area knows of a pet praying mantis escaping last year, we would like to hear about it.

Praying mantids have short, powerful front legs that they hold in a pious-looking fashion, as if they are praying. They are nature's example of a hypocrite, however, for they are not as pious as they look. As soon as another insect ventures within reach, the front legs extend quickly forward and grab the intruder for a meal. It then becomes a "preying mantis." The female praying mantis is no kinder to her mate: she may eat him during, or after, mating!

^a Mantis common names, and the use of "mantids" as the plural of "mantis", follow Helfer 1963.

1. BLATCHLEY, W.S. 1920. Orthoptera of Northeastern America, The Nature Publishing Company, Indianapolis, Indiana.

2. HELFER, J.R. 1963. How to Know the Grasshoppers, Cockroaches and their Allies. W.C. Brown Company, Dubuque, Iowa.

3. VICKERY, V.R. and D.K. KEVAN. 1985. The Grasshoppers, Crickets and Related Insects of Canada and Adjacent Regions. The Insects and Arachnids of Canada 14:1-918. Ottawa, Ont.