

Praying mantis use their big, bright butts to attract mate

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Published: January 25, 2015 - 12:01AM

This insect's big butt is unlikely to break the internet but it may attract itself a lanky lover.

The green exoskeleton of the praying mantis is the perfect camouflage to avoid predators but researchers have often wondered how these inconspicuous creatures catch the eye of a potential partner.

Now scientists from Macquarie University have uncovered the secret of this bug's sex life - a big, bright butt.

Females of a common variety of praying mantis, the false garden mantis, catch the attention of males with their large abdomen, which is brighter than the rest of their body and the surrounding vegetation.

The team, led by ecologist Kate Barry, found birds have a hard time detecting these insects because there is almost no colour contrast between mantis and background vegetation.

The insects blend so well with common green vegetation, the researchers had difficulty locating them to study.

Dr Barry's previous work found females released pheromones which encouraged males to fly towards them, before they switched to visual cues.

But, instead of using differences in colour to tell a potential mate from a tree branch, praying mantises, which are mainly colourblind, are highly sensitive to brightness differences, allowing males to spy the female's bright abdomen among vegetation.

"Male praying mantids like big, bright butts," said Dr Barry.

While the discovery might not prove as popular as recent pictures of Kim Kardashian's derriere, Dr Barry said the mantis had evolved a "cool way" of being detectable to their kind while being cryptic to predators.

"This result really struck us, as the female abdomen is easily the largest part of her body and it is also the part of the body that males need to mount in order to start mating," says Dr Barry.

In the laboratory, the group confirmed their theory when they discovered males were more likely to approach brighter females than ladies who were a little duller.

They also noted that females which appeared healthier were brighter than mantis in poor condition.

Dr Barry said the brightness of a female's generously sized rear end also likely signalled to males that she was healthy, with an abdomen full of eggs.

The team have published their findings in the scientific journal *Functional Ecology*.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/technology/sci-tech/praying-mantis-use-their-big-bright-butts-to-attract-mate-20150122-1253ok.html>