



The colorful and somewhat intimidating organism gazing out at you from the front cover of *Campbell Essential Biology* is the spiny flower mantis (*Pseudocreobotra wahlbergii*). This spectacular insect is just one of more than 2,000 known species of mantis, which are commonly referred to as “praying mantises” because they are often seen with their forelegs in a prayer-like stance. In fact, the scientific name of the group (the order Mantodea) originates from the Greek words for “shape of a prophet.” The spiny flower mantis is native to sub-Saharan Africa—it is found most abundantly in Kenya—and is recognizable by the green stripes on its legs, its purple-tinted eyes, and by the distinct swirling pattern on its wings. Like all mantises, this one is predatory, primarily eating other insects. But it, too, is stalked by larger predators. When threatened, members of this species stand tall, spread their forelegs, and fan their wings out wide. This makes the insects appear larger and at the same

time displays the colorful swirls on the wings, which may be mistaken by predators for large eyes. But how does the biology of this insect, fascinating as it may be, affect human life? Many gardeners, especially those who follow organic and sustainable practices that avoid chemical pesticides, introduce mantises as a form of biological pest control; garden stores stock mantis eggs for this very purpose. And the spiny flower mantis is one of the most common mantis species raised in captivity by hobbyists. That so many of us keep pets—mantids or something less exotic—and so many of us tend gardens shows that we all have an innate interest in the living world. The primary goal of *Campbell Essential Biology* is to tap into your natural curiosity about life. While deepening your understanding of life on Earth and how science can be used to investigate it, we hope in this book to remind you constantly of the myriad ways that biology is woven into the fabric of your life and our larger society.

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