

# [***Students lobby to dethrone Connecticut's state insect, the voraciously predatory praying mantis***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BH6-4R91-DYMD-627V-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

HARTFORD, Conn. — When it comes to state insects, most states honor beloved and benign bugs, like butterflies, honey bees and ladybugs. Connecticut has designated a voracious predator as its bug-to-be-most-proud-of for decades, but its reign could soon come to an end.

The European “praying” mantis, recognized by its raptorial forelegs and known for catching and eating the occasional bumble bee and butterfly along with all kinds of other insects, has been awaiting its prey from atop Connecticut's pedestal since 1977, after a group of kids in Vernon proposed it to lawmakers.

Now legislators have been confronted by more schoolchildren — two groups of them — who submitted dueling proposals to replace the mantis, with either the Autumn Meadowhawk Dragonfly or the Spring Azure Butterfly. And unlike the mantis, which was introduced to the state in the 1890s to help farmers combat pests, both are native to Connecticut and therefore important to the state's environment, the students argued.

“By having a non-native European praying mantis as our state insect, we are overlooking the thousands of native insects that are present in Connecticut’s ecosystem,” Katherine Boye Williams, 16, a junior at the Watkinson School in Hartford, told a legislative committee on Friday.

Williams said it's “been a source of irritation” that the praying mantis gets all the glory, and she hopes greater attention paid to natives like the Spring Azure Butterfly will spark more interest in protecting the state's environment.

According to the Smithsonian Institution, [*48 states have officially designated State Insects*](https://www.si.edu/spotlight/buginfo/state-insects), nearly all of them colorful or fuzzy, with notable exceptions such as New Mexico’s Tarantula Hawk Wasp and South Carolina’s state bug -- a cousin to Connecticut’s and also not native to the U.S. -- the Carolina mantid.

Williams said her school's environmental coalition ultimately recommended the Spring Azure Butterfly after a long process that included debating the merits of multiple candidates recommended by entomologists, whittling the list down to two, reaching out to 100 other schools, organizations and individuals for input, and ultimately collecting 1,189 votes for the tiny blue butterfly with roughly an inch-wide wingspan.

“The Spring Azure, like Connecticut, is energetic and small,” she told lawmakers, and its colors even match the Connecticut state flag.

Representing the other bug contender during Friday’s public hearing, state wildlife biologist Jane Seymour read a letter on behalf of students at Center Road School in Vernon, Conn. They extolled the virtues of the Autumn Meadowhawk Dragonfly, including how it eats mosquitoes and other biting bugs and how its flight has been studied for aeronautics purposes, including by Connecticut-based Sikorsky Aircraft.

“The Meadow Hawk Dragonfly is an interesting and beautiful creature that has been on this planet for 300 million years. That’s more than the dinosaurs,” the students wrote in the letter, noting their fears about how the insect’s habitat is at risk.

Seymour supports the student-led efforts. Mantis religiosa can be a “voracious predator,” she said, and it “ate everything” after it was introduced in the U.S.

Recognized for its habit of standing motionless on four hind legs while appearing to “pray” with its two forelegs, Mantis religiosa originated from northern Africa, southern Europe and parts of Asia and can now be found throughout Connecticut from early May or June until the weather turns cold, according to the state register and manual.

“Although it’s a cool-looking insect, it’s harmful to our native insects and it should be replaced,” Seymour said.

While receptive to the change, lawmakers expressed concern Friday in having to choose, not wanting to disappoint any of the students.

But in a sign of goodwill and cooperation not always seen in state ***politics***, both sides offered up a solution: Dub the Meadow Hawk Dragonfly as the State Insect and the Spring Azure Butterfly as the State Butterfly. After all, some other states have both.

Rep. Matt Blumenthal, co-chair of the Government Administration and Elections Committee, praised Williams for her “diplomatic” testimony after she suggested the possible compromise.

“You've already displayed some significant political skills in dealing with this controversy between the two insects,” he told the teen. “So, I think you have a bright future ahead of you.”

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