



Nota breve | Short note

**First mention of the conehead mantis *Empusa pennata*
(Thunberg, 1815) (Mantodea, Empusidae) in Cabo Verde**

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In Cabo Verde, 42 orthopteroid taxa are known (Veiga 1967; Buzzetti *et al.* 2005; Martín & Oromí 2005). During a survey on Sal Rei Islet in March 2026, F.M. & S.P. observed an adult and a juvenile mantid Mantodea within a patchy annual sward, on stony flatland near the south-western coast. Sal Rei Islet (89 ha) has a gently sloping topography (maximum 27 m a.s.l.) and diverse vegetation, including 21 plant communities (Médail & Pasta 2026).

P.P. & R.O. identified the species as *Empusa pennata* (Thunberg, 1815) (Fig. 1) by its clearly prolonged vertex, acuminate and apically lobed, long pronotum, and hind lobed femora (Battiston *et al.* 2010; Ouni 2018). The adult was a female, recognisable by its filiform antennae (males have pectinate antennae).

Our observation represents the first mention of the species and genus in Cabo Verde

(Ehrmann 2002). *Empusa pennata* has a Western Mediterranean distribution (Fig. 1C), from south-western Morocco to southern Europe, including the Iberian Peninsula, France, Italy, and Istria (Harz & Kaltenbach 1976). In Macaronesia, its presence has long been debated. Although reported from the Canaries, Wieland *et al.* (2014) conclude that “it is evident that this species has never actually been found on any of the islands”.

The female's empty abdomen suggests egg-laying had already occurred. Since egg-laying generally occurs in April–May in the Mediterranean, it may occur earlier in Cabo Verde due to marked different climate (Rivas-Martínez *et al.* 2017). This individual was, in full sunlight, perched on dry *Zygophyllum simplex* branches, a typical behaviour in winter and during the larval stage (Ouni 2018).

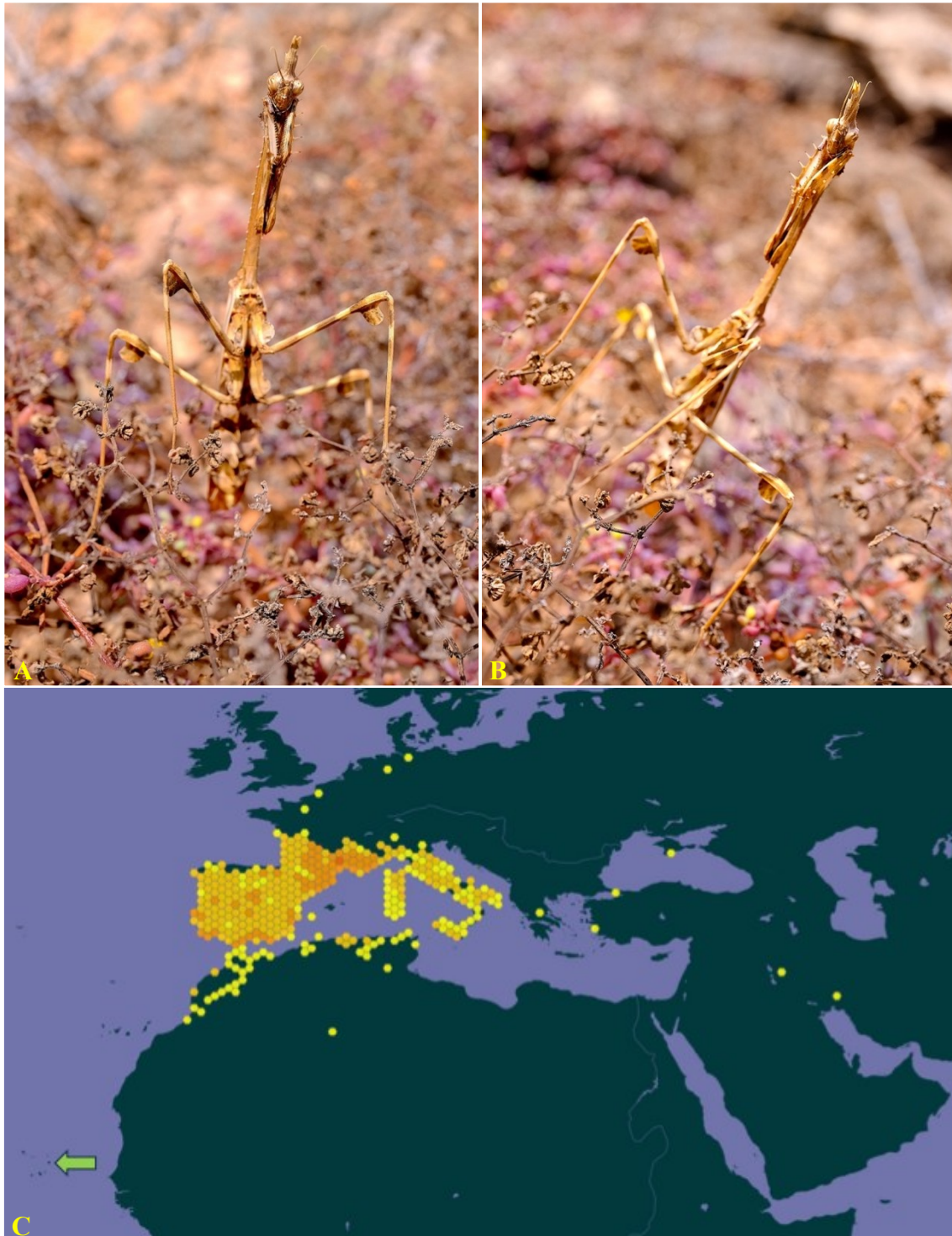


Fig. 1. Study species and its current distribution area. **A) & B)** Female of *Empusa pennata* photographed on Sal Rei islet (Boavista), 15th of March 2026, laying on dry branches of *Zygophyllum simplex* (photos by F. Médail). **C)** World distribution of *Empusa pennata* according to the GBIF database (<https://www.gbif.org>, accessed 22 April 2026); the new population discovered in Cabo Verde (Boavista, Sal Rei Island) is indicated by the green arrow.

The colonization pathway of this populations is uncertain. The nearest native populations occur along the coast of Western Sahara, 1850 km away (Fig. 1C). To explain its highly disjunct occurrence, several non-

mutually exclusive scenarios exist. Natural long-distance dispersal seems unlikely. Females, despite well-developed wings, are flightless, while males travel only 200–500 m (R. Ouni, pers. obs.). Rafting of oothecae on

plant material from Saharan coasts is possible. Oceanic dispersal is strongly underestimated to explain disjunct distributions, although essential for oceanic islands colonization (Queiroz 2005). However, an accidental introduction via importation of plants or building materials carrying oothecae seems most plausible, as the small island lies only 700 m from the port of Boavista Island, and restauration works of its fort are commencing.

Increased tourist traffic may also have facilitated its accidental arrival on Boavista, where it has not yet been documented so far.

Future phylogeographic research should therefore seek to clarify the origin and age of these individuals. In addition, a search for the species in mainland Boavista and other Cabo Verde islands may help to clarify the status of the two animals found on Sal Rei Islet.

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