

Kosovar biologist calls newly found insect after coronavirus

April 20 2021, by Florent Bajrami and Llazar Semini



Halil Ibrahim, 44, associate professor at the faculty of natural sciences at Pristina university, speaks to the media in Pristina on Friday, April 16, 2021. Restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic helped Kosovar biologist Ibrahim sit down and complete his research, naming a new insect after the virus and raised public awareness against pollution of river basins. (AP Photo/Visar Kryeziu)

Kosovar biologist Halil Ibrahimimi believes the pandemic restrictions haven't all been bad—as a result of them, he completed his research, raised public awareness of the pollution of river basins and named a newly discovered insect after the virus.

Ibrahimimi, 44, had spent years working on a research report on a caddisfly [species](#) found in Kosovo's western Bjeshket e Nemuna (Accursed Mountains) [national park](#). That species now bears the name *Potamophylax coronavirus*.

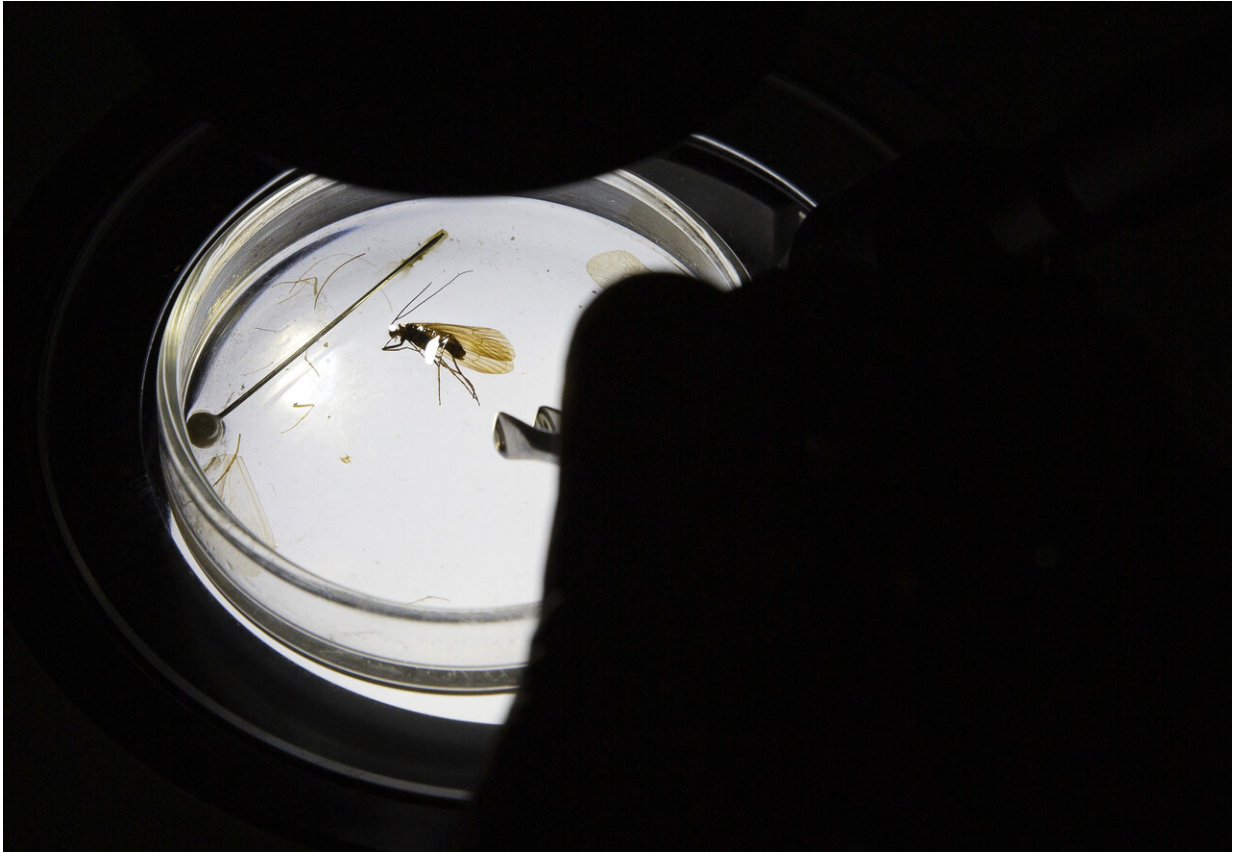
As an associate professor of the Natural Sciences Faculty at Pristina University, Ibrahimimi collected the species, which turned out to be endemic to the national park, 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of the capital Pristina, and found it was quite different from the other species in the Balkans.

It is considerably smaller, and lives in a different habitat, in open, high-altitude zones, some 2,000 meters (6,500 feet) above sea level.

He announced the new name he had chosen for the species in a scientific magazine this month.

"Coronavirus was the most vivid thing during the time when the species was discovered," he said.

During his research, Ibrahimimi also noticed that the Lumbardhi i Deçanit River, where the new species was found, has severely deteriorated over recent years due to the construction of a hydropower plant.



Halil Ibrahim, 44, associate professor at the faculty of natural sciences at Pristina university looks under a microscope at an insect named Potamophylax coronavirus, inside a lab in Pristina on Friday, April 16, 2021. Restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic helped Kosovar biologist Ibrahim sit down and complete his research, naming a new insect after the virus and raised public awareness against pollution of river basins. (AP Photo/Visar Kryeziu)

Kosovo and the Balkan countries have a long history of environmental pollution of all kinds, from [sewage water](#) pumped directly into rivers to deforestation and mismanagement of hydropower plants.

"It has the same effect on the species living in the rivers as the coronavirus is causing to humankind these days," Ibrahim said.

The overall environmental situation in Kosovo has worsened over recent years, with increased construction, traffic and [industrial pollution](#), as well as the government's efforts to promote small hydropower plants as an alternative energy source.

"Uncontrolled use of water resources and damage to river beds still remains one of the forms of degradation of our water resources," according to a [report](#) on Kosovo's environment published last year.

People should "rethink their attitude toward the environment" because these insects are "the first barrier before the pollution comes to the humans," Ibrahimimi said.



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Halil Ibrahimimi, 44, associate professor at the faculty of natural sciences at Pristina university, searches his net for insects near a polluted stream in Siceve, Kosovo, on Friday, April 16, 2021. Restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic helped Kosovar biologist Ibrahimimi sit down and complete his research, naming a new insect after the virus and raised public awareness against pollution of river basins. (AP Photo/Visar Kryeziu)



In this handout photo provided by Halil Ibrahim, insects named *Potamophylax coronavirus* are mating on Oct. 24, 2020. Restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic helped Kosovar biologist Ibrahim sit down and complete his research, naming a new insect after the virus and raised public awareness against pollution of river basins. (Halil Ibrahim via AP)



Halil Ibrahim, 44, associate professor at the faculty of natural sciences at Pristina University looks under a microscope an insect named Potamophylax coronavirus inside a lab in Pristina on Friday, April 16, 2021. Restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic helped Kosovar biologist Ibrahim sit down and complete his research, naming a new insect after the virus and raised public awareness against pollution of river basins. (AP Photo/Visar Kryeziu)

"They are the first indicators that something is going wrong in the environment ... in order to be prepared for the [pollution](#) impacting directly on ourselves."

Now that the virus and the insect are forever linked via the name, "the institutions must undertake measures to stop this degradation to the environment, and people must start considering these insect species as

part of their own life," Ibrahim said.

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Citation: Kosovar biologist calls newly found insect after coronavirus (2021, April 20) retrieved 24 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2021-04-kosovar-biologist-newly-insect-coronavirus.html>

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