Brief buzz: Danish Mayfly named 2021 insect of the year
27 November 2020

Mayflies have existed for about 355 million years and today some 140 species live in Central Europe, the commission said.

Despite their fleeting time on earth in their final form, their developmental cycle is quite long.

Female mayflies zigzag over water between May and September, laying thousands of eggs that then sink.

Larvae hatch within a few days, and eventually develop gills. Buried in riverbeds, they take between one to three years to develop.

"Shortly before the transition from aquatic to terrestrial life, a layer of air forms between the old and new skin of the adult larvae," said Schmitt, who is also director of the Senckenberg German Entomological Institute in Muencheberg, east of Berlin. "By reducing its specific weight, the larva rises to the water surface. Once there, the larval skin bursts and within a few seconds a flyable mayfly hatches."

With no mouth parts nor a functioning intestine, the fully developed mayfly has only a few days then to mate and lay new eggs before it dies.

The commission has been selecting one unique insect each year since 1999 to "bring an exemplary species closer to people."

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