



WILDLIFE FACTFILE: Mayfly nymph

For this week's Wildlife Factfile, we're looking at mayfly larvae, or mayfly nymphs, which is the name for immature mayflies. These aquatic insects belong to the order Ephemeroptera and live in the water for around two years, shedding their skin (or moulting) in order to grow many times during this period.

Mayfly nymphs feed on algae and other vegetable matter on the riverbed during their time at this stage of the life cycle. They can be found widespread in freshwater and wetland habitats all year round, from fast-flowing rivers to still lakes. Nymphs have two or three tails depending on the species of mayfly, and a body which is split into ten segments. Most of these segments contain a pair of gills.

Mayfly nymphs provide essential ecosystem services, which are defined as the benefits that people gain from the ecosystem. One of these services is a regulatory water-purification service, in which the larvae break down and sometimes remove substances from the water. Mayflies also have a crucial role in cycling nutrients and carbon between water and land. The absence of mayfly larvae in a body of freshwater is a strong indicator of environmental issues within the habitat.

Global freshwater biodiversity has seen massive declines since 1970. There are four main challenges to mayflies and the ecosystem services they provide, and these are what we need to focus on managing to help conserve mayfly populations:

- Water pollution
- Invasive alien
- Habitat loss
- Climate change

DID YOU KNOW?

Fishing flies are made of feathers designed to look like various mayfly species because they are a favourite food of trout and salmon.