

## 'Evolutionary origins' continue to be pushed back in time

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New fossil discoveries continue to push back the origin of organisms within the evolutionary geological column and timescale. I have previously reported on this trend in several perspective articles in *TJ*.<sup>1-4</sup> If this trend continues, supposed evolutionary origins of most multicelled organisms at the phylum level will be pushed back to the Cambrian explosion within the evolutionary geological column. So many new phyla have been added to the Cambrian explosion in the last few decades that it is now being called the 'Cambrian Big Bang'. During this Cambrian big bang, 50% to possibly as high as 85% of animal phyla made their first appearances with no ancestors.<sup>5</sup> This is an astronomical increase in information and exhibits a pattern opposite to that expected from evolution. The evidence very strongly favours creation.

A recent re-discovery of a fossil that was collected early in the twentieth century has not only pushed the origin of insects further back in the fossil record, but also it is probable that the origin of flight has been extended well backwards within the evolutionary paradigm.<sup>6</sup> The fossil, named *Rhyniognatha hirsti*, was discovered in 1919 in chert from Scotland's Old Red Sandstone. A 1928 report on the fossil described it as 'insect like'. Since then it has sat in a drawer in the British Museum of Natural History, without much attention. However, a recent reanalysis of the fragmentary fossil has raised great interest, as it is now considered the earliest record of true insects.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, two double-hinged 0.1-millimetre-long mandibles indicate that the insect probably had wings. This is based on its having a similar morphology to winged

insects today. The authors of the new evidence state that previously fossil evidence showed

'that insect wings originated in the Early Carboniferous period, some 90, 170 and 270 Myr before pterosaurs, birds and bats respectively ...'<sup>8</sup>

There are no ancestors or transitional fossils for such a huge leap in information or specified complexity:

'A diverse assemblage of winged insects appears suddenly in the fossil record about 330 million years ago, and there are few clues about their evolutionary lineage.'<sup>9</sup>

If the author's analogy with present insects holds up, the new fossil analysis places the winged insect 70 to 80 million years earlier than any previously discovered winged insect, well past 400 million years, still with no ancestors. Furthermore, the origin of wings and flight must be even earlier, at least 20 million years earlier in the evolutionary framework:

'If *Rhyniognatha* had wings, the evolutionary origin of those features probably occurred at least 20 million years earlier, says Conrad C. Labandeira of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C.'<sup>9</sup>

That would place the origin of flight clear back to the early Silurian within the evolutionary geological column. Since insects usually need plants, pushing back the origin of insects, and possibly flight, supports new information that has pushed the origin of land plants back to the Ordovician period within the evolutionary paradigm.<sup>8,10</sup>



Photo by Joachim Schvehen

*The evolution of flight is also contradicted by 'living fossils' of flying insects preserved in amber.*

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