

wild about OCTOBER

Look for rarities, such as Pallas's warbler, among common migrants



Spiders weave dewy garlands of webs



TINY & WILD ROSS PIPER

Insect longevity

Insect life is a fleeting cycle of mate, die, repeat. Or is it?

Insect is very nearly a byword for short-lived. On the whole, an insect's life cycle is: hatch, grow, mate, die, repeat and this is normally completed in one year, often multiple times.

The majority of adult insects, especially those that go through a larval stage, have fleetingly short lives as all they need to do is disperse and mate. But, as with all biology, there are exceptions to this rule.

Adult dragonflies (above) can survive for two months or so if they're lucky, which is quite long-lived compared to the majority of adult insects. Many of our beetles can survive even longer as adults. For instance, the fabulous blue ground beetle



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Illuminated Mini Beast Centre, £19.99

(*Carabus intricatus*) is thought to live for two to three years as an adult in the cool, western woodlands where it is still to be found, prowling the ground and climbing tree trunks on the search for slugs. Likewise, diving beetles, the churchyard beetle (*Blaps mucronata*) and some broad-nosed weevils (eg *Otiorhynchus spp.*) can also reach the same sort of age. Overall, two to three years is quite a good innings in the insect world.

To find the most venerable of our insects we must look to the social insects, specifically the queens of the bees, ants and wasps. A honey bee queen might survive for as long as four years, but the record-holders are very probably the wood



Blue ground beetle

STARS OF LONGEVITY



LINE OF DEFENCE Many long-lived insects are well-defended from threats, for example: the thick exoskeleton and fused elytra of flightless beetles and the queen wood ants several feet under the ground, defended by tens of thousands of aggressive, formic-acid squirting daughters.

WINTER PROOF

Surviving the winter is a challenge for the long-lived. They must seek out a sheltered spot to get away from the worst of the weather and enter a state of dormancy known as diapause – triggered by shorter days.



Southern wood ant queen

LYING LOW

Some insects are long-lived because they have evolved a low-energy approach to life. They have long periods of inactivity during which their food requirements are minimal.



ant queens (*Formica rufa* and closely related species). Down in the deepest, most sheltered parts of their nests, these queens live for anywhere between 15 and 20 years. This is a hugely long time for such small animals. During their very long lives, queen ants pump out a near continuous stream of eggs, most

of which will become the workers that will service the many needs of the colony.



Dr Ross Piper is an entomologist, zoologist and explorer. His book, *Animal Earth*, is a cutting-edge introduction to animal diversity. Find out more at rosspiper.net

WHAT'S ON OCTOBER

Autumn adventures 20 October

Make wild art-and-craft cosy homes for hibernators at RSPB Black Devon Wetlands, Clacks, Scotland. 2pm–4pm, adult £2, child £2 (£3 non-member).

Autumn fungi stroll 13 October and 3 November

Join local expert James Emerson for a family-friendly fungus hunt around RSPB Strumpshaw Fen, Norfolk. 10am–1pm, adult £5, child £2.50 (£11/£5.50 non-member), book via bit.ly/AutumnFungiStroll

Badger-watching Various dates

Get fantastic close-up views of the badgers at the new Naddle Farm Badger Hide at RSPB Haweswater, Cumbria. Join a guided badger watch – adults £12 (£15 non-member), under 18s £10 – or hire the whole hide! Visit rspbhaweswater.

eventbrite.com for more information and full prices.

Morning migration walks 8, 22 and 29 October

Join a morning walk to look for firecrest and spoonbills at RSPB Arne, Dorset. 7am–9am. £16 (£20 non-member). rspb.org.uk/arne