

Macroinvertebrate Fact File 11

Rat-tail maggot - sensitivity scale 1

- The maggot gets its name from its long tail, which is actually a breathing tube, used by the maggot to survive in very wet environments. There are two rows of flexible hairs between each segment. They can grow up to 7 centimetres long including the breathing tube.
- Large members of the rat-tail maggots can be found in any accumulation of stagnant water where they feed on decaying organic matter. The breathing tube remains at the surface of the water while the larva moves through the water at various depths. This allows it to search for food without having to return to the surface to breath.
- Adult drone flies lay their eggs in spring. The egg is white in colour, has an elongated shape and is covered in a sticky substance. Eggs are deposited near the surface of foul water or decaying organic material, animal faeces and rotting carcasses are laid in masses with the eggs side by side standing up from the ground.
- The eggs hatch in a week and the maggots develop through the summer and pupate in late December and January. The maggots crawl away from their breeding site to find a dry place where they can transform into the adult stage.
- The pupa are grey in colour, hard and about 15 millimetres long, the tail often curves up and over the back of the body.
- The adult drone flies are sometimes called bee flies because of their resemblance to honey bees, however these flies do not bite or sting and have only one pair of wings.



Rat-tail maggot

Image courtesy of Otago Regional Council

Freshwater Bug Fact File 11

Collect the fact files, laminate them and put them on to a key ring to produce a macroinvertebrate reference guide.