

Kanjiža is an enchanting town with well-preserved architecture that stands in the embrace of the surrounding fields with bright golden and green hues stretching endlessly into the horizon. It is a city jealously keeping its secret, a city with secretive visitors coming at the moment when everybody would think that the future is holding a scorching, hot summer for them. That is when, in mid-June, the so-called “winged horses” emerge from the depths of the Tisa.

Giving the impression of the times when our planet was formed, millions of insects fly around enchantingly with amorous fervor above the surface of the water. On the Mayfly hiking route, right next to the Tisa, anyone can witness the inspirational, high-spirited, unforgettable performance of nature, which could be named as The beginning and the End.

The lazy, slow and parched afternoons of June bring the promise of another long and hot summer. While you are lying in a swinging boat on the Tisa and the horizon is gradually disappearing, your thoughts are getting distant and just when it seems you are falling asleep, a sudden anxiety overcomes you. Something is about to happen. With greedy impetuosity, the orange beaks of the gulls hit the tranquil surface of the Tisa leaving behind waves spreading in circles as the only witnesses. Flying up into the sky, they will return again to the surface of the astonished Tisa. Wide awake, trying to straighten up, you hesitantly stand up rocking the wooden boat. But it's too late. You are completely surrounded by them and you cannot even see the Sun anymore. Hundreds of thousands of playful winged horses are dancing in front of your eyes.

Forming colonies in ten millimeter tunnels in the bottom of the Tisa, the insect *Palingenia longicauda* (Ephemeroptera), i.e. the mayfly, spends about three years in the form of a larva in the clay sludge of the river. The insects do not surface individually but their arrival is synchronized in huge numbers, creating a magical dance show above the river by their weaving flight. No one knows when in June the larvae will start waking up and how long the blossoming will last because the hatching depends on the external and water temperature, the quality of the water, lunar stage, velocity of the river. What is known though is that it is meant to happen. The larvae get out of the mud of the Tisa only in Kanjiža and in some areas of the Tisa in Hungary.

Birds are the first to notice the appearance of the larvae on the surface of the river. Many larvae that manage to avoid becoming fish food in the river depths end up in the beaks of the hungry birds before they could even see the sunlight, or that they could shed their larva skin and become free. They always fly in the direction of the bright sky (if the sky is cloudy and grey, the mayfly surfaces) but soon afterwards they shift their direction towards the river bank where in the leaves of the trees, boats, pontoons, earth or on people watching their dance, they shed again their skin and swiftly dash away in search of females. When their number reaches huge amounts forming flying clouds, the symphony of the million fluttering, silky wings that enchant your ears is simply indescribable! Their rush indicates the uniqueness of the moment as if they knew they only have three hours to live.

After the several hour-dance the male insect perishes. The inseminated female insect knows by instinct that it should not lay its eggs at the same point where it shed its skin. The water would take the eggs downstream to a point where the conditions are not suitable to form larvae colonies. That is why the female flies a couple of kilometres upstream in order to lay six or seven thousand eggs on the surface of the water – after which the female perishes as well. While the eggs sink slowly in the water, the flow of the river takes them approximately to the same spot where their parents were tunneled in the sludge for three years, waiting for the time to surface and live for only a couple of hours.

According to fossil finds, the *Palingenia longicauda* has lived for 350 million years on Earth. According to its visible life, the mayfly in Europe lives a day and it occurs only in the Tisa. It has disappeared from other European rivers.