

Mechanisms of Micro-scale Aerial Vehicle with Controlled Heavier Wings

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DESCRIPTION

Due to the combination of their low inertia as well as the resilience of their wings, exoskeletons, and muscles, flying insects that are capable of navigating in highly cluttered natural environments can withstand collisions while in flight. The rigid micro scale actuators used in current aerial robots that are insect-scale (less than ten centimeters long and weighing less than five grams) are typically fragile when subjected to external impact. Because they can withstand the stresses brought on by such impacts, biomimetic artificial muscles that are capable of large deformation present a promising alternative for actuation.

However, the closed-loop flight control that is driven by an input control signal that is adjusted based on sensory feedback is further complicated by the existing soft actuators' actuation nonlinearity and limited bandwidth, which prevent them from achieving lift-off. Open-loop (driven by a predetermined signal without feedback), passively stable (upright during flight), ascending, and closed-loop (hovering) flight are the two modes of flight that we develop here for heavier-than-air aerial robots. Multi-layered dielectric elastomer actuators with a power density of 600 watts per kilogram and a resonance frequency of 500 hertz drive the robots. Each actuator weighs 100 milligrams. We present solutions to soft actuator-specific problems like nonlinear transduction and dynamic buckling in order to improve the actuator's mechanical power output and demonstrate flight control. By utilizing vehicle passive stability and material robustness, these robots are able to detect and withstand collisions with surrounding obstacles as well as recover from in-flight collisions. In a crowded environment, we also fly two micro-aerial vehicles simultaneously. They crash into each other

and the wall without getting hurt. To power the dielectric elastomer actuators and control their flight, these robots rely on external motion-capture systems and off-board amplifiers. The potential of developing agile soft robots of the next generation is illustrated by our work, which demonstrates how soft actuators can achieve sufficient power density and bandwidth to enable controlled flight.

Heavier-than-air flight at any scale consumes a lot of energy than untethered flight of a microscale aerial vehicle the size of an insect's flapping wings. Untethered flight of insect-sized robots—those with a mass of less than 500 milligrams and a wingspan of less than 5 centimeters has been impossible due to this, which is exacerbated at smaller scales. Due to the difficulties of integrating onboard electronics within a limited payload capacity, these vehicles must fly tethered to an offboard power supply and signal generator. An insect-sized flapping-wing microscale aerial vehicle's sustained untethered flight is demonstrated here by overcoming these obstacles. The 90-milligram vehicle has four wings that are driven by two alumina-reinforced piezoelectric actuators to achieve a peak lift-to-weight ratio of 4.1 to 1, demonstrating greater thrust per muscle mass than typical biological counterparts and increasing aerodynamic efficiency by up to 29% in comparison to similar two-wing vehicles. The vehicle's integrated system and the electronics needed for untethered flight a photovoltaic array and a signal generator weigh 259 milligrams. The vehicle's additional payload capacity makes it possible to carry more gadgets on board. The system's thrust efficiency is comparable to that of bees and other insects of similar size, using only 110-120 milliwatts of power. In contrast to impulsive jumps or liftoffs, this insect-scale aerial vehicle is the lightest yet for sustained untethered flight.

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