

Shropshire (VC40) Dragonfly Newsletter



Spring 2013
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Introduction

Well, I ended the newsletter last year by writing ‘fingers crossed for a long and glorious summer’ –won’t be making that mistake again! Amazingly despite the epic monsoons I have received over 700 records, nearly 600 of them made during the 2012 flight season. This is approximately the same number of records as were made in 2011 and there has been an increase in the number of people actually sending in records which is great. So once again **THANK YOU** so much for your efforts under very soggy circumstances. It has made a real difference to how Shropshire will be represented in the forthcoming BDS National Atlas and long may such efforts continue... for the next project... more details later on!

Flight Season 2012

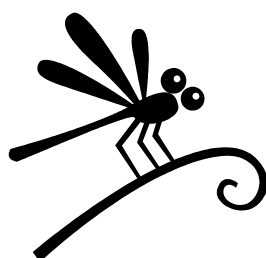
The 2012 season started typically with Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrhosoma nymphula*) being recorded on 28th April by Claire Install at Preston Montford (SJ4314). I was also present and unfortunately only a few adults were recorded alive, the majority having been drowned on emergence due to wind, rain and generally appalling weather sweeping the damselflies off the vegetation. This first sighting was about a week later than the previous year, a pattern repeated during the summer ahead where generally the first recorded sightings of most species were later than in 2011. The emergence dates in 2012 were however more typical of many species - you may remember, the exceptionally warm April of 2011 produced the earliest recorded sightings ever in Shropshire for Large Red Damselfly, Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*), Azure Damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*), Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*) and Common Club-tail (*Gomphus vulgatissimus*).

The October summary report in British Wildlife (Perrin, 2012b) suggested a number of species were flying later and longer than usual such as Hairy Dragonflies seen in Leicestershire at the end of July. This was certainly illustrated by some species in Shropshire such as the Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*). This species has a flight season that usually extends from early June to late August (Brooks, 2004) so three recorded sightings in September were exceptional. The last record of the season was Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna mixta*) recorded east of Telford on 12th October by Melanie Rissbrook.

The table below shows the first and last dates for those species recorded in Shropshire in 2012, but it is important to understand that these are directly influenced by recorder effort and the sites visited.

First and Last Recorded Sightings 2012

Species	Common Name	Date of first record	Date of last record
<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>	Banded Demoiselle	24 th May	19 th September
<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>	Beautiful Demoiselle	20 th May	21 st August
<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	Emerald Damselfly	30 th June	8 th September
<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	Azure Damselfly	23 rd May	4 th September
<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>	Variable Damselfly	28 th May	28 th May
<i>Erythromma najas</i>	Red-eyed Damselfly	28 th May	10 th August
<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>	Large Red Damselfly	28 th April	4 th August
<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	Common Blue Damselfly	13 th May	9 th September
<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	Blue-tailed Damselfly	26 th May	22 nd September
<i>Ischnura pumilio</i>	Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly	5 th July	5 th July
<i>Platycnemis pennipes</i>	White-legged Damselfly	9 th June	12 th August
<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	Southern Hawker	20 th July	22 nd September
<i>Aeshna grandis</i>	Brown Hawker	8 th July	22 nd September
<i>Aeshna juncea</i>	Common Hawker	3 rd August	7 th September
<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	Migrant Hawker	29 th July	12 th October
<i>Anax imperator</i>	Emperor Dragonfly	30 th May	6 th September
<i>Gomphus vulgatissimus</i>	Common Club-tail	4 th June	4 th June
<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>	Golden-ringed Dragonfly	25 th June	11 th August
<i>Cordulia aenea</i>	Downy Emerald	28 th May	29 th May
<i>Leucorrhinia dubia</i>	White-faced Darter	30 th June	30 th June
<i>Libellula depressa</i>	Broad-bodied chaser	26 th May	12 th July
<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Four-spotted Chaser	28 th May	7 th September
<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>	Black-tailed Skimmer	25 th June	4 th September
<i>Sympetrum fonscolombii</i>	Red-veined Darter	30 th May	1 st June
<i>Sympetrum danae</i>	Black Darter	6 th August	7 th September
<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>	Ruddy Darter	4 th August	11 th September
<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	Common Darter	20 th July	3 rd October



Species

A total of 27 species were recorded in 2012 comprising 16 dragonfly and 11 damselfly species. Though the number of species recorded was the same in 2011 there are differences in those species present. A good number of records were received of common species such as **Blue-tailed Damselfly** (*Ischnura elegans*), **Common Blue Damselfly** (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) and **Southern Hawker** (*Aeshna cyanea*), but many of those species associated with often higher more exposed habitat had notably fewer records. There were limited records of **Black Darter** (*Sympetrum danae*), **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*) and **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** (*Cordulegaster boltonii*) and no records of **Keeled Skimmer** (*Orthetrum coerulescens*). These are all species recorded at heathland sites in Shropshire and I suspect the low numbers or absence of records is due largely to recorder effort and quite simply no one going to these areas. Having said that, I had to go out to complete dragonfly larval studies on a number of pools situated in the Wild Moor area of the Long Mynd. Despite monthly visits in all weathers I saw only a handful of adults on the wing, came across only 3 exuviae and unfortunately a number of adults that were unable to fly, clearly damaged on emergence. It will be interesting to see the impact of such a summer on the species recorded in 2013.

In last years news letter I expressed concern that **Ruddy Darter** (*Sympetrum sanguineum*), **Variable Damselfly** (*Coenagrion pulchellum*) and **Downy Emerald** (*Cordulia aenea*) had very few records. Despite the adverse conditions during 2012 Ruddy Darter was recorded at 7 different sites most notably for the first time at Bomere (SJ5008). Downy Emerald was also recorded at Bomere and Shomere in addition to Berrington Pool (SJ524071) where an exuvia was identified providing proof of successful breeding at this location. Variable Damselfly seems to have remained elusive with just 1 solitary record at Shomere in 2012.

New / Rediscovered Populations

Despite the elements the big story for 2012 was that **Red-veined Darters** (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*) were spotted in late May by Jim Almond at Venus Pool (SJ5406). Days later I was lucky enough to see them accompanied by Bob Kemp who confirmed the identification. The only previous Shropshire record was an anonymous sighting made at Whixall Moss in 1940. The darters were on the wing some distance out



from the main bird hide, but using a telescope the single pale stripe on the side of the thorax was clearly visible. This is illustrated here in Jim's photographs and one can also make out the blue coloration in the lower half of the eye.



The darters were clearly ovipositing and though this species is regarded as a scarce migrant there has been an increase in the number of breeding records in recent years (Smallshire & Swash, 2010). Red-veined Darter has been recorded in a number of nearby counties this year including Worcestershire, Warwickshire and Staffordshire. Interestingly adults have been recorded at Belvide Reservoir, Staffordshire for the last few years suggesting possible successful breeding at this site as opposed to an influx of new migrants (Perrin, 2012a). The larvae are capable of rapid development enabling 2 generations per year in hot summers (Smallshire & Swash, 2010). Incredibly this was observed in some more southerly

locations, individuals still being recorded in Cornwall on 22nd October (Parr, 2012). This is definitely a species to look out for and thanks to Jim is a great record for Shropshire.

Jim Almond also recorded **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** for a second year in succession at Titterstone Cleve (SO5977). Male and female individuals were seen in 2011 at this location ending a 5 year absence of recorded sightings in Shropshire. In 2011 records for this species were also made at Bromfield Quarry (SO484775), though no records at all were received for this site in 2012. This may be well worth a return visit in the great summer we are going to have this year. The bright orange immature females (form *aurantiaca*) seen in this photograph by Dan Wrench are truly stunning.



Missing In Action...

The most notable 'missing species' of 2012 was the **Keeled Skimmer** (*Orthetrum coerulescens*). Having boasted in the previous newsletter about Shropshire's two thriving populations at Cramer Gutter (SO6479) and on the Long Mynd (SO4197) all has gone quiet. As I suggested earlier I think this is entirely symptomatic of recorder effort not being focused on exposed heathland sites in the

driving rain! I will be venturing on to the Long Mynd in a sun hat this summer to see how this population (only recently discovered in 2010) have fared after last year and would be very interested to hear from anyone going to Cramer Gutter. I would also like to believe we have more Keeled Skimmer sites in Shropshire just waiting to be discovered...

As per the last newsletter the usual previously recorded 'missing species' remain:

- ✈ **Yellow-winged Darter** (*Sympetrum flaveolum*) - To my knowledge there have been no records in the UK since 2006 and no Shropshire records since the mid 1990's, but as an 'irregular immigrant' we should always bear it in mind.
- ✈ **Hairy Dragonfly** (*Brachytron pratense*) - Last recorded in the year 2000 in the Wyre Forest area, south Shropshire. This is the first hawker dragonfly on the wing in mid-May and is a fan of clean waters, lush surrounding vegetation and nearby shelter (Brooks, 2004).
- ✈ **Scarce Chaser** (*Libellula fulva*) - Only 1 Shropshire record ever made at Attingham Park in June 2008 by John Balcombe.

Coming Soon to a Pond Near You?

The first record in Britain of **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma viridulum*) was made in Essex in 1999 (Smallshire & Swash, 2010). From this location the range of this species has expanded north and west and though this expansion was believed to be slowing, Small Red-eyed Damselfly has been recorded in Gloucestershire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire (Twissell, Reeve & Averill, 2012). In 2012 this species was recorded for the first time in Wales at the Penclacwydd WWT Reserve in Carmarthenshire (Parr, 2012) indicating that this range expansion is far from over. There is no reason why we should not see Small Red-eyed Damselfly in Shropshire and this is definitely one to look out for!

The photograph below shows the male Small Red-eyed Damselfly. This



species has bright red eyes –often described as a brighter 'tomato' red than the deeper 'burgundy' red seen in the Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma najas*). The blue colouration on the abdomen extends onto the sides of segment 2 from the thorax and onto

segment 8 from segment 9. In addition a black X mark can just about be seen here on the dorsal surface of segment 10. When at rest the wings extend just beyond the join between segments 6 and 7 (Brooks, 2004).

In contrast the Red eyed Damselfly seen here on the right has wings that extend further down the abdomen and has far less blue colouration. Segments 1, 9 and 10 are blue, but this does not spread onto segments 2 or 8. In addition there is no black X mark seen on the dorsal surface of segment 10.



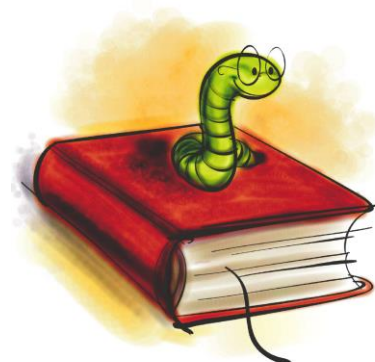
Any records of Small Red-eyed Damselfly received will be a first for Shropshire so it is important to try and get some good photographs highlighting those diagnostic features listed above. Even if you don't manage to get photographs please let me know where you think you've seen them and I'll come and take a look.

BDS National Atlas

When I took on the role of county recorder in 2011 there were twenty 10 km squares that had fewer than 11 species recorded (the county diversity threshold set by the British Dragonfly Society). Worse still 3 of these hectads had no recorded sightings of Odonata since 2000. Thanks to your efforts I'm really pleased to say that Shropshire no longer has any 10km squares that are unrecorded since 2000 and only 8 hectads that fall below the diversity threshold. Five such squares lie primarily in neighbouring counties and indeed may exceed the threshold when all data has been gathered in. The remaining 3 frustratingly fall just short of the threshold with each having 10 species. These hectads are SO38 (Bishops Castle and Lydbury North), SO69 (Southwest of Much Wenlock) and SO79 (Bridgnorth). I visited these (rain permitting!) but unfortunately recorded just those species already listed. The National Atlas is due to be published later this year and rest assured that Shropshire will be represented far more accurately than would have been the case.

Shropshire Dragonflies- the next project!

With recent dragonfly recording being focused on a national scale I'm now really looking forward to concentrating in greater detail on the dragonflies of Shropshire. Following a meeting with experienced naturalist, author and prolific dragonfly recorder Paul Hope we have decided to produce an up to date publication on Shropshire dragonflies. We are also really pleased to add Bob Kemp to our team of 3 and with his



fantastic photography and wealth of experience we are hoping to produce a book that is not only informative with regards to local species and their distributions but also a pleasure to read. To that end we intend to use the next 2-3 field seasons ensuring that we have a really good recording coverage of the County. The National Atlas has helped highlight those areas with fewer records (mentioned above) and therefore all records made in these under recorded parts of the County, or indeed anywhere in Shropshire will be very gratefully received. So please do keep sending in your records so we have the best overview possible of the species in Shropshire.

The Last Word..

I will be updating the Shropshire page on the BDS website (<http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/local-groups>) in the near future and adding details of local dragonfly events as I receive information. I am running a free **Larval Workshop** at Preston Montford FSC Centre on Saturday 20th April, 2013. This is aimed at beginners and is a great way to get started on identifying larvae and exuviae- and as I found out last summer you can study larvae whatever the weather - even in hail! There are still a few places available so please get in touch if interested. Being slightly strange I'm always more than happy to receive exuviae to identify – they provide an interesting challenge and most importantly if you record where and when they were found, you have absolute proof of breeding at a particular site- the best possible dragonfly record of all.

Thanks again for your continued interest and recording efforts and as ever please don't hesitate to contact me with records, newsletter suggestions, ID queries etc. at info@shropshiredragonflies.co.uk And I won't be crossing any fingers for anything to do with the weather! Enjoy the dragonflies!



References

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