

Shropshire (VC40) Dragonfly Newsletter



Spring 2014
Sue McLamb

Introduction

As we sit through a soggy start to the year it's great to think back to summer- especially as we actually had one in 2013! I distinctly remember uttering unusual phrases like 'it's too hot' which of course was great news for dragonflies. In total I received nearly 1500 records, 1154 of them made during the 2013 flight season. This is nearly double the number of records made in 2012 which is incredible and results not only from an increase in recorders, but also from some spectacular individual efforts. Special mention must go to Paul Hope who spent most of 2013 on his bike cycling through Shropshire gathering 253 records- a superb effort and he could probably give Bradley Wiggins a run for his money now! So I know I say it at the start of every newsletter but **THANK YOU!** Without your efforts I would have very little to talk about and far more importantly we wouldn't have any idea how these fantastic insects are faring in our county. It's great that more people are enjoying and recording dragonflies and as a result we have had some really interesting sightings this year - so read on and find out more!

Flight Season 2013

Despite a good summer things were slow to get started and unusually no records of dragonflies or damselflies were made in April. The first record of the season was as usual **Large Red Damselfly** *Pyrrhosoma nymphula* though this was not until May 6th, about a week later than in 2012. This late start was echoed many times with the first records of all damselfly species being later than in 2012. The dragonfly species however did not mirror this pattern and a number of the hawkers were actually on the wing earlier in the season. From a national perspective Odonata were generally seen to emerge later and this coupled with a mild autumn meant they remained on the wing for longer (Perrin, 2013).

In Shropshire the tail end of the flight season provided a number of late sightings most notably Large Red Damselfly recorded by S. Whild on 2nd October at Preston Montford. This represents the 3rd latest sighting ever of this species in Shropshire with previous records on 31st October 2001 at Merrington Green and apparently on 9th December 1979 at Church Pulverbatch ponds! Typically developing Large Red Damselflies enter the final larval stadium towards the end of the summer and then enter a resting phase or diapause. This allows all individuals to reach the same developmental stage and emerge synchronously the following spring triggered by increasing day length and temperature. A few larvae however fail to enter the diapause and so emerge late in summer.

The final record of the season is usually **Common Darter** *Sympetrum striolatum* which in 2013 was recorded in Corvedale by P. Sams on 4th November. This incidentally was also the 3rd latest county record of this species- the latest ever sighting made by A. Lockton at Haughmond Abbey Wood on 8th November, 1996. Surprisingly however the season did not end there as a record of **Vagrant Emperor** *Hemianax ephipigger* - a species new to Shropshire was made by G. Hiatt on 23rd November-much more on this shortly!

The table below shows the first and last dates for those species recorded in Shropshire in 2013, but it is important to understand that these are directly influenced by recorder effort and the sites visited.

First and Last Recorded Sightings 2013

Species	Common Name	Date of first record	Date of last record
<i>Brachytron pratense</i>	Hairy Dragonfly	7 th July	7 th July
<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>	Banded Demoiselle	31 st May	3 rd September
<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>	Beautiful Demoiselle	4 th June	26 th July
<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	Emerald Damselfly	4 th July	18 th September
<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	Azure Damselfly	31 st May	20 th August
<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>	Variable Damselfly	4 th June	10 th June
<i>Erythromma najas</i>	Red-eyed Damselfly	4 th June	10 th June
<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>	Large Red Damselfly	6 th May	2 nd October
<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	Common Blue Damselfly	5 th June	3 rd September
<i>Hemianax ephippiger</i>	Vagrant Emperor	23 rd November	23 rd November
<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	Blue-tailed Damselfly	4 th June	3 rd September
<i>Platycnemis pennipes</i>	White-legged Damselfly	15 th June	1 st August
<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	Southern Hawker	30 th June	8 th October
<i>Aeshna grandis</i>	Brown Hawker	26 th June	5 th October
<i>Aeshna juncea</i>	Common Hawker	5 th July	20 th August
<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	Migrant Hawker	30 th July	19 th October
<i>Anax imperator</i>	Emperor Dragonfly	5 th July	20 th August
<i>Gomphus vulgatissimus</i>	Common Club-tail	31 st May	30 th July
<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>	Golden-ringed Dragonfly	30 th June	20 th August
<i>Cordulia aenea</i>	Downy Emerald	4 th June	10 th June
<i>Leucorrhinia dubia</i>	White-faced Darter	20 th May	2 nd August
<i>Libellula depressa</i>	Broad-bodied chaser	31 st May	19 th July
<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Four-spotted Chaser	20 th May	12 th August
<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>	Black-tailed Skimmer	30 th June	30 th August
<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>	Keeled Skimmer	10 th July	9 th August
<i>Sympetrum danae</i>	Black Darter	12 th July	24 th September
<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>	Ruddy Darter	2 nd August	22 nd August
<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	Common Darter	14 th July	4 th November



Species Summary

A total of 28 species were recorded in 2013 comprising 18 dragonfly and 10 damselfly species. Numerically this is 1 more than in 2012 though there are differences in those species represented. In summary **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** *Ischnura pumilio* and **Red-veined Darter** *Sympetrum fonscolombii* were not recorded in 2013, but **Keeled Skimmer** *Orthetrum coerulescens*, **Hairy Dragonfly** *Brachytron pratense* and **Vagrant Emperor** *Hemianax ephippiger* were recorded. These species are discussed in detail below following a general summary.

Good numbers of common species were recorded with well over 100 records received of **Azure Damselfly** *Coenagrion puella*, **Large Red Damselfly** *P. nymphula* and **Common Darter** *S. striolatum*. Heathland species such as **Common Hawker** *Aeshna juncea* and **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** *Cordulegaster boltonii* had a greater number of records than in 2012, most likely due to the sun encouraging far more dragonflies and recorders to venture out to more exposed locations. I expressed concern in the last newsletter at the impact of the 2012 'summer' on population numbers, but as larval development in many species takes a number of years the impact of low reproductive success would not be apparent for some time. That said, **Black Darter** *Sympetrum danae* and **Emerald Damselfly** *Lestes sponsa* both have an obligatory univoltine life cycle meaning eggs would have been laid at the end of 2012 and hatched out in the spring of 2013 developing rapidly and emerging in the late summer. Gladly a large number of records of both species were received this year giving no indication of significant impact caused by atrocious weather.



The number of records received for certain species in 2013 causes some concern. **Red-eyed Damselfly** *Erythromma najas* (photo left) and **Common Club-tail** *Gomphus vulgatissimus* (photo below) were recorded only 3 times each and **Variable Damselfly** *Coenagrion pulchellum* was recorded only at Shomere. Late records also

revealed Variable Damselfly was recorded during 2012 at Whixall Moss for the first time since 1995. Whilst the latter is good news the fact is Variable Damselfly has not been recorded at Bomere since 2003 and there have been no records from Berrington pool for 2 years despite a number of recorders visiting the site. Variable Damselfly does have a scarce and localised national distribution and is indeed rare in Shropshire, but it is also easily confused with the very common Azure Damselfly *C. puella*. Do look closely at a good field guide (Smallshire & Swash, 2010 or Brooks, 2004) or maybe come on an excellent dragonfly course (shameless plug!) to ensure you do not miss any variable damselflies!



Individual Species Reports

Keeled Skimmer

O. coerulescens



In early 2013 I expressed concern at the absence of Keeled Skimmer records during 2012. Late records did reveal however that this species had in fact been recorded in 2012 at Cramer Gutter and a number of records of this species were made again at Catherton Common in 2013. In addition an adult was recorded at Whixall Moss in 2013 for the first time in 6 years. Only 2 previous records exist from 2006 and 2007 and as Whixall Moss is regularly recorded hopefully there's every chance it may be observed in 2014.



Hairy Dragonfly

B. pratense



Apart from one vague record (SO47) made by B. Merrit in 1978, Hairy Dragonfly until this year had only 2 records from the year 2000. These sightings were in very close proximity in south Shropshire at the Wyre Forest and may indeed be duplicates of the same record. In July, 2013 however a male was recorded at Whixall Moss by B. Smith. It was seen on the main path from Morris Bridge on to the moss and

observed for over a minute both perched and feeding. As noted by the recorder this is late in the year for this species as it is typically the first hawker dragonfly on the wing in mid-May. Though at the opposite end of the county to the Wyre Forest sightings, Hairy Dragonfly is known to be present in Cheshire so there is every possibility it may be seen again in north Shropshire and is certainly an exciting first for Whixall Moss. Keep your eyes open from mid-May near clean water with lush surrounding vegetation and nearby shelter (Brooks, 2004).

The Vagrant Emperor *H. ephippiger*



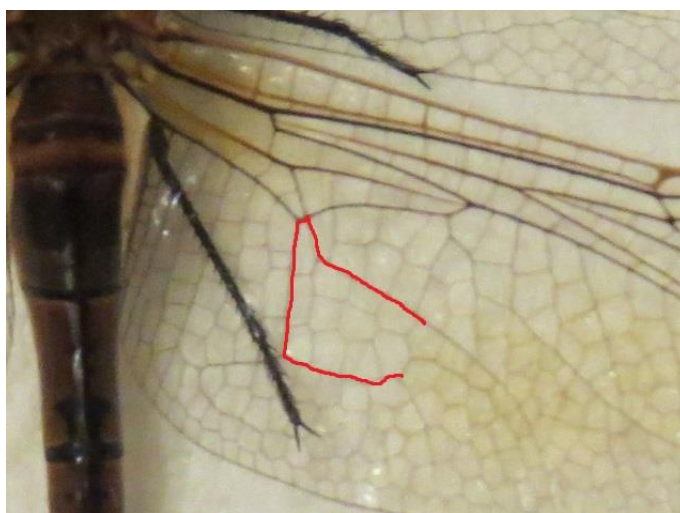
Top of the list for exciting finds is the new Shropshire record – a Vagrant Emperor shown in the photograph below. The specimen was found at Muxton Marsh (SJ715132) by Gwyn Hiatt on 23rd November and is one of a number of UK records for this migrant this year and a really great find!



I thought like many that by early November the Shropshire dragonfly season was well and truly over.....but no! Having given a talk on November 14th where I uttered with total confidence that the last Shropshire sightings of the year were always Common Darter I was shortly to be proved wrong. Just 9 days later Gwyn

and Sue Hiatt sent the photograph of a suspected female Vagrant Emperor found recently deceased and slightly frosted on the ground at Muxton Marsh near Telford.

Having never actually seen this species before I collected the specimen which was then determined by Bob Kemp. The colouration on the specimen was already quite dark, and though the broad pointed anal appendages were distinctive, the clear diagnostic feature was the arrangement of cells in a particular part of the wing-outlined here in red. In this area the cells are arranged in 3 irregular rows rather than 2 regular rows as seen in other *Anax* species.



I contacted Adrian Parr (Migrant Dragonflies Project Officer of the British Dragonfly Society) and it

would appear that Shropshire is not alone with other 2013 sightings in a number of areas in Wales, Ireland and England, and indeed ovipositing females observed in Devon. At time of writing however this record is to my knowledge the last Vagrant Emperor seen in 2013 and it is certainly the first record of this species for Shropshire. The Vagrant Emperor is a well known migrant originating mostly in the dry regions of Africa and Asia (Dijkstra, 2006). Migrations are more typically from Africa into

southern Europe and rarely extend as far north as the UK, making British records very rare. In the autumn of 2013 however individuals were also recorded in The Netherlands and Belgium (Parr, 2013).

A huge thank you to Glyn and Sue for being 'bright-eyed' and getting in touch and also giving me the chance to understand the diagnostic use of wing cells - an area we rarely delve into with UK species. **And remember it is still possible for Vagrant Emperors to turn up throughout the winter- even in Shropshire- so watch out!**

Missing In Action...



✿ **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** *I. pumilio* - Recorded in 2012 by J. Almond for a second year in succession at Titterstone Clee (SO5977) so I was surprised to receive no records for this species in 2013. There have been no records from Bromfield Quarry (SO484775) since 2011 though it would appear no one has recorded the site since that time. Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly inhabits water bodies typically in early successional stages often resulting in populations being transient in nature. This is however definitely a species to bear in mind next field season particularly in the Titterstone Clee area.

✿ **Red-veined Darter** *S. fonscolombii* - Despite repeated visits made to Venus Pool where this species was seen ovipositing in 2012 there were unfortunately no adults observed. Unlike the plethora of UK records made in 2012 few reports were made in 2013 (Perrin, 2013). The very nature of this dispersive migrant does however mean that it could well cross our borders again in the future so always bear it in mind.

✿ **Yellow-winged Darter** *Sympetrum flaveolum* - To my knowledge there have been no records in the UK since 2006 and still no Shropshire records since the mid 1990's.

✿ **Scarce Chaser** *Libellula fulva* - Only 1 Shropshire record ever made at Attingham Park in June 2008 by J. Balcombe. This species has a relatively early flight season emerging on mass in early May. The female (seen in this photo by M.Randall) and immature male are striking orange/brown in colour. Typically found on neutral or base-rich muddy slow flowing small rivers, dykes in floodplains and water meadows (Smallshire & Swash, 2010).



A New Site for Downy Emerald

Downy Emerald *C. aenea* has been recorded at Bomere, Shomere and Berrington Pool for a number of years, but in 2013 was recorded at a new site Ebury Hill (SJ5416). John Curd spotted the male on 7th June flying and settling on vegetation at the old quarry and managed to take the great photograph below. John



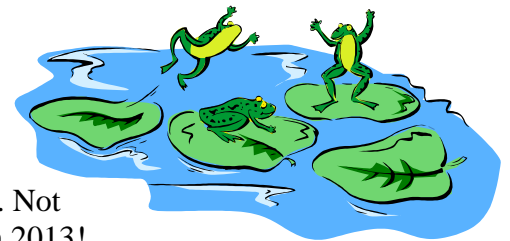
was visiting from Bedfordshire where he lives just 2 miles from an established population of Downy Emerald Dragonflies. The quarry forms part of Ebury Hill campsite and apparently access is only available to those staying at the campsite. Though not open to the public this is an interesting

site where John also recorded 6 other species; **Azure Damsel**, **Common Blue Damsel**, **Large Red Damsel**, **Blue-tailed Damsel**, **Beautiful Demoiselle** and **Red-eyed Damsel**.

STILL Coming Soon to a Pond Near You?

In the last newsletter I wrote about the imminent arrival of **Small Red-eyed Damsel** *Erythromma viridulum*. Not quite so imminent it would appear with no records received in 2013!

There is still however every expectation that this species will cross our borders and so I have included again the main identification tips that differentiate between this species and **Red-eyed Damsel** *E. najas*.



The male Small Red-eyed Damsel has bright red eyes – often described as a brighter ‘tomato’ red than the deeper ‘burgundy’ red seen in the Red-eyed Damsel. 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 wings of the Red eyed Damselfly extend further down the abdomen upon which there is 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.

Shropshire Dragonflies Book

Progress on the next Shropshire dragonflies book continues with Paul Hope and Bob Kemp. As I said in the last newsletter we intend to use the next 2-3 field seasons to ensure we have a really good recording coverage of the County. The National Atlas highlighted a number of potentially under recorded areas near the county borders and also the following 10km squares; SO38 (Bishops Castle and Lydbury North), SO69 (Southwest of Much Wenlock) and SO79 (Bridgnorth). All records made in these under recorded parts of the county, or indeed anywhere in Shropshire will be very gratefully received. Within the book we are also keen to draw attention to the joys of our local exuviae! They provide an interesting identification challenge and represent the most important dragonfly records as they provide absolute proof of breeding at a particular site. As I have said before (strange as it may seem!) I'm always more than happy to receive exuviae to identify so if you are lucky enough to find some and they don't personally appeal then please send them my way!

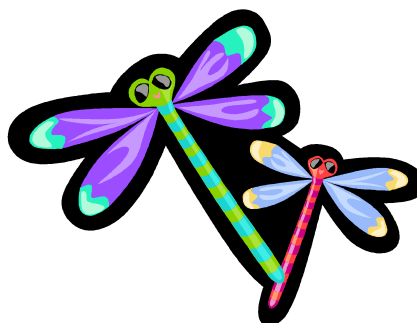


The Last Word..

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 Shropshire dragonfly events as I receive information. The web page currently states that I was hoping to launch a Shropshire Dragonflies website in 2013- I really was and somehow it's now 2014! The plan is still there as I think it would be beneficial to have a site where I can receive information and pass it on as the flight season unfolds rather than retrospectively. So watch this space- literally at the moment I'm afraid!

I am running a number of courses this year 2 of which I have shamelessly decided to detail at the end of this newsletter. A beginners **Larval Workshop** is also taking place at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre on 26th April, 2014. This is being supported by Invertebrate Challenge and is therefore free so don't delay as it's first come first served! A pdf with details of this course hopefully accompanied your newsletter.

A huge thank you again for your continued interest in Shropshire dragonflies and all your recording efforts. Many of you contributed records to the **Atlas of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland** and it is due for publication in May 2014 so be sure to grab a copy and see how some of our well known local species are faring from a broader perspective. As ever please don't hesitate to contact me with records, newsletter suggestions, ID queries, 100s of exuviae (!!!) etc. at info@shropshiredragonflies.co.uk Have a great hot sizzling summer and above all enjoy the dragonflies!



References

Brooks, S. (2004) **Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland**. 4th ed. Hook: British Wildlife Publishing.

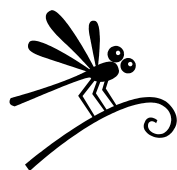
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Courses



Tuesday 13th May, Tuesday 24th June and Tuesday 19th August, 2014

National Trust Carding Mill Valley, Shropshire

Aim: Discovering Dragonflies- a repeat of the successful series of 3 dragonfly identification workshops with County Recorder Sue McLamb. Aimed at beginners this series will enable people to identify a range of species that occupy different flight periods throughout the season. Classroom inputs during the morning will focus on identification of 'seasonal species' and an understanding of the natural history of these fantastic insects. Participants will also learn how the life cycle is adapted for species emerging at different times of the year. Following a brief lunch the afternoons will be spent outside at 3 different locations on the Long Mynd putting identification skills to the test in a variety of habitats.

Meet: Please report to the National Trust's chalet pavilion at Carding Mill Valley, Church Stretton, Shropshire, SY6 6JG. The workshop will start at 10am and finish at 2pm. For further directions see

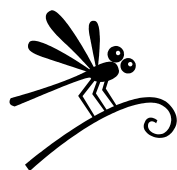
<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/carding-mill-valley-and-shropshire-hills/how-to-get-here/>

Requirements: Packed lunch essential. Wellies/walking boots and waterproofs as we will be venturing out! Total walking will be no more than 1km. Identification guides and hand lens if owned.

Contact: Booking essential via Emily Knight 01694 725000 or email emily.knight@nationaltrust.org.uk

Cost: £10 per session

NB: Weather permitting 2 afternoons will be spent at pools on top of the Long Mynd so some participants will need to drive and car sharing will be very much appreciated.



Introduction to Dragonflies and Damselflies

8th-10th August, 2014

Preston Montford Field Centre, Shropshire

Aim: This course is aimed at all those with a desire to learn more about these stunning insects. Open to all levels of ability we aim to introduce you close up to a good number of the 31 Shropshire species of dragonfly and damselfly so that you will leave confident in your own abilities to identify them and make species records. Classroom sessions on identification, life history, larvae and exuviae will be combined with a number of field visits to a range of aquatic habitats. This will allow you to put your skills into practice and to observe and understand the visual spectacle of these fascinating insects on the wing.

Tutors: Sue McLamb is the County recorder for Dragonflies in Shropshire and Odonata Tsar for the Shropshire Ecological Data Network. Ian Cheeseborough is a self-employed entomologist and previously held the post of County recorder for this group of insects.

Location: Preston Montford Field Centre (SJ433143). For further directions see <http://www.field-studies-council.org/centres/prestonmontford/location.aspx>

The course will start on Friday evening and finish on Sunday late afternoon.

Contact: For further details and booking please contact Preston Montford Field Centre
Tel: 0845 3307372 or email: enquiries.pm@field-studies-council.org
Cost: £253 (residential) £173 (non residential)