

ODONATA

Dragonflies & Damselflies

During the Carboniferous period, 300 million years ago when the earth's atmosphere was rich in oxygen, insects reached their largest size. Giant dragonfly-like creatures existed with wingspans of up to 28 inches. True dragonflies appear in the fossil record 250 million years ago with wingspans of 8 inches while the largest Odonate today from Central and South America is a damselfly with a wingspan of 7.1 inches.

The largest dragonflies we see flying around our ponds and rivers have wingspans closer to four inches. Like their ancestors ninety nine percent of them rely on freshwater to breed. Their aquatic larvae, called naiads (nymphs) are carnivorous as are the adult insects which reach maturity over a period of between one to five years. Masters of flight, reflected in their names, darters, skimmers, chasers and hawkers. These charismatic creatures, whilst falling prey to other critters such as frogs, spiders, birds and bats also have a taste for each other. They are top predators in the insect world helping to keep a balance. I recently photographed a Lesser Emperor preying on a Migrant Hawker on Winterton Dunes in Norfolk.

The British Dragonfly Society reports that nineteen UK species have increased in occupancy since the seventies. The number of wetland habitats, water quality and climate warming all having an impact. Since the nineties six new species of dragonflies and damselflies have arrived in the UK.

Anisoptera

Dragonflies



Southern Migrant Hawker



Hairy Dragonfly



Southern Hawker



Brown Hawker



Norfolk Hawker



Azure Hawker



Moorland Hawker



Migrant Hawker



Emperor Dragonfly



Lessor Emperor



Downy Emerald



Brilliant Emerald



Northern Emerald



Golden-ringed Dragonfly



Broad-bodied Chaser



Common Clubtail



Four-spotted Chaser



Scarce Chaser



Black-tailed Skimmer



Keeled Skimmer



White-faced Darter



Common Darter



Ruddy Darter



Black Darter



Red-veined Darter



Scarlet Darter

Zygoptera

Damselflies



Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly



Southern Damselfly



Azure Damselfly



Blue-tailed Damselfly



Northern Damselfly



White-legged Damselfly



Variable Damselfly



Common Blue Damselfly



Dainty Damselfly

Irish Damselfly

No image yet



Southern Emerald Damselfly



Red-eyed Damselfly



Small Red-eyed Damselfly



Small Red Damselfly



Large Red Damselfly



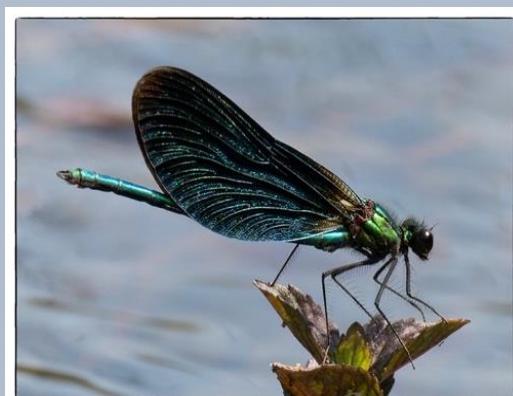
Scarce Emerald Damselfly



Willow Emerald Damselfly



Emerald Damselfly



Beautiful Demoiselle



Banded Demoiselle