

# DRAGONFLIES AND DAMSELFLIES OF THE GREEN MOUNTAIN AUDUBON NATURE CENTER

HUNTINGTON, VERMONT

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Always curious about all things natural I purchased a beginner's guide to dragonflies a number of years ago. After identifying a handful of species and marveling at their beauty I began to think this might be an interesting group of insects (the Odonata) to study in more detail. The Audubon Nature Center, with its nearby location and diversity of aquatic habitats, seemed like a good place to begin. With the enthusiastic support of the Nature Center staff I began to record all the different species encountered. What I found was more than I imagined; 48 species of odonates - 36 dragonflies and 12 damselflies. Species diversity was only half the surprise though, because each species is much more than a name and a pretty combination of colors and patterns. Even though small by our standards, each species has its own unique life history, habitat preferences, and behaviors. When you start to study dragonflies you can't help but add all these new stories to your memory.

This is an ongoing study with still much to learn and undoubtedly new species to discover. The species listed here were found over the past six spring to fall seasons, 2008 through 2013. The early years were characterized by more enthusiasm than proficiency but as my knowledge of odonates increased the study became somewhat more systematic. Because the adult flying phase of any given species is short, and different species emerge as adults throughout the warm weather season, I've tried to visit the Nature Center frequently and regularly. During the middle years of the study I would try to visit at least once a week. Since odonates inhabit a wide variety of aquatic habitats I've made it a point to not only visit regularly but visit all potential habitats. Recent years have been more focused on targeted species, species likely to be found here but for some reason not found to date. Going forward the study promises diminishing returns in terms of new species found, but increasing returns in the understanding and enjoyment of our local dragonflies and damselflies.

Most productive for dragonflies and damselflies, not only in species but in numbers, is a string of beaver ponds of various sizes and ages through the middle of the property. Some of these ponds are large and well established, some small or ephemeral. A man made "peeper pond" adjacent to a meadow

adds to the lentic, or still water, mix. Less productive of odonates are the Huntington River, Sherman Hollow Brook, the hemlock swamp, and various seeps. With fewer species and numbers in these environments, more patience is needed to survey them, and it is thought that these areas are often under surveyed.

This study has been limited to the adult flying stage of these insects' lives and no aquatic larvae or shed exuvia were sampled. Repeated encounters with most of the species over the years and the suitability of the aquatic resources for these species larval development leads me to believe that most are permanent residents. Some of the larger species of dragonflies are powerful flyers and could easily have wandered onto the study site and therefore not represent local breeders. There are only two species located to date that the state ranks as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The large Green-striped Darner I've only found once in six years so I doubt it is a permanent resident. The other Species of Greatest Conservation Need is a species of snaketail. Many of these are river specialists, hard to find and even harder to net for identification. Again, if these lotic, or moving water environments are under surveyed as suspected, that might well account for its state status.

The most interesting discovery for me has been how predictable some species are in their very specific habitat choices. If I want to see a certain species I know exactly where to find it because I've found it repeatedly in a specific spot, and not anywhere else at the Nature Center. These species tend to be river specialists, not so much the generalists found in good numbers at the beaver ponds.

June is a good time to find Superb Jewelwings at the first bend in the river downstream from Horseshoe Bend. They perch on sunny Japanese Knotweed leaves there. A little further downstream seems to be just right for Ocellated Darners. Their search for flying insect prey finds them closely following every little in and out of the river bank, just a foot or two above the water. You'll find them there in late summer. One of the snaketails, a group of very colorful and elusive dragonflies, has been seen for a few years on a more open stretch of the river, downstream from the Main Road. Here they like to perch on rocks in the middle of the river, at the head of a long riffle. Try to find them in June because the adults have finished with reproduction and died off by July.

One other dragonfly stands out for its very specific choice of habitat, the Delta-Spotted Spiketail. This large and colorful species is most often associated with beaver dams and their outlet brooks, where females lay eggs in the sandy shallows. They are called spiketails because of the females long and spiky egg laying ovipositor. If you find your way into the shrub embowered outlet brook of the last beaver pond in June, you may enjoy watching her as she pogoes up and

down like a sewing machine needle, injecting eggs into the sandy brook bottom through an inch of surface water.

### Audubon Damselflies by Family

#### Jewelwings

- Superb Jewelwing
- Ebony Jewelwing

#### Spreadwings

- Spotted Spreadwing
- Northern Spreadwing
- Lyre-tipped Spreadwing
- Slender Spreadwing
- Elegant Spreadwing

#### Pond Damsels

- Taiga Bluet
- Northern or Vernal Bluet
- Boreal Bluet
- Marsh Bluet
- Hagen's Bluet
- Eastern Forktail
- Fragile Forktail
- Aurora Damsel
- Sedge Sprite

### Audubon Dragonflies by Family

#### Darners

- Common Green Darner
- Lance-tipped Darner
- Canada Darner
- Black-tipped Darner

Shadow Darner  
Ocellated Darner  
Variable Darner  
Green-striped Darner

#### Clubtails

Dusky Clubtail  
Lilypad Clubtail  
Northern Pygmy Clubtail  
Beaverpond Clubtail  
Snaketail species

#### Spiketails

Delta-spotted Spiketail  
Twin-spotted Spiketail

#### Emeralds

Beaverpond Baskettail  
Racket-tailed Emerald  
American Emerald

#### Skimmers

Common Whitetail  
Chalk-fronted Corporal  
Four-spotted Skimmer  
Twelve-spotted Skimmer  
Widow Skimmer  
Slaty Skimmer  
Frosted Whiteface  
Belted Whiteface  
Dot-tailed Whiteface  
Eastern Pondhawk  
White-faced Meadowhawk  
Cherry-faced Meadowhawk  
Band-winged Meadowhawk  
Autumn Meadowhawk  
Blue Dasher