

Ode News - An Occasional Newsletter for Dragonfly Enthusiasts in Southeastern Massachusetts

Volume I, Number 2 - July, 1994

Hi! Welcome to the second issue of Ode News! Did you think you would see another? We had quite a response to the first issue - enough to convince us to produce a second. We weren't sure when it would happen, but here it is. The spring of 1994 was exciting! We invested in some new equipment - nets, hip boots, hand magnifying lenses - and started looking in April. Our efforts paid off in some exciting discoveries!

CONTENTS

- [Highlights: Spring/Early Summer 1994](#)
 - [First Sightings - 1994](#)
 - [In Focus: The Pennants \(Genus *Celithemis*\)](#)
 - [News and Noduses](#)
 - [About Ode News](#)
-

Highlights: Spring/Early Summer 1994

After what seemed like a slow start (perhaps typical on this chilly peninsula), the spring and early summer season eventually produced many highlights. Some of the more noteworthy were:

Probably the most significant event so far this year was confirmation of a small population of **Spring Blue Darners** (*Aeshna mutata*) at a vernal pool in Eastham. In June of 1993, a couple of *Aeshnas* were seen at this pool but were not identified to species. However, the early date suggested *mutata*, as the other species of *Aeshna* do not appear until mid-summer or later. On 6 June of this year, one was rediscovered at this site, and at least four of these beautiful dragons were present later in the month, one of which was captured and photographed in the hand. The only other Cape record for this state-listed species is of an individual captured by Ginger Carpenter in the Punkhorn area of Brewster on 7 June 1987.

On 12 June, at least two **Springtime Darners** (*Basiaeschna janata*) were discovered foraging along a small stream that empties out of Seymour's Pond near the Harwich/Brewster line. On 15 June, one was captured and photographed in the hand to confirm the sighting. This represents only the second record of this small aeshnid for Cape Cod. The first was of a teneral individual

found in Hyannis and brought to Ginger Carpenter several years ago. Springtime Darners are common throughout New England so their presence on Cape Cod is not unexpected.

On 5 June at a site in E. Harwich, two libellulids were photographed which, at the time, were tentatively identified as teneral Painted Skimmers (*Libellula semifasciata*). Examination of the slides a couple of weeks later, however, proved the creatures to be **Four-spotted Skimmers** (*Libellula quadrimaculata*), a species not recorded on the Cape in over 40 years! On 18 June at a vernal pool in Eastham (very close to the Spring Blue Darner pool), two adult Four-spotted were found, one of which was captured and photographed in the hand. On 27 June, at least six of this species were present at the Spring Blue Darner pool. Additionally, a total of 3-4 individuals were at two different sphagnum bog sites in the Punkhorn conservation area in Brewster on 26 June. Although this stocky dragon was collected by Robert and Sarah Gibbs at three sites in Falmouth during the early 1950s, Ginger Carpenter did not encounter it during her several years of field work on the Cape. Four-spotted Skimmers are early fliers, and are common in bogs and boggy ponds elsewhere in Massachusetts, so their presence here is not surprising. It will be interesting to see if *quadrimaculata* appears elsewhere on the Cape.

On 30 May, a **Harlequin Bog Darner** (*Gomphaeschna furcillata*) was found patrolling a short stretch of dirt road in the Punkhorn conservation area, and no less than five of these lovely insects were found there on 12 June. Although this species is known for its rather confiding, inquisitive behavior, one individual that spent a couple of minutes perched on an observer's arm - eyeball to eyeball - was unexpectedly obliging! This is another sphagnum bog species. Ginger Carpenter found them in the Punkhorn as well during the late 1980s. Although this handsome aeshnid is not illustrated in Ginger's book, photos of both sexes can be found in Dunkle's "Dragonflies of Florida, Bermuda, and the Bahamas".

On 25 June, a **Long-legged Green Darner** (*Anax longipes*) reappeared at Gould's Pond in Orleans. This state-listed species was discovered at this site for the first time last year.

Although sightings of rare or little-known species provide the most exciting memories, we were also impressed on occasion with the sheer numbers of some species. For example, on 11 June at Grassy Nook Pond in Nickerson State Park, no less than 800 forktails, most, if not all, Common Forktails (*Ischnura verticalis*), were present. At the same time and place, there were perhaps 100 Johnny Whitefaces (*Leucorrhinia intacta*) and at least 250 spreadwings (*Lestes* sp.). On 20 June at a couple of small ponds off Pleasant Bay Road in E. Harwich (referred to by Ginger as the "Superspot"), clouds of spreadwings arose from the shoreline grasses with every step; 1400+ were estimated to be present. A couple of males examined in the hand appeared to be Disjunct Spreadwings (*Lestes disjunctus*).

We continue to be amazed - and occasionally somewhat taken aback - by the voracious, often cannibalistic habits of these otherwise appealing creatures. While such behavior may not seem terribly out-of-character for the larger dragons, there is something disconcerting about watching a dainty forktail calmly and methodically munching away on another of its brethren! We have witnessed many such instances so far this season; the victims most often seem to be hapless tenerals.

One of the strangest observations recently involved a pair of mating Stream Cruisers (*Didymops transversa* - one of the more delightful Latin names!). A pair of *Didymops* on the ground in the "wheel position" were almost stepped upon by the surprised observer. The male tried repeatedly to become airborne but seemed trapped. After a minute or two of frantic effort, he finally broke free and flew off, leaving the female lying motionless on her back. Closer examination showed the female to be dead!

First Sightings - 1994

Species	Date of first sighting	Location
Ebony Jewelwings (<i>Calopteryx maculata</i>)	11 June	Marston's Mills
Spreadwing species (<i>Lestes</i> sp.)	4 June	Aunt Patty's Pond, Dennis
Spotted Spreadwing ? (<i>Lestes congener</i>)	18 June	vernal pool, Eastham
Disjunct Spreadwing ? (<i>Lestes disjunctus</i>)	20 June	"Superspot", E. Harwich
Violet Dancer (<i>Argia fumipennis</i>)	19 June	Mashpee River
Bog Bluet (<i>Enallagma aspersum</i>)	18 June	vernal pools, Eastham
Northern Bluet (<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>)	24 May	E. Harwich
Turquoise Bluet ? (<i>Enallagma divagans</i>)	19 June	Mashpee River Pond
Skimming Bluet (<i>Enallagma geminatum</i>)	6 June	Baker's Pond, Dennis
Lateral Bluet (<i>Enallagma laterale</i>)	31 May	Grassy Pond, E. Falmouth
Barrens Bluet (<i>Enallagma recurvatum</i>)	6 June	Baker's Pond, Dennis
Orange Bluet (<i>Enallagma signatum</i>)	19 June	Grassy Pond, E. Falmouth
Vesper Bluet (<i>Enallagma vesperum</i>)	16 June	Herring Pond, Wellfleet
Fragile Forktail (<i>Ischnura posita</i>)	24 May	vernal pool, Eastham
Common Forktail (<i>Ischnura verticalis</i>)	3 May	vernal pools, Eastham
Sprite species (<i>Nehalennia</i> sp.)	30 May	Nickerson S.P., Brewster
Spring Blue Darner (<i>Aeshna mutata</i>)	6 June	vernal pool, Eastham
Common Green Darner (<i>Anax junius</i>)	24 April	Nickerson S.P., Brewster
Long-legged Green Darner (<i>Anax longipes</i>)	25 June	Gould's Pond, Orleans
Springtime Darner (<i>Basiaeschna janata</i>)	12 June	Seymour's Pond, Harwich
Harlequin Bog Darner (<i>Gomphaeschna furcillata</i>)	30 May	Punkhorn, Brewster
Lancet Clubtail (<i>Gomphus exilis</i>)	14 May	Wellfleet
Sand Dragon (<i>Progomphus obscurus</i>)	26 June	Punkhorn, Brewster
Petite Emerald (<i>Dorocordulia lepida</i>)	12 June	Punkhorn, Brewster

Common Baskettail (<i>Epitheca cynosura</i>)	28 May	Gould's Pond, Orleans
The Prince (<i>Epitheca princeps</i>)	19 June	Great Hill Road, Sandwich
Stream Cruiser (<i>Didymops transversa</i>)	11 May	Wellfleet
Calico Pennant (<i>Celithemis elisa</i>)	4 June	Grassy Pond, Dennis
Green Jacket (<i>Erythemis simplicicollis</i>)	4 June	Grassy Pond, Dennis
Saltmarsh Dragon (<i>Erythrodiplax berenice</i>)	23 June	WBWS
Johnny Whiteface (<i>Leucorrhinia intacta</i>)	22 May	vernal pools, Eastham
Goldenwings (<i>Libellula auripennis</i>)	19 June	Grassy Pond, E. Falmouth
White-spangled Skimmer (<i>Libellula cyanea</i>)	4 June	Aunt Patty's Pond, Dennis
Little Corporal Skimmer (<i>Libellula deplanata</i>)	28 May	E. Harwich
Corporal Skimmer (<i>Libellula exusta</i>)	24 May	"Superspot", E. Harwich
Damson Skimmer (<i>Libellula incesta</i>)	17 June	Moody Pond, Mashpee
Whitetail (<i>Libellula lydia</i>)	18 June	Beech Forest, Provincetown
Needham's Skimmer (<i>Libellula needhami</i>)	25 June	Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary
Twelve-spotted Skimmer (<i>Libellula pulchella</i>)	18 June	Beech Forest, P'town
Four-spotted Skimmer (<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>)	5 June	"Superspot", E. Harwich
Painted Skimmer (<i>Libellula semifasciata</i>)	5 June	"Superspot", E. Harwich
Blue Pirate (<i>Pachydiplax longipennis</i>)	11 June	Nickerson S.P., Brewster
Globetrotter species (<i>Pantala</i> sp.)	19 June	WBWS
Meadowfly species (<i>Sympetrum</i> sp.)	18 June	Evans Field, Provincetown
Red Saddlebags (<i>Tramea carolina</i>)	27 June	vernal pool, Eastham

In Focus: The Pennants (Genus *Celithemis*)

One of the most conspicuous and easily observed groups of Cape Cod's summer odonates are the so-called pennants of the genus *Celithemis*. These are smallish dragons, ranging from about 1 to 1.5 inches in length. They are boldly patterned and often strikingly colored, with distinctive wing patterns. Pennants are typically found perched on the tops of plant stems, from which they forage. They are relatively sluggish flyers, at least compared with other dragons! Pairs usually oviposit in tandem, the tip of the male's abdomen clasping the female behind the head as they fly low over the water with the female repeatedly tapping the surface as she drops her eggs. Eight species of *Celithemis* are currently recognized in North America; four of these occur on Cape

Cod. They begin to appear here in June, but are most common during the dog days of July and August.

The **Calico Pennant** (*Celithemis elisa*), also known as Elisa's Skimmer, is the most widespread and common of the genus in our area, and is found throughout the eastern U.S. They are spectacularly colored and rather easily identified. The mature males have a red face, bright chestnut eyes, reddish and black thorax, and a black abdomen with bright red markings on the top. The wings are suffused with a reddish tinge and have bright red stigmas. Females and immature males are patterned similarly, but are bright yellow where the males are red, including the stigmas. In both sexes, each wing is boldly marked with a dark, roundish spot at the tip, and another dark spot in the center. Additionally, the hindwing has an extensive dark patch at the base which is tinged with yellow or amber. Calico Pennants are widely distributed on Cape Cod and can be found in almost any freshwater habitat as well as upland fields, often far from water. The males are not territorial, but at the breeding ponds often perch facing away from the water, watching for approaching females which they intercept in the hopes of mating.

The **Halloween Pennant** (*Celithemis eponina*) is the largest of the genus on Cape Cod, with long wings and a fluttery flight that is often described as butterfly-like. The strikingly patterned wings are suffused with orange in males or yellow in females and immatures, and have bold dark brown bands and patches. The males have red stigmas, the females yellow. The abdomen is black, with reddish-orange (males) or yellow (females and immatures) spots. In both sexes the eyes are a rich chestnut. Halloween Pennants range throughout the eastern U.S., and are widely distributed across Cape Cod, though are nowhere numerous. They are often found in upland fields where they forage from the tops of weeds and flower stalks. One curious and unexplained behavior is that they occasionally perch with the forewings vertical and the hindwings horizontal.

The **Banded Pennant** (*Celithemis monomelaena*) ranges from southern New England south to Texas and Florida; those in the southern portion of the species' range are considered by some to be a separate species, *C. fasciata*. This is a rather small species with a distinctive wing pattern: black tips, a variably-sized black patch three-quarters of the way out the wing, and a black blotch over the basal third or so. Mature males are entirely black on the body, developing a blueish pruinosity on the abdomen, while females and immature males are dark brown with a yellow face and body markings. On Cape Cod, Banded Pennants have so far been recorded only from Falmouth to Chatham, where they are most numerous at shallow, coastal plain ponds. Males are most active at the pond shore early in the morning where they perch on the tops of emergent vegetation. Later in the day they forage from the tops of trees and shoreline shrubs.

Martha's Pennant (*Celithemis martha*) is another rather dainty, darkly colored species. Its restricted North American range extends only from Nova Scotia to Ohio and Pennsylvania. Mature males are entirely black on the body, while in females the abdomen and sides of the thorax are marked with triangular yellow spots. The wings are mostly clear, except for a conspicuous roundish, dark basal patch on the hindwing; in females there is some yellowish coloring in this patch. On Cape Cod, Martha's Pennants have been recorded from Falmouth to Truro. This is another characteristic species of the Cape's coastal plain ponds, where they can become quite numerous in mid-summer.

News and "Noduses"

Dragonfly Society - Anyone with a serious interest in odonates will wish to join the Dragonfly Society of America. This non-profit society was formed in 1989 to "encourage scientific research, habitat preservation, and aesthetic enjoyment of Odonata". The society publishes a quarterly newsletter *Argia* and a quarterly journal, the Bulletin of American Odonatology. Membership dues are a modest \$10 annually, which includes *Argia*. The Bulletin is available by separate subscription for \$15 annually. For information or to subscribe, write to: Dragonfly Society of America, c/o T. Donnelly, 2091 Partridge Lane, Binghamton, NY 13903.

Nature Conservancy article - The May/June issue of Nature Conservancy magazine has a wonderfully written piece "Hunting Dragons: On Safari for the Big Game of the Insect World" which focuses not so much on dragonflies as on their human admirers. The author, William Stolzenburg, delightfully describes some of the attendees and activities at a 1993 meeting of the Dragonfly Society of America held in Oregon. The article is accompanied by many exceptional photos, and a sidebar (with photo) features Ginger Carpenter! If you are unable to locate a copy of this issue, send us a S.A.S.E., and we will mail you a photocopy.

Dragonfly Workshop - Jackie Sones will be conducting a workshop entitled "How to I.D. Odes" at the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary on 23 July from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Registration is \$5 for Mass. Audubon members, \$7 for non-members. Call 508-349-2615 for information or to register.

Cape May Hotline - The Cape May, NJ, rare bird hotline now includes sightings of odonates (and butterflies) as well! A recent recording reported an influx of Spot-winged Gliders (*Pantala hymenaea*) into the area. Give them a call at 609-884-2626.

Our thanks, as always, to Ginger Carpenter for her boundless patience and enthusiasm in answering our unending barrage of questions.

Ode News

Editorial Staff & Production - Blair Nikula & Jackie Sones
Illustrations - Fahy Bygate

Ode News is available at no charge (for now!) to anyone interested.
If you have any questions, comments, or contributions, or wish to be placed on the mailing list



write to: Ode News, 2 Gilbert Lane, Harwich Port, MA 02646, or send email to:
odenews@odenews.org



[Return to Index of Back Issues](#)



[Back to Ode News Home Page](#)