

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

Volume I, Number 3 - November, 1994

Hi! This issue covers the peak ode season on Cape Cod. Included within are the highlights of the late summer and fall, the beginning of an attempt to define the flight period of each species on Cape Cod, and some insights into the confusing group of dragons in the genus *Sympetrum*. As December approaches, there are still a few odes on the wing, the last sightings of which will be detailed in the next issue.

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Highlights: Late Summer/Fall 1994

Water levels remained exceptionally high throughout the season, and temperatures averaged above normal. What impact these variables have on odonates remains largely speculative - there is so much yet to learn! We made an executive decision to use the common names proposed a few years ago by Sidney Dunkle and Dennis Paulsen, two of the countries leading odonatologists. Unfortunately, for a number of species these names differ from those used in Ginger Carpenter's book - when in doubt, cross-reference using the latin name.

A **Fawn Darner** (*Boyeria vinosa*) was netted and photographed along a small stream connecting Seymour's and Hinckley's ponds in Harwich on 27 August (BN); at least one or two others were present on that date. This elusive species is known from only a couple of Cape sites. They generally inhabit running water and tend to be crepuscular, although the individuals above were active during midday.

A single **Swamp Darner** (*Epiaeschna heros*), the Cape's largest dragon, was seen and photographed at the Ashumet Wildlife Sanctuary in Falmouth on 30 August (JS,JT,BN). There was also a possible sighting on South Monomoy Island on 10 September (JS). This impressive insect apparently is a rare but regular visitor to this area.

Blue darners (*Aeshna* spp.) were a considerable source of both excitement and frustration this season - they are certainly a challenging bunch! Mottled Darners (*Aeshna clepsydra*) were numerous and widespread during the late summer. Many ponds with emergent vegetation seemed to host from one to several patrolling males, and at least 35 were estimated to be present at Grassy Pond in E. Falmouth on 30 August (BN,JS,JT). Black-tipped Darners (*Aeshna tuberculifera*), though much more local in distribution, were easily found at a few favored sites. Both species seemed to stick pretty close to wetlands, where we had some success in netting them, and where ovipositing females were seen on numerous occasions.

A number of *Aeshnas* in upland areas away from water kept us hopping and swinging, and swinging some more! Despite our best efforts, we succeeded in catching only one of these elusive and seemingly tireless creatures! However, an occasional individual did stop long enough to permit identification through binoculars or a camera lens. Single Shadow Darners (*Aeshna umbrosa*) were seen in N. Harwich on 10 September (BN), in E. Harwich on 18 September (BN), in Truro on 6 October (JS), and at Wellfleet Bay on 31 October (JS). Several other probable *A. umbrosas* were noted at various other sites. A very blueish *Aeshna* netted in Eastham on 12 September (JS) was thought to be either a Canada Darner (*Aeshna canadensis*) or a Green-striped Darner (*Aeshna verticalis*). Another of this type was seen in Sandwich on 8 October (JT,PT,BN). A number of other *Aeshnas* were seen too briefly to permit even a guess as to their identity.

We continued to see the spectacular **Comet Darner** (*Anax longipes*) at a number of coastal plain ponds. New sites for this state-listed species were North Trout Pond in Chatham on several dates from 23 July into August (BN et al.), and the "Frosted" Pool in Eastham on 23 July (JS).

The only sighting of **Black-shouldered Spinyleg** (*Dromogomphus spinosus*) was of two individuals at Mashpee/Wakeby Pond in Mashpee on 30 August (BN,JS). In contrast, this species was noted quite commonly in riverine habitats in the Sudbury River valley of Massachusetts this summer (RF).

The darkly elegant **Swift River Cruiser** (*Macromia illinoiensis*) was seen this summer at a number of sites from Falmouth to Wellfleet. From one to three individuals were noted cruising low along back roads and trails as well as over some of the larger ponds.

Band-winged Meadowflies (*Sympetrum semicinctum*) were found at two locations this season: the Mashpee River on two dates in late July (JT,SC,BN,PT) and Gould's Pond in Orleans on 17 Sept. (BN,RF). See the "In Focus" section below for more on this locally scarce species.

Rainpool gliders (genus *Pantala*) seemed numerous this season, but proved to be as frustrating as the *Aeshnas* - they are every bit as elusive and tireless! They first appeared in late June, most notably at the Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary where a swarm of 30 or so spent a few days (JS,BN) and eluded any attempts at capture. There were numerous other *Pantala* sightings through September, most involving one or two individuals. Both Wandering Gliders (*Pantala flavescens*) and Spot-winged Gliders (*Pantala hymenea*) were present, but only a handful of each was identified with any confidence (and only one - a *P. flavescens* - was captured). Our vague impression was that *P. hymenea* was more common early in the season, while *P. flavescens*

predominated later, but on-the-wing identification of these two remains a bit of a puzzle to us. There is some indication that *Pantallas* are more common in the Northeast during warm summers, so it will be interesting to watch for annual variation in the numbers of this group in future seasons.

A pair of **Black-mantled Gliders** (*Tramea lacerata*) at Gould's Pond in Orleans on 1 August (JT,SC) provided the only sighting of this species on the Cape this season.

Lilypad Forktails (*Ischnura kellicotti*) were found at North Trout Pond in Chatham on several dates in August (BN et al.) and at "Flume" Pond in Mashpee on 30 August (JT,JS,BN). This species appears to be scarce on the Cape, but may be easily overlooked among the abundant *Enallagmas*.

Several **Stream Bluets** (*Enallagma exsulans*) were at the headwaters of the Mashpee River on 30 August (JS,BN). This is another species that inhabits running water and, so far as is known, is scarce on the Cape.

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Observed Flight Periods - 1994

For a variety of reasons, these dates are by no means definitive. Our lack of experience in identifying some groups, particularly *Lestes* and *Enallagmas*, resulted in much uncertainty over flight periods for some species. Additionally, coverage was spotty during the first half of July, thus first appearances of some species (e.g., pennants) undoubtedly were missed. Consider these dates a baseline from which to expand in the future.

Species	Observed Flight Period in 1994
Ebony Jewelwing (<i>Calopteryx maculata</i>)	11 June - 27 Aug.
Spreadwing species (<i>Lestes</i> sp.)	4 June
Spotted Spreadwing (<i>Lestes congener</i>)	? - 30 Oct.+
Common Spreadwing (<i>Lestes disjunctus</i>)	20 June - 9 Oct.(?)
Sweetflag Spreadwing (<i>Lestes forcipatus</i>)	? - 29 Oct.
Slender Spreadwing (<i>Lestes rectangularis</i>)	4 Aug. - 30 Oct.+
Swamp Spreadwing (<i>Lestes vigilax</i>)	6 Aug. - 21 Sept.
Violet Dancer (<i>Argia fumipennis</i>)	19 June - 17 Sept.
Bog Bluet (<i>Enallagma aspersum</i>)	18 June - 20 Sept.
Familiar Bluet (<i>Enallagma civile</i>)	mid-June - 11 Sept.
Northern Bluet (<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>)	24 May - 18 June

Turquoise Bluet (<i>Enallagma divagans</i>)	19 June
Atlantic Bluet (<i>Enallagma doubledayi</i>)	? - 21 Sept.
Stream Bluet (<i>Enallagma exsulans</i>)	30 August
Skimming Bluet (<i>Enallagma geminatum</i>)	6 June - 17 Sept.
New England Bluet (<i>Enallagma laterale</i>)	31 May - 19 June
Little Bluet (<i>Enallagma minisculum</i>)	19 June
Pine Barrens Bluet (<i>Enallagma recurvatum</i>)	6 June - 11 June
Orange Bluet (<i>Enallagma signatum</i>)	19 June - 27 Aug.
Vesper Bluet (<i>Enallagma vesperum</i>)	16 June - 3 Sept.
Citrine Forktail (<i>Ischnura hastata</i>)	10 Sept. - 2 Oct.
Lilypad Forktail (<i>Ischnura kellicotti</i>)	16 Aug. - 30 Aug.
Fragile Forktail (<i>Ischnura posita</i>)	24 May - 20 Sept.
Eastern Forktail (<i>Ischnura verticalis</i>)	3 May - 21 Sept.
Sprite species (<i>Nehalennia sp.</i>)	30 May - 26 June
Mottled Darner (<i>Aeshna clepsydra</i>)	31 July - 8 Oct.
Spatterdock Darner (<i>Aeshna mutata</i>)	6 June - 18 June
Black-tipped Darner (<i>Aeshna tuberculifera</i>)	23 July - 20 Sept.
Shadow Darner (<i>Aeshna umbrosa</i>)	10 September - 31 Oct.
Common Green Darner (<i>Anax junius</i>)	24 April - 30 Oct.+
Comet Darner (<i>Anax longipes</i>)	25 June - 21 Aug.
Fawn Darner (<i>Boyeria vinosa</i>)	27 Aug.
Springtime Darner (<i>Basiaeschna janata</i>)	12 June - 15 June
Swamp Darner (<i>Epiaeschna heros</i>)	30 Aug.
Harlequin Darner (<i>Gomphaeschna furcillata</i>)	30 May - 26 June
Black-shouldered Spinyleg (<i>Dromogomphus spinosus</i>)	30 Aug.
Lancet Clubtail (<i>Gomphus exilis</i>)	14 May - 23 July
Common Sanddragon (<i>Progomphus obscurus</i>)	26 June - 30 July
Swift River Cruiser (<i>Macromia illinoiensis</i>)	31 July - 30 Aug.
Petite Emerald (<i>Dorocordulia lepida</i>)	12 June - 26 June
Common Baskettail (<i>Epithea cynosura</i>)	28 May - 30 July
Prince Baskettail (<i>Epithea princeps</i>)	19 June - 30 Aug.
Stream Cruiser (<i>Didymops transversa</i>)	11 May - 26 June
Calico Pennant (<i>Celithemis elisa</i>)	4 June - 30 Aug.
Halloween Pennant (<i>Celithemis eponina</i>)	23 July - 2 Aug.
Martha's Pennant (<i>Celithemis martha</i>)	23 July - 30 Aug.

Banded Pennant (<i>Celithemis monomelaena</i>)	23 July - 16 Aug.
Eastern Pondhawk (<i>Erythemis simplicicollis</i>)	4 June - 13 Sept.
Seaside Dragonlet (<i>Erythrodiplax berenice</i>)	23 June - 1 Sept.
Dot-tailed Whiteface (<i>Leucorrhinia intacta</i>)	22 May - 20 June
Golden-winged Skimmer (<i>Libellula auripennis</i>)	19 June - 21 Aug.
White-spangled Skimmer (<i>Libellula cyanea</i>)	4 June - 2 Aug.
Little Corporal Skimmer (<i>Libellula deplanata</i>)	24 May - 19 June
Corporal Skimmer (<i>Libellula exusta</i>)	24 May - 26 June
Slaty Skimmer (<i>Libellula incesta</i>)	17 June - 20 Sept.
Common Whitetail (<i>Libellula lydia</i>)	18 June - 13 Sept.
Needham's Skimmer (<i>Libellula needhami</i>)	25 June - 3 Sept.
Twelve-spotted Skimmer (<i>Libellula pulchella</i>)	18 June - 13 Sept.
Four-spotted Skimmer (<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>)	5 June - 26 June
Painted Skimmer (<i>Libellula semifasciata</i>)	5 June - 16 Aug.
Blue Dasher (<i>Pachydiplax longipennis</i>)	11 June - 20 Sept.
Glider species (<i>Pantala spp.</i>)	19 June - 8 Oct.
Eastern Amberwing (<i>Perithemis tenera</i>)	2 July - 30 Aug.
Saffron-bordered Meadowfly (<i>Sympetrum costiferum</i>)	30 July - 17 Sept.
Ruby Meadowfly (<i>Sympetrum rubicundulum</i>)	18 June - 30 Oct.+
Band-winged Meadowfly (<i>Sympetrum semicinctorum</i>)	late July - 17 Sept.
Yellow-legged Meadowfly (<i>Sympetrum vicinum</i>)	23 July - 30 Oct.+
Violet-masked Glider (<i>Tamea carolina</i>)	27 June - 20 Sept.
Black-mantled Glider (<i>Tamea lacerata</i>)	1 Aug.

+ = species that were still flying into November; more on these in the next issue of Ode News

In Focus: The Meadowflies (Genus *Sympetrum*)

One of the most common, widespread, and conspicuous groups of odonates on Cape Cod are the meadowflies of the genus *Sympetrum*. A small red or olivaceous dragon in your driveway, on your deck, or even on your shoulder during the late summer or fall is almost certainly one of these confiding creatures. They are late fliers, not appearing in numbers until late July, and are the last dragons on the wing as winter nears.

The taxonomy of this genus and many of the species within it has yet to be completely resolved, but at least 50 species are currently recognized worldwide, with at least a dozen occurring in

North America. Of these, nine are known from Massachusetts and seven from Cape Cod (two from historical reports only).

*Sympetrum*s are rather small dragons, generally 1 - 1.5 " in length. Mature males are reddish in coloration, with varying degrees of black on the abdomen. Females and immatures range from yellowish to olive-brown overall. Most of the local species breed at shallow, freshwater ponds and pools, the females ovipositing either alone or in tandem with the male. Although rather weak fliers, they wander widely, and are commonly found in fields (thus the common name "meadowfly"), upland areas, woodland trails, and even backyards. During warmer weather they typically perch at the tops of emergent vegetation or on low shrubs, but when it is cooler they more often are found basking in sunny spots on the ground, logs, or human-made structures. Most species are not particularly wary and usually can be approached and netted easily. This is fortunate, as some of the species are virtually identical in appearance and require in-the-hand examination to determine their identity.

The **Ruby Meadowfly** (*Sympetrum rubicundulum*) is probably the most representative of the genus on Cape Cod and may be the most widespread dragonfly in this area. Mature males have a brilliant red abdomen, marked with black triangles on the sides. The wings are clear with red stigmas and often a small amber patch at the base of the hindwing. The eyes are chestnut, the face pale brownish yellow, and the legs black. Females and immature males are similar in pattern but are dull yellow or olive where the males are red. Ruby Meadowflies are found from southern Canada south to Georgia and west to Idaho. In our area, they begin to appear in late June and by late July are abundant at their favored sites, often numbering into the hundreds. They fly well into the fall, but become scarce by late October. Females oviposit in a variety of lentic (still water) habitats, usually in tandem with the male, but occasionally alone.

The **Cherry-faced Meadowfly** (*Sympetrum internum*) is virtually identical to the Ruby Meadowfly, and the two in fact may be conspecific. The only means of separating these look-alikes is by the shape of the hamules (secondary sex organs on the underside of the males abdomen), though even this feature appears less than totally reliable and, of course, is of no use with females. Although Ginger Carpenter collected a few of this form on the Cape, its status here - as well as its status as a species - remains uncertain.

The **Yellow-legged Meadowfly** (*Sympetrum vicinum*) is another very common dragonfly on Cape Cod. It is superficially very similar to the Ruby Meadowfly, but close examination reveals that the male *S. vicinum*'s abdomen is more orange-red in hue, and has less extensive black on the side. Additionally, mature males have a reddish face, and mature females develop a reddish tinge on the dorsal surface of their abdomens. Both sexes and all ages have yellowish or brown legs, rather than the jet black legs of *S. rubicundulum*, though this distinction can be difficult to see in the field, particularly later in the season when *S. vicinum*'s legs seem to darken. The Yellow-legged Meadowfly is found throughout the eastern United States from Georgia north into Nova Scotia and Ontario. It has the latest flight period of our *Sympetrum*s, not appearing until late July and flying well into November. It is undoubtedly the most common dragonfly on the Cape during the latter half of the fall.

The **Saffron-bordered Meadowfly** (*Sympetrum costiferum*) is widespread but rather uncommon on the Cape, rarely occurring in numbers. Their most obvious field mark is a narrow amber band along the leading edge of the wings, a feature which fades in older individuals. The stigmas are yellow. Mature males are a darker shade of red - more of a brick red - than our other *Sympetrum*s. *S. costiferum* occurs across southern Canada south to California, Nebraska, and New England. They are said to be more tolerant of saline conditions than their relatives, and seem to be found more often at the larger, sandier- bottomed ponds. They seem to be the predominant *Sympetrum* around the South Monomoy ponds. The flight season is primarily July and August.

The **Band-winged Meadowfly** (*Sympetrum semicinatum*) appears to be rather rare and local on the Cape. It is smaller than our other *Sympetrum*s, averaging about 1" in length. Their most distinctive feature is a broad wash of amber across the base of the wings, darkest on the hind wings. This is a northeastern species, found from Nova Scotia west to Wisconsin and south to North Carolina. They apparently prefer lotic (moving water) habitats, which probably explains their scarcity on Cape Cod. *S. semicinatum* has been found at only about half a dozen sites locally, from Mashpee to Wellfleet, including two new sites this year (see "Highlights" above). The flight season is from July into September.

The **White-faced Meadowfly** (*Sympetrum obtrusum*) is part of the Ruby/Cherry-faced Meadowfly complex, and its taxonomic distinctness is uncertain. It is primarily a Midwestern species, but is found eastward to the Canadian Maritimes. The only indication that this species has occurred on the Cape is a vague reference in R. Heber Howe's, "Manual of the Odonata of New England" (1917-1921); the details are unknown.

The **Variiegated Meadowfly** (*Sympetrum corruptum*) is a distinctive, large, and colorful meadowfly. It is another Midwestern species, but occurs sporadically in the east. The only suggestion that this species has wandered to Cape Cod is another vague reference by Howe in his 1921 paper, "The Distribution of New England Odonata." The existence of any specimens is uncertain.

Corrigenda: The Springtime Darner (*Basiaeschna janata*) found in Harwich in June represents the third Cape Cod record, not the second as reported in the last issue. The Gibbs found the species in Falmouth in 1953.

Ode News

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