# Ode News - An Occasional Newsletter about Dragonflies and Damselflies on Cape Cod

Volume V, Number 2 - ISSN 1084-9750 - November, 1998

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Greetings! As hard as it is to believe, another field season has flown past and it's time to look back at some of the highlights. Most of this issue is devoted to a review of the 1998 season, including the exciting first year of the Rhode Island atlas project, some Connecticut sightings, and the DSA meetings in Maine and Nebraska. In addition, we are delighted to have articles from several contributors: Fred Goodwin summarizes his thorough observations of darner swarms; Carolyn Sones shares her experience with a sizable migratory movement; Noble Proctor describes an impressive roost of green darners; and Michael Thomas details an emerald swarm in Petersham. Enjoy!

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## 1998 Massachusetts Highlights

The 1998 season got off to a great start, with unusually warm weather in April and May resulting in the early emergence of many species. No less than 53 species of odonates were recorded in Massachusetts by the end of May. However, things came to a screeching halt in June as heavy rains arrived and lingered throughout the month. Boston received 11½"(!) of precipitation during the month, 8½" above normal, and many areas in New England received even greater amounts. Most rivers in the region exceeded flood level, causing considerable damage in places.

We can only speculate on the effect these conditions had on odonates, but it seems likely it would have been deleterious for some. High water levels might result in fewer surfaces (rocks, vegetation, etc.) upon which nymphs could undergo a successful transformation to adults. The

raging currents in many of the rivers would present an additional hazard to nymphs ready to emerge. In some species, a substantial proportion of the population emerges in a very short period of time. If an extended period of cool, rainy weather, or even a short period of very heavy rain followed one of these "mass emergences," the vulnerable tenerals would likely suffer considerable mortality due to an inability to "harden" properly, or to difficulty in finding food and/or thermoregulating. Consequently, very few might survive to maturity. Many southern New England species emerge primarily in June and these may have been especially hard hit in 1998.

The weather improved dramatically in July and the remainder of the summer was relatively dry and mild. However, the damage was perhaps already done, as numbers of many species seemed rather low all summer. Especially poorly reported this season were the clubtails (Gomphidae), most of which are riverine species that fly during the first half of the summer. We received no reports at all for several of these species. The blue darners (genus *Aeshna*), most of which emerge in mid-late July, seem to have been less affected; some large swarms were found in places, though at other sites they seemed far less numerous than in recent years.

*Ode News* sponsored three walks during the 1998 season. The first in Concord in May was rained out shortly after we started. However, the other two were blessed with good weather and great attendance. The 18 July walk in Petersham, cosponsored with the Athol Bird and Nature Club, attracted 18 participants and recorded a good variety of odonates, highlighted by a pair of the rarely seen Incurvate Emerald (*Somatochlora incurvata*). Sixteen participants showed up for our walk in the Myles Standish State Forest in Plymouth on 8 August and found most of the expected coastal plain species. The spectacular Comet Darner (*Anax longipes*) stole the show!

*Initialed Observers*: Fred Goodwin, Rick Heil, Jim & Stina MacDougall, Fred Morrison, Blair Nikula, Fred SaintOurs, Jackie Sones, Matt Steen, Fred Thurber, Jeremiah Trimble, Peter Trimble, Michael Veit, Richard Walton. Letters in brackets following the species name indicate state-listing: E = Endangered; T = Threatened; SC = Special Concern.

**Sparkling Jewelwing** (*Calopteryx dimidiata*): This species was present again on the Nissitissit River in Pepperell (and Hollis, NH) on three dates between 6 June and 25 July, and was "abundant" on the last date (MV). A male jewelwing seen on the Shawsheen River in Andover on 5 August was thought to be this species (RH); we know of no confirmed records for Essex County.

**American Rubyspot** (*Hetaerina americana*): The only report we are aware of this year was of three individuals on the Squannacook River in West Groton on 5 September (BN *et al*.).

**Blue-fronted Dancer** (*Argia apicalis*): This striking dancer was numerous on the Merrimack River in Haverhill on 5 & 9 August, and two males were caught at Haggett’s Pond in Andover on the former date (RH). These apparently constitute the first records for the species in Essex County.

**Boreal Bluet** (*Enallagma boreale*): Two males in Truro on 30 May (BN) may have been the first for Barnstable County; a specimen from the 1970’s, labeled as this species, awaits confirmation.

**Tule Bluet** (*Enallagma carunculatum*)[SC]: This dark bluet was found in numbers at three sites in Berkshire County in late July, with a peak of 100+ at the Mt. Williams Reservoir in N. Adams (JT *et al*.).

**New England Bluet** (*Enallagma laterale*)[SC]: One in Groveland on 2 June provided a first Essex County record (JM). The species was present again at Wallace Pond in Ashburnham in late June (MV), and there were a few reports from Cape Cod.

**Pine Barrens Bluet** (*Enallagma recurvatum*)[T]: Poor weather in June and extremely high water levels resulted in only a handful of reports for this coastal plain specialty. As many as 30+ were found at various sites in the Massachusetts Military Reservation in Bourne (PT), and 100+ were at Grassy Pond in Falmouth on 30 May (BN). The latter report indicates how abundant this local species can be in the right place at the right time.

**Rambur's Forktail** (*Ischnura ramburii*): The only report of this southern species was of a single male on South Beach in Chatham on 7 September, surprising for the location and the rather late date (JS, BN).

**Lake Darner** (*Aeshna eremita*): This large darner was found again on Mt. Watatic in Ashburnham where three males were netted among the *Aeshna* swarms on 1 August (JT *et al*.).

**Variable Darner** (*Aeshna interrupta*): As in 1997, large numbers of Variable Darners were present on Mt. Watatic in Ashburnham throughout the last half of the summer (MV *et al*.). A few were also present again at Bass Swamp in Warwick in early August (BN *et al*., MV) and they were fairly numerous at several sites in Berkshire County in late July (BN, JT, RH, JS).

**Spatterdock Darner** (*Aeshna mutata*)[E]: This blue-eyed beauty again was reported rather widely during June, with sightings at many of the previously known sites as well as new sites in Truro (BN), Bourne (PT), Pepperell (MV) and Ludlow (FM).

**Subarctic Darner** (*Aeshna subarctica*): For the first time since Subarctic Darners were discovered in the state in 1995, no individuals were found this year, despite several visits to the Ashburnham site during the species' late summer/early fall flight period.

**Comet Darner** (*Anax longipes*)[SC]: There were few sightings of this spectacular darner this year, primarily because there was little coverage of the coastal plain ponds they inhabit. However, one or two were seen at four sites in Bourne during July (PT), and at least five were seen at various ponds in the Myles Standish State Forest in Plymouth on 8 August. As usual, they nimbly eluded the most fervent efforts to net them!

**Fawn Darner** (*Boyeria vinosa*): An individual in Pepperell on 19 October (MV) seems to be the latest ever recorded in the state.

**Swamp Darner** (*Epiaeschna heros*): This southern giant was reported only three times in 1998: a female in Norwell on 2 July (FS); two in Bourne on 30 July (PT); and a single in Eastham on 22 August (BN).

**Cyrano Darner** (*Nasiaeschna pentacantha*): Only a few of this husky, southern darner were reported this season, perhaps due to the poor weather during its prime flight period in June. Singles were found in Rowley on 29 May (MS) and in Topsfield on 30 May (MS) and 2 June (FG); several were at the Musketaquid area of Concord, 9-10 June (RW); and two were rather late in Topsfield on 19 July (JT, JS).

**Black-shouldered Spinyleg** (*Dromogomphus spinosus*): One in Groveland on 1 June appears to be the earliest ever recorded in the state (JM).

**Cobra Clubtail** (*Gomphus vastus*)[SC]: Several of this inhabitant of large rivers were found on the Connecticut River in Sunderland and Northfield on 4-5 August (MV).

**Dragonhunter** (*Hagenius brevistylus*): One of these monsters at Turner's Pond Stream in New Bedford on 19 July (FT) furnished a first Bristol County record.

**Northern Pygmy Clubtail** (*Lanthus parvulus*): A male captured at Westfield Brook in Windsor on 28 June (JT *et al*.) is apparently the first Massachusetts record in recent years.

**Southern Pygmy Clubtail** (*Lanthus vernalis*): This small clubtail was found again in Norwell: the first adult and several exuviae were noted on 16 May and many adults were seen by late May (FS). They were also present again at Gulf Brook in Pepperell and were common during July on another small, unnamed stream in that town (MV).

**Riffle Snaketail** (*Ophiogomphus carolus*)[T]: Several of this small, green clubtail were found on Westfield Brook and the Westfield River in West Cummington on 28 June (JT *et al*.).

**Riverine Clubtail** (*Stylurus amnicola*)[E]: A male of this elusive clubtail was netted at the Fannie Stebbins Refuge in Longmeadow on 28 June (JT *et al*.).

**Zebra Clubtail** (*Stylurus scudderi*)[E]: A first Berkshire County record came from Hop Brook in Tyringham where 8-10 adults were found on 16 September (B.Windmiller). Additionally, a number of exuviae were found on the Connecticut River in Sunderland and Northfield on 4-5 August (MV).

**Arrow Clubtail** (*Stylurus spiniceps*)[T]: Two tenerals were caught on the Connecticut River: a female in Sunderland on 4 August and a male in Northfield the following day (MV). Many exuviae were found at both sites, and several clubtails that eluded capture at the former site were thought to be this species.

**Arrowhead Spiketail** (*Cordulegaster obliqua*): This rarely encountered dragon was found again in Topsfield where single males were found on 30 May and 2 June (FG). Additionally, a female photographed near Black Pond Bog in Norwell on 9 June (JS, JT) provided a first for Plymouth County.

**Twin-spotted Clubtail** (*Cordulegaster maculata*): The first Plymouth County records of this species were provided by two or three adults, plus an exuviae, on the Indian Head River at the

Pembroke – Hanover line on 27 May (FS), and two at the Norris Reservation in Norwell on 9 June (JS, JT).

**Illinois River Cruiser** (*Macromia illinoiensis*): Several of this handsome dragon over the Merrimack River in Haverhill on 5 August (RH) apparently represent a long-overdue first for Essex County.

**Umber Shadowdragon** (*Neurocordulia obsoleta*) [SC]: Single males of this crepuscular, little-known dragon were captured at the Indian Head Dam in Pembroke on 11 & 13 July (FS), providing an unexpected first for Plymouth County.

**Ski-tailed Emerald** (*Somatochlora elongata*)[SC]: Three near the Westfield Brook in West Cummington on 28 June (BN *et al*.) furnished a first record for Hampshire County. Additionally, a female was in Ashburnham on 5 July (BN).

**Forcipate Emerald** (*Somatochlora forcipata*): A male captured on Mt. Watatic on 16 July (MV), and another at Tom's Swamp on 19 July (M.Thomas – see page 8) constitute, to our knowledge, just the third and fourth records of this northern emerald in Massachusetts. The first was collected by Chris Leahy in Washington on 10 July 1973; the second was a female collected by Michael Veit on Mt. Watatic in July, 1997 (which we neglected to report in last year's sightings summary).

**Coppery Emerald** (*Somatochlora georgiana*)[E]: Although there were no definite records in 1998, two or three dragons thought to be Coppery Emeralds were seen on two dates in early August at the Holliston site where the species was discovered in 1997 (BN *et al*.). Another possible sighting came from West Newbury in August (RH).

**Incurvate Emerald** (*Somatochlora incurvata*): A male and a female on Mt. Watatic on 16 July (MV) provided the second record of this rare species in that area (the species was found at a nearby bog last year). Additionally, a pair in the wheel was at Tom's Swamp in Petersham on 18 July (JT, JS *et al*.).

**Mocha Emerald** (*Somatochlora linearis*)[SC]: This southern emerald was present again in Holliston: two females on 2 August (JT *et al*.) and another on 6 August (BN, RH). A female was also at the Martin Burns W.M.A. in Newbury on 11 July (BN, RH).

**Ebony Boghaunter** (*Williamsonia fletcheri*)[E]: The only report we received this year was of a single male at the traditional Tom's Swamp site in Petersham on 18 May (J&SM).

**Ringed Boghaunter** (*Williamsonia lintneri*)[E]: See the previous issue of *Ode News* for the few 1998 reports of this very rare species.

**Elfin Skimmer** (*Nannothemis bella*): This delightful, diminutive dragon seems to be very locally distributed in boggy habitats. The few reports in 1998 included 10+ at Black Pond Bog in Norwell on 24 May (FS), and as many as 20+ on a backwater section of the Squannacook River in Shirley on three dates between 30 May and 16 July (MV).

**Wandering Glider** (*Pantala flavescens*): Once again, Wandering Gliders apparently wandered elsewhere as there were only scattered reports from Massachusetts, mostly in August and September. The only count of note came from Connecticut (see the Connecticut report on page 6).

**Spot-winged Glider** (*Pantala hymenaea*): Spot-winged Gliders were again scarce this year, although there may have been a substantial movement in late June (see article by Carolyn Sones on page 8). One hundred or more gliders in Dartmouth on 20-21 June were also thought to be this species (FT).

**Variegated Meadowhawk** (*Sympetrum corruptum*): Probably the most surprising find this season was a female Variegated Meadowhawk discovered on South Monomoy Island in Chatham on 23 July (JS). This western species stages periodic mass movements and shows up occasionally in the East. Although there are historical records for Massachusetts, we are unaware of any in recent decades. The last record from New England appears to be one captured by Hal White at Mt. Desert, Maine on 8 August 1980. We thought the Monomoy record might be the precursor of an influx, but we heard of no other records from the Northeast in 1998.

**Migration**: There was very little migratory movement noted in Massachusetts this year. The only northbound movement detected was in late June when large numbers of unidentified dragons were seen moving north in Hingham (see the article by Carolyn Sones on page 8).

Although southbound movements seem to be routine on the Connecticut coast, and some impressive counts were made there this year (see page 6), the magnitude of these movements seems to diminish rapidly eastward. The only presumably southbound movements in Massachusetts came once again from Martha's Vineyard where large numbers of dragons were seen at Gay Head in September. However, these were reported by observers who made no attempt to estimate numbers and were unsure of the species involved. Although we again failed to detect any southbound movements on Cape Cod this fall, a large swarm of migratory species over a soccer field in Mashpee on 11 September (JT) included about 2000 Common Green Darners (*Anax junius*), eight Wandering Gliders (*Pantala flavescens*), two Spot-winged Gliders (*Pantala hymenaea*), and two Carolina Saddlebags (*Tramea carolina*).

**Corrigenda**: The report of two female Big Bluets (*Enallagma durum*) in Wellfleet on 12 July 1997 (*Ode News* - Vol. IV, No.2) is erroneous. Closer examination of the specimens has proven them to be very large Familiar Bluets (*Enallagma civile*) — illustrating the value of judicious collecting.

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## Rhode Island Atlas

The Rhode Island Odonate Atlas got off to a flying start in 1998. Atlas coordinator Ginger Carpenter has provided periodic updates, from which we have excerpted the following summary.

More than two dozen volunteers have contributed approximately 1300 specimens, including six new state records. The project received exceptional media coverage with articles in five different Rhode Island newspapers, as well as a piece on a Providence TV station and mention on CNN's Headline News.

The most surprising discovery was a population of Southern Sprites (*Nehalennia integricollis*) found by Ginger at a pond in Charlestown. This species was not previously known from anywhere in New England! There appeared to be an established population at the site, which suggests that these tiny damsels may occur elsewhere in the region. Observers in southern New England should be on the lookout for this species, which is even smaller (hard as that is to believe) than our other sprites.

The other five species new to Rhode Island were all more or less expected as they occur in both Massachusetts and Connecticut: Lilypad Forktail (*Ischnura kellicotti*), Unicorn Clubtail (*Arigomphus villosipes*), Spiny Baskettail (*Epitheca spinigera*), Chalk-fronted Skimmer (*Libellula julia*), and Needham's Skimmer (*Libellula needhami*).

In addition to the new state records, participants turned up many new county and site records, and in just one season have greatly expanded the known distribution for many species. Among these are Attenuated Bluet (*Enallagma daeckii*), New England Bluet (*E. laterale*), Black-shouldered Spinyleg (*Dromogomphus spinosus*), and Moustached Clubtail (*Gomphus adelphus*). One of the more interesting records was of a Lyre-tipped Spreadwing (*Lestes unguiculatus*) from Block Island, only the second record for the state.

Congratulations to Ginger and her atlas volunteers for a very successful emergence! For more information, or if you would like to participate next year, contact Ginger at: The Nature Conservancy, 159 Waterman Avenue, Providence, RI 02906; e-mail: gcarpenter@tnc.org

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## 1998 Connecticut Reports

Noble Proctor sent along his extensive records from Connecticut (23 pages worth!), from which we've culled the following highlights. As elsewhere, the season got off to an early start in the Nutmeg State, with no less than 34 species recorded during May. Twenty-five Powdered Dancers (*Argia moesta*) in Middlefield on 12 May seemed especially early for that species. A Lyre-tipped Spreadwing (*Lestes unguiculatus*) in Lyme on 17 August is noteworthy, as there have been very few reports of this species in Connecticut or elsewhere in southern New England recently. Other damselfly sightings that caught our eye included 40 New England Bluets (*Enallagma laterale*) in N. Madison on 21 May, an unusually high total for this scarce, local damselfly; and four Rambur's Forktails (*Ischnura ramburii*) in Old Lyme on 5 September, a new site for this seldom found coastal species.

Among the big game were reports of Comet Darners (*Anax longipes*) in Old Saybrook on 19 July and Madison on 22 July, and Swamp Darners (*Epiaeschna heros*) in Madison on 4 June and Cheshire on 10 June. Exceptionally early were Fawn Darners (*Boyeria vinosa*) in Haddam on 23

May, in Madison on 29 May, in Middlefield on 30 May, and in Chesire on 10 June; these records are over a month earlier than the earliest dates we have from Massachusetts. Equally as early was a Black-shouldered Spinyleg (*Dromogomphus spinosus*) in Litchfield on 1 June. Single Mocha Emeralds (*Somatochlora linearis*) were found in North Branford on 8 August and Deep River on 5 September. Two Ringed Boghaunters (*Williamsonia lintneri*) in Voluntown on 28 May were at a new site for this very rare, local species.

Banded Pennants (*Celithemis fasciata*) seem to be rather scarce and local throughout southern New England, so as many as four at four sites during the period 28 June – 13 August is of interest. Martha's Pennants (*Celithemis martha*), a coastal plain species, have been recorded very infrequently in Connecticut, so singles in Deep River on 5 July and in Lyme on 10 August were noteworthy. Crimson-ringed Whiteface (*Leucorrhinia glacialis*) is a boreal species that barely reaches Connecticut; at least 10 were in the northwest corner of the state in Salisbury on 11 July. Finally, another coastal plain specialty that seems to be quite rare in the state is Golden-winged Skimmer (*Libellula auripennis*); one or two were in Old Saybrook on 5 July and 24 August.

For many years, hawkwatchers and others have reported large concentrations of dragonflies during the early fall from coastal locations in Connecticut such as Lighthouse Point, but never before has anyone conducted any systematic observations of this phenomenon. Noble and Margaret Ardwin attempted to rectify that, and their impressive initial results are presented in the accompanying table. Odonate migration is finally attracting considerable attention and we hope there will be many more such observations in the future. See the migration Web site set up by Bob Barber for more information on this fascinating topic:

http://www.hsrl.rutgers.edu/BOB/migrant/mig.html

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## Dragonfly Swarms of Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary

*Fred Goodwin*

Can you imagine standing with a net in hand and having two to three hundred large dragonflies swarming around you? Jim and Stina MacDougall can, and so can I. It is an odonatist's heaven.

In December of 1997, Bob Speare, Teacher/Naturalist at the Ipswich River Wildlife Sanctuary, asked me to do a species count and take photos of odonates for the Sanctuary. We had been counting butterflies since 1996 and at the same time I had been observing, netting, and photographing odonates, trying to learn how to identify them. During July 1997, I stayed with Jim and Stina, who live a couple of miles from the I.R.W.S. Around their house during the early evening we started seeing and netting quite a few large dragonflies. Jim was great on the IDs and a very good teacher. We netted several species of darners and observed them feeding on small insects. One night Stina caught a very large darner and the next evening got another one of the same species: Swamp Darners (*Epiaeschna heros*) two nights in a row. Wow!

At the beginning of August 1997, I moved to the Sanctuary and began to observe occasional flights of large dragonflies feeding in the late afternoons and early evenings. This continued into late September. Netting, identifying, photographing, and releasing dragonflies became an evening routine. Several species of darners, two Wandering Gliders (*Pantala flavescens*), and a few emeralds were caught and released. I began to ask myself several questions about what caused these wild feeding frenzies and how many species were involved. I knew food was a factor, but why weren't there swarms every evening? There were plenty of insects in the area. Maybe mating was the draw? However, during two seasons of observation, I haven't observed any dragonflies in the wheel or in tandem during these feeding frenzies. I started to think that weather played a substantial role in the formation of these swarms. Time ran out on the 1997 season, but I promised myself 1998 would be the year of answers.

On 6 August 1998 at 4:00 PM, I saw the first swarm of the year. I estimated about 100 large dragonflies feeding at tree top level in our bluebird field two hundred yards south of the main house. Tree Swallows alerted me to the swarm. (The swallows intermingle with the dragonflies while feeding on the insects that cause the swarms. I have never observed any swallows harming the dragonflies. Before the swallows migrate, they can be used to locate the fields in which the dragonflies are swarming.) I was able to net a male Lance-tipped Darner (*Aeshna constricta*) and a female Green-striped Darner (*A. verticalis*). The weather was hot and humid; there had been a rain shower in the early morning. On 11 August at 5:30 PM, I observed about 100 dragonflies and netted 10. The weather was warm and humid; there had been a rain shower the previous night.

On 13 August at 6:00 PM, I observed about 50 dragonflies and caught five. It was still humid but cool (67°F) and a sea breeze had started during mid-afternoon. The ground was very moist, following showers the night before. On 14 August at 5:30 PM, about 100 dragonflies were flying above the front lawn of the main house. I netted six, but many were "tree toppers" — too high to catch. The weather was hot and humid, and the lawn was moist. The largest swarms took place on 16, 21, and 26 August; we estimated 200-300 dragonflies on each date.

Directly under each swarm, small insects were flying out of the ground. I caught several of the insects which proved to be flying ants. I sent several of the ants out for identification. This was one of the answers I had been looking for. I began to see a connection between the weather, the flying ants, and the dragonfly swarms. The ants seem to fly when it's warm and humid during the day and there has been a recent rain.

Jim and Stina joined me on several evenings to witness these feeding frenzies of hundreds of dragonflies: multi-colored bodies of green, yellow, and blue; their wings flashing in the late sunlight, the color of gold glittering from a few; all swarming about you. It's a shame that only a few of us have observed this wonderful spectacle of nature.

The last swarm I observed was on 27 September at 5:15 PM, and included 40 to 50 dragonflies. The weather had been warm, humid, and wet. I caught a few and also shot slides of the flying ants emerging from their nest. There were queens and males with wings, plus workers without wings. The few dragonflies I caught had tattered wings, and some had legs missing. Sadly, the end of their season was near.

Summary for 1998: 16 swarms observed, with 223 dragonflies of eight species identified:

1. Canada Darner (*Aeshna canadensis*): 5 males, 8 females
2. Mottled Darner (*A. clepsydra*): 14 males, 3 females
3. Lance-tipped Darner (*A. constricta*): 82 males, 56 females
4. Black-tipped Darner (*A. tuberculifera*): 4 males, 2 females
5. Shadow Darner (*A. umbrosa*): 9 males, 3 females
6. Green-striped Darner (*A verticalis*): 14 males, 5 females
7. Common Green Darner (*Anax junius*): 6 males, 10 females
8. Williamson's Emerald (*Somatochlora williamsoni*):1 male
9. unidentified Gliders (*Pantala sp.*): 2

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## Migration Magic

*Carolyn Sones*

On 26 June, as I skimmed across Hingham Harbor in my sailboat, I began to realize that every minute or two a good-sized, chunky, mostly dark dragonfly would fly by. No matter where I went for three hours there was a constant stream of these dark, darting dragons coming in off the ocean, heading inland and north. They were flying fast, darting back and forth and up and down. I was low in the water and had to look up to see them. Reflected against the sun and the sky, I was seeing mostly silhouettes. I could not pick out any markings except a possible reddish, brownish tinge. They never landed on the boat or on the rocks and branches that reached out from the shoreline. As I headed into the launching ramp I knew I had been in the middle of a mysterious migration — Where had they come from, where were they going, and why? I felt frustrated that I was not able to identify them in order to learn more about what they were up to.

Half an hour later and 15 miles south of Hingham in Humarock I headed out into my own backyard to put sailing gear away and what to my wondering eyes should appear but hundreds of the same dragonflies passing through. My backyard was swarming with them! I grabbed a net (A BIG NET), determined to catch one now that my feet were on solid ground. They were 15 to 20 feet up in the air and just out of reach. I jumped around a bit (entertaining to the neighbors I am sure) and then decided that there were so many that I would just hold the net up and perhaps one would fly in. No such luck. It was late in the day now and I wondered if they would alight for the night. Do they fly at night? The next day there was no sign, not even a wayward stray struggling to keep up.

Communication with *Ode News* suggested that the mystery dragonflies might be Spot-winged Gliders (*Pantala hymenaea*). After checking the photo I think that's a good possibility. What do you think?

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## Somatochlora Bonanza

*Michael Thomas*

On July 19, at Tom's Swamp in Petersham, MA, I had the good fortune of encountering a feeding swarm of emeralds (*Somatochloras*) along a narrow, forested trail in Harvard Forest. Sphagnum is quite common along this trail, with several small pools up to a meter deep. The morning was on the cool side, with bright sunny skies.

The *Somatochlora* activity began at 10:00 AM, when up to ten Clamp-tipped Emeralds (*S. tenebrosa*) where seen hawking small insects along the trail from two to three and a half meters above the ground. Between 10:45 AM and 11:15 AM, male and female Brush-tipped Emeralds (*S. walshii*) appeared on the scene. Their flight appeared to be much weaker compared to the noticeably larger Clamp-tipped Emeralds. Several Brush-tipped Emeralds frequently were observed hovering in place along sunny openings.

At approximately 11:20 AM, I spotted a small *Somatochlora* flying along the edge of the trail, approximately one and a half meters from the ground. The flight was very weak, almost flutter-like, resulting in an easy capture of a male Forcipate Emerald (*S. forcipata*)! By 11:30 AM, the activity ended abruptly, with only an occasional emerald seen flying high above the treetops.

Interestingly, on 14 August Dave Wagner and I captured a male Forcipate Emerald at the Bloomingdale Bog in Essex County, New York. The flight of this individual was also very weak and fluttery.

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## Dazzling Darner Roost!

*Noble Proctor*

One 26 September 1998 I was photographing butterflies in a flower meadow at the Fewick Point section of Old Lyme, Connecticut. This is a location where I also monitored the migratory movement of Common Green Darners (*Anax junius*) and Black Saddlebags (*Tramea lacerata*). It was late afternoon and the light was warming to a rich golden.

As I walked through the meadow paths I noted large concentrations of Common Green Darners very low to the path. While watching, two people approached from the other end of the path and as they walked, small clouds of darners took flight from the path edge, circled around over the field and, after the people had passed, again dropped low and disappeared into the vegetation at pathside. I approached very slowly, flushing an occasional *Anax* from the edge. Reaching an extensive area of Winged Sumac (*Rhus copallina*), I crawled up the path and peered into the area where the darners had disappeared. I was astounded by what I saw. Hanging from beneath leaves on every plant were countless green darners! Perhaps 2000-3000, based upon the numbers covering one plant and the extent of the vegetation. I scanned with my binoculars and each plant was the same — covered with dragonflies. They hung from under the leaves in rows of five or

six per leaf. As I lay there, more swooped in, spun around, and hung up under the leaves. I believe what I had stumbled upon was a night roost for this large dragonfly. As the light faded, more and more arrived and disappeared into the sumac stand.

Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity to return pre-dawn and await their departure. It was the first time I had seen such a roost and I have not read of other sightings. Is there anyone else who has had the same experience?

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### 1998 DSA Northeast Meeting

Although the early summer monsoons dissuaded a few, 13 intrepid odonatists ignored the weather and traveled to Fryeburg in west-central Maine the weekend of 20-21 June for the 1998 DSA Northeast regional meeting. Although some rain fell the first day, it actually turned out to be one of the better weekends of the month (which is not saying much!).

Although the intended focus of the meeting was the Saco River which hosts a rich lotic odonate fauna, the exceptional rainfall had pushed the river over its banks and turned it into an intimidating torrent. Indeed, a week before our arrival the river reportedly reached a level 19 feet (!) above normal, overflowing its banks and flooding many low-lying areas. Thus, the river was largely inaccessible and we found few riverine species.

However, the area's ponds and bogs produced some interesting finds. Many of the ponds in this part of Maine have coastal plain characteristics and host populations of a number of plants and animals not typically found that far north or inland. Some of the odonates fall into this category. Most notable of those we found was the Spatterdock Darner (*Aeshna mutata*), several of which patrolled a boggy pond. This species had not previously been recorded in Maine. Also present at the same site were several Cyrano Darners (*Nasiaeschna pentacantha*), a southern species that had been recorded only once or twice previously in the state. At a large, shallow pond numbers of Little Bluets (*Enallagma minusculum*) inhabited the shoreline vegetation. Indicative of this species limited distribution, these were Nick Donnelly's first Little Bluets after five decades of pursuing odonates throughout the world!

Despite somewhat adverse conditions, we found a nice variety of odes and, more importantly, had a great time. We look forward to future gatherings!

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### DSA Meeting in Nebraska — Dragons Galore!

*Blair Nikula*

Many naturalists spend much of their time pursuing the rare, the elusive, the little-known. Yet, equally exciting can be the spectacles, the dazzling displays of abundance: skies obscured by waves of Snow Geese; mudflats carpeted with uncountable shorebirds; seas obliterated by a

swirling profusion of shearwaters. Among the most famous wildlife pageants in North America is the early spring gathering of hundreds of thousands of northbound Sandhill Cranes on Nebraska's Platte River. This past summer, Nebraska offered a more subtle, but equally impressive spectacle to four dozen eager odonatists: dragonflies galore — clouds of them stretching to the horizon (and there's a lot of horizon in Nebraska!).

Stepping out of the Omaha airport terminal into the 95 degree air on the 16th of July was like walking into an incinerator. Little did I know that this would be the coolest of my five days in Nebraska! I had arrived for the Dragonfly Society of the Americas 1998 annual meeting during one of the hottest summers on record in the Midwest. However, as overpowering as the heat was, it soon became a secondary concern. I had come to see dragonflies and within a few hours, I was seeing them in numbers I had only imagined.

The meeting was held in Valentine, a small town in the sandhills of north-central Nebraska. The sandhills are a lovely expanse of open rolling hills, interspersed with small wooded copses in the low areas. The scenic Niobrara River, very popular with canoeists and rafters, runs through the town and hosts a nice variety of odonates. Also in the area are several small streams and a variety of ponds, marshes, and prairie potholes, many within the Valentine National Wildlife Refuge.

The drive from Omaha to Valentine took several hours, and I made a number of stops at wetlands along the way. One small pool at the edge of a cornfield was teeming with bugs: at least a dozen species included the only Red-mantled Saddlebags (*Tramea onusta*) I saw on the trip. While I found a decent number and variety of odonates in eastern Nebraska, it was not until late in the day, when I had left the cornfields behind and entered the sandhills, that the numbers of odes reached mythic proportions. As I cruised along the highway, I saw increasing numbers of dragonflies in the air. Many seemed to be darners, while others looked like saddlebags. However, identifying flying dragons is difficult enough when you're stationary — at 60-70 mph it becomes little more than conjecture!

After checking into my motel and getting my bearings, I returned to an area outside of town where the highway crosses high over the Niobrara River. Although it was about 8 PM and dusk was approaching, dragonflies were still everywhere. There was a steady stream of saddlebags and darners crossing the road, and meadowhawks were lined up along the barbed wire fences, one every foot or two. Needless to say, my attention was focused on the big game — the many *Aeshnas* that were cruising past at tantalizingly close range. In short order I had netted several, all of which proved to be Blue-eyed Darners (*Aeshna multicolor*), a stunning western species that is closely related and very similar in appearance to our eastern Spatterdock Darner (*A. mutata*). After about half an hour, I decided to check another river crossing just to the south. Though the sun had set, the air was still full of dragons, and on my short drive several bounced off my windshield — an unfortunately frequent occurrence in the days ahead. At a small, dirt pull-off high above the river, more *Aeshnas* filled the air, and in the final twenty minutes of light, I caught another 13, mostly Blue-eyed Darners, but also three Canada Darners (*A. canadensis*). When it became too dark to see, I reluctantly headed back to the motel, full of anticipation for the days ahead.

My introduction to the sandhills' odonate fauna that sultry evening proved to be no fluke. Almost everywhere I went for the next three and a half days the sheer numbers of odonates was mind-boggling — at times overwhelming. Most numerous were the meadowhawks, of which seven species were present. Western Meadowhawks (*S. occidentale*) — virtually identical to, and now considered by some authorities to be conspecific with the eastern Band-winged Meadowhawk (*S. semicinctum*) — and White-faced Meadowhawks (*Sympetrum obtrusum*) were the most abundant. In some places, thousands of these two species filled the air and occupied every conceivable perch, actually becoming a nuisance at times! A walk through any field would send dozens swirling into the air ahead with every step. Lesser numbers of the other five meadowhawk species made for some identification challenges. It seems that differentiating the *Sympetrums* is no easier in the Midwest than it is here in the Northeast!

I soon became blasé about Blue-eyed Darners, hard as that is to imagine. Indeed, I soon stopped swinging at any darners that had blue eyes, as they invariably proved to be this western beauty. Among the less numerous green-eyed *Aeshnas* were (in roughly decreasing order of abundance) Canada Darners, Variable Darners (*A. interrupta*), Lance-tipped Darners (*A. constricta*), and Paddle-tailed Darners (*A. palmata*). Black Saddlebags (*Tramea lacerata*) were ubiquitous and, along with the darners, were the most common "highway" odes. Nearly as common were Twelve-spotted Skimmers (*Libellula pulchella*) and Pied Skimmers (*L. luctuosa*).

Some of my most striking memories are from one day when a group of us visited the Valentine N.W.R. The temperature soared to a searing 105°(!) and a stiff wind was blowing. By mid-morning the masses of odonates were seeking what little shade was available in this open landscape. Every tree and shrub had dozens of odes either hovering or perched in the shaded lee. Along one stretch of road bordering a large pond, hundreds of darners, saddlebags and others swarmed in the cover of a row of cottonwoods. Many of the bugs were unusually easy to catch and, after sampling the species composition, we soon grew tired of netting them and just sat back and enjoyed the spectacle. At another site, a swampy, somewhat sheltered patch of trees, we were amazed to find scores of Blue-eyed Darners and others hanging from the lower branches of the trees, most at about eye level. Some branches had several darners hanging within a two or three foot stretch!

Although the abundant species stole the show, there were some area specialties we were eager to find. One, the Plains Emerald (*Somatochlora ensigera*), a rather little-known species which occurs primarily in the upper Midwest, was found by some participants. More common were Pale Snaketails (*Ophiogomphus severus*) — a much larger, paler species than any of our eastern snaketails — and Brimstone Clubtails (*Stylurus intricatus*). Other creatures that were new to this easterner included Paiute Dancer (*Argia alberta*), Alkali Bluet (*Enallagma clausum*), Western Forktail (*Ischnura perparva*), Plains Clubtail (*Gomphus externus*), and Horned Clubtail (*Arigomphus cornutus*).

As in past meetings, there was plenty of opportunity for socializing, and everyone, expert and novice alike, was congenial and a pleasure to talk to. After all was said and done, the meeting's 48 participants had recorded at least 78 species, including several new state records and many new county records (reflecting the limited odonate work that has been done in Nebraska). But, it was the stunning masses of odonates that left the most lasting impressions. None of the

participants, even those with decades of experience, had ever witnessed such a spectacle. Is this a routine event in the Nebraska sandhills? Or did we luck into a once-in-a-lifetime experience? Perhaps someday we'll know. For now, we can only wonder — and savor the memories!

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### New Wisconsin Guide

Slowly, but steadily, new regional odonate guides are appearing. The latest comes from Wisconsin where Karl and Dorothy Legler and Dave Westover have published *A Color Guide to Common Dragonflies of Wisconsin*. This 64-page, softcover book has photos of 76 of the state's 110 dragonfly species, plus three species of damselflies. The text covers identification, breeding habits, flight periods, and life histories. Range maps are also included. There are 167 color photographs which range in quality from mediocre to very good. Seventy-one of the illustrated species occur in southern New England. The identification sections are geared to in-the-field determination and contain some previously unpublished field marks. This guide is self-published and the production is a bit rough. However, odonatists throughout the Northeast (and elsewhere) will find this guide very useful and we highly recommend it. The price is $19.95, postpaid. To order, send your check payable to: Karl Legler, 429 Franklin Street, Sauk City, WI, 53583-1228. A Web Site describing the book is at: http://userpages.itis.com/karlndot/

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## Ode News

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