

# Finding Clubtail Exuviae

By Stephen Burch, with thanks to Mike Averill

If you are participating in the BDS Clubtail count, you may find these notes on finding their exuviae (or skin casts) useful, as it is likely that they may be easier to locate than the elusive adults. Also finding a Clubtail emerging from its exuvia is a truly memorable encounter as well as being the best proof of breeding!



*Clubtail exuvia on a vertical concrete surface where they are comparatively easy to spot – but even then you may need to look closely.*

## Time of day

The timing of emergence is related to the weather and so if it is a drizzly dull day they will continue in to the afternoon but on a good day mid to late morning may offer the greatest chance of success. If you want to maximise your chances of finding exuviae without seeing any emerging, the end of the day may be best as they will have all have emerged earlier, although for single or occasional visits to sites, timing isn't critical.

## Safety

Be very careful on river banks and make sure you don't fall in the water if peering over the edge to look for exuviae! There is more on safety in the welcome letter from the BDS for volunteers participating in this count.

## Best places to search

The easiest places to search for exuviae are probably clean vertical surfaces that you can see and scan readily (possibly with binoculars). Bridges and other structures (walls, rowing club steps) are good. Under bridge arches are promising as they offer shelter from the rain and so exuviae are not disturbed and may persist longer after emergence.

Fishing platforms are good, grazed meadows are probably the best but nettles, balsam and other tall, dense riverside vegetation is very difficult.

Exuviae are generally found within 3 metres of the water's edge and mostly emerge around the 1 metre mark. They don't seem to favour any particular surface and will stop on concrete surfaces, grasses and taller plants. They will even emerge in the horizontal attitude.

Exuviae will hang around for several days as long as there is no violent rain or wind but they do get washed away by boat wakes.



*Emerging Clubtail – a spectacular sight!*