

British Dragonfly Society

Annual Report

For the year ended 31 March 2012



British Dragonfly Society

Registered Charity No 800196

Patron

Sir David Attenborough OM CH FRS

Charity's principal address

23 Bowker Way, Whittlesey, Peterborough PE7 1PY

Trustees and Committee Members as at 31st March 2012

Trustee	Position
Dr P Taylor	Chairman
Dr D Gennard	Vice-Chairman
Mr H G Curry	Hon. Secretary
Mr B Walker	Hon. Treasurer
Mr D Smallshire	Convenor of Dragonfly Conservation Group
Mr M Tyrrell	
Mr A Nelson	
Mr D Mainwaring	
Mr S Davidson	

Appointment of Trustees

The Chairman, Vice-Chairman and the four ordinary members shall each be elected for a period of four years. The Secretary, Treasurer, and the Convenor of the Dragonfly Conservation Group shall be appointed by the Trustees for a period of four years and are then *ex-officio* members of the Board. The four ordinary members shall retire in rotation and are not immediately eligible for re-election as an ordinary Trustee.

Bankers

The Bankers of the Society are Lloyds TSB.

Cover photos

Front: Dragonfly sculpture, Cheshire

Back: Darter, the BDS magazine for Recorders

1. The Society

The British Dragonfly Society is a non-profit making Society with no political affiliations or stance. The Trustees meet as a minimum twice a year. A Constitution and By-Laws provide rules for the governance and conduct of the Society, and a series of Policy Documents are in place for the guidance of Trustees, Voluntary Officers and Staff. All these documents are periodically reviewed and updated as necessary.

2. Aims

The aims of the Society are to promote and encourage the study, conservation and understanding of Odonata and their natural habitats, especially in the United Kingdom, and to raise public awareness of dragonflies.

Study and conservation

Within the BDS there are two main inter-linked areas of interest, dragonfly recording and dragonfly conservation. The first of these consists of a dedicated group of individual enthusiasts each collecting and supplying records to a Dragonfly Recording Network of Vice County Recorders. The purpose of these records is not simply to document what is present, but also to inform the second main area of interest, that of dragonfly conservation. Records help us to understand the value of a site and added notes about population size and breeding behaviour allow us to assess the importance of an area for species survival. Dragonflies are good indicators of the health of a habitat, so any variation in distribution or population size can indicate changes on a wider environmental scale. Education and training are important weapons in conservation. People need to appreciate something in order to want to preserve it, so providing information to an ever widening audience is an important job for the BDS.

We aim to share the knowledge gained with as many as possible of those whose job it is to take care of the environment. This is achieved both through direct contact and through public events, other meetings and publicity in the national press.

Meetings

We hold one main indoor meeting a year in the late Autumn, the Members' Day, which also includes the Annual General Meeting. Here members and guest speakers, usually including a guest speaker from outside the UK, show digital presentations, slides, videos and film on various odonatological subjects. These meetings are not confined to members of the Society and guests are welcomed at all of our meetings. We also hold an annual Recorders' Day at the start of the season where information is shared and Vice-County Recorders can discuss the previous season's results and plan activities for the coming year. All members of the Society and any interested members of the public are welcome to attend. Through publicising the existence and work of the Society we aim to become the obvious and automatic source of information and advice on all odonatological matters in the UK.

Another way of sharing knowledge is by organising field meetings, training courses and displays in as many different parts of the country as possible – many such meetings or events take place every year throughout England, Wales and Scotland.

3. Chairman's Review of the Year

The British Dragonfly Society (BDS) has taken a major step forward this year with the appointment of its first Chief Executive. Interviews were held in April 2011 and the successful candidate, Gary Roberts, took up his post in mid-June. His first official duty was to attend the Dragonfly Day that launched National Dragonfly Week 2011.

Since his appointment, Gary Roberts has drafted a BDS Development Strategy. This Strategy was agreed by BDS Trustees in late autumn 2011 and the first phase has already been implemented. A number of Trusts and Foundations have been approached seeking funds to support our new initiatives, whilst at the same time ongoing BDS projects, recording and conservation work have continued as before.

The BDS Conservation Officer has been involved with two dragonfly re-introduction projects and a number of further re-introduction proposals involving Southern Damselfly and White-faced Darter. Advice has been given to those involved and a number of site meetings have been attended to assess site condition and discuss management issues.

In Wales two habitat improvement projects for Southern Damselfly, a Biodiversity Action Plan Species, have been carried out in partnership with other organisations including the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA). A management plan for Southern Damselfly populations in the Preseli area has been written. These works were funded by CCW and Environment Wales with support from the Welsh Assembly Government and the Wales Biodiversity Partnership. In February 2012, two training courses supporting event and course organisers to raise the profile of dragonflies were held at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Llanelli nature reserve.

In Scotland the BDS launched a postcard survey of Common Darter at the Gardening Scotland event in June 2011 and the new BDS Scottish Dragonflies leaflet, designed by our BDS Conservation Officer, proved popular at the same event. These publications were funded as part of a grant from Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH). Also in Scotland, two major consultations that might potentially affect dragonflies were responded to and comments were submitted in response to a major planning application. The latter could affect a breeding site for Northern Damselfly, an Endangered species on the Odonata Red Data List for Great Britain.

The BDS Dragonflies in Focus project continued to support the Dragonfly Recording Network of Vice-County Recorders in the collection of dragonfly records. The summer of

2011 was the penultimate season of recording for the forthcoming Dragonfly Atlas and particular efforts were made to survey areas of Britain that hadn't been recorded since the year 2000. The launch of a new BDS website including progress maps for each area and the facility of online recording greatly assisted this process.

The BDS achieves many of its aims and objectives by working in partnership with other organisations and government agencies, some of which are mentioned above. In addition, the Environment Agency supports BDS conservation work through a partnership agreement and Natural England provides in-kind support by hosting BDS officers in their Telford office. During 2011 a research student from Lincoln University, supervised jointly by two BDS Trustees and a member of Environment Agency staff, completed a project looking at the salinity tolerance of Norfolk Hawker. This work was part funded by the Broads Authority who also produced a Dragonflies and Damselflies leaflet for the Broads in association with the BDS.

To publicise the work of the BDS and to raise awareness of dragonflies with the general public, the BDS attended or ran a number of events throughout the country. One major event attended was the annual Birdfair at Rutland Water, with others being Gardening Scotland in Edinburgh, Festival of Nature in Bristol, Insect Festival in York and WildlifeXpo in London. In addition to these and other more local events, the BDS also held over twenty Field Meetings during the main dragonfly season and ran a number of dragonfly identification courses.

Publicity was generated through these events and also through press releases, radio interviews and features in television programmes. These included the BDS Conservation Officer being interviewed live by BBC Radio Scotland, a White-faced Darter feature on the BBC's The One Show, press releases about the largest ever Vagrant Emperor influx into the UK and an interview about Dragonfly Day to launch National Dragonfly Week. Dragonfly Day was held on the National Trust's reserve at Wicken Fen in Cambridgeshire where the BDS continues to run a Dragonfly Centre in partnership with The Dragonfly Project.

4. Progress Report

Dragonfly Conservation Group

The number of dragonfly records in the Society's Dragonfly Recording Network (DRN) database exceeds 900,000. As well as encouraging further recording from regions with poor coverage to date, further good relationships have been forged with local data holders, including several local records centres. There is a very good chance that the one millionth record will have been received when the maps are produced for the new Atlas, publication of which is scheduled for 2013. This will be in conjunction with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology's (CEH) Biological Records Centre, who will both fund the

publication and undertake statistical analyses. Volunteers have begun drafting species texts and a range of possible mapping styles has been tested.

Many dedicated observers have provided these records and we are anxious not to lose their enthusiasm after fieldwork for the Atlas ends in 2012. Following initial work in the Netherlands, we asked CEH analysts to investigate the existing DRN database to see if we could produce reliable dragonfly population trends. Dragonflies are among the best indicators of the health of freshwater ecosystems and climate change, so we are keen to find a method of producing trends that is acceptable to recorders. Early indications are that, by using local frequency modelling, the information already collected routinely by recorders can produce trends. Further work is underway to determine the best methods for taking this forward as a new recording initiative – provisionally called *DragonWatch* – from 2013.

The pilot British Dragonfly Monitoring Scheme (BDMS) continued for a third season at a limited number of locations. The purpose of this is to test the scientific merits and observer willingness of a Dutch methodology. The results have shown that few observers are prepared to visit sites weekly or fortnightly, but that most will visit monthly. This has proved useful in deciding on the feasibility of *DragonWatch*. It is anticipated that the BDMS method could be used for monitoring sites of importance for key dragonfly species, which recorders are more willing to visit regularly.

Surprisingly little is known about the precise habitat requirements of most British dragonflies. So a Habitat Survey was initiated to gather information on the relationships between specific habitat features and assemblages of breeding dragonflies associated with them. The need for more sites to be surveyed has led to the survey being extended for a further year.

Two dragonfly species are prioritised for action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan: Southern Damselfly *Coenagrion mercuriale* and Norfolk Hawker *Aeshna isosceles*. We continue to be concerned at the fate of the former in Preseli, Wales, where undergrazing has resulted in declines and some local extinctions. The Society was heavily involved in work to improve the habitat at Penlan, South Wales, for Southern Damselfly. Research on the salinity tolerance of Norfolk Hawker has been carried out in the Broads to help to understand the threats to this species by rises in the sea level.

The White-faced Darter *Leucorrhinia dubia*, an essentially Arctic-Alpine species potentially at great risk from climate change and lost in recent years from several English locations, is the subject of a re-establishment project in Cumbria. It is still early to judge the success of this, but early signs are promising. Consideration is being given to similar translocations in Cheshire, where the species recently became extinct seemingly because of degradation of its habitat, and Humberside.

Interest in the Peter Miller School Ponds Scheme, whereby small grants are given to pond projects associated with educational establishments, soared during the summer as a result

of third party publicity. Unfortunately, the original memorial fund has long since been exhausted and it was decided to close the scheme and look for more sustainable funding. We hope to launch a better-targeted successor when a suitable funding source has been found.

The DCG has responded to a series of national consultations, where the future success of dragonflies or wetlands has been relevant.

Conservation Officer

The work of the Conservation Officer covers conservation, education, attending events and general administrative duties. The highlights of the year in question are:

- a) In partnership with PCNPA and CCW, BDS was awarded a grant from Environment Wales to create Southern Damselfly habitat at Penlan, a site owned by Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (PCNPA). Habitat creation work was carried out, to the extent that more habitat was created than originally planned.
- b) Several mosses were visited in Delamere Forest, Cheshire, during attendance of the Meres and Mosses Forum. These sites had been cleared of trees and rewetted by the Forestry Commission and were the subject of an analysis of sites suitable for White-faced Darter reintroduction. Five such sites are under discussion.
- c) Discussions were held with the site manager and local conservation group for Thorne Moors to assess its potential to sustain a population of White-faced Darters. Fenn's, Whixall and Bettisfield Moss NNR, a White-faced Darter site with similarities to Thorne Moors, was also visited in order to compare the two sites' properties.
- d) Education & dragonfly awareness included advising the BBC on an article prior to the broadcast of 'An Animals Guide to Britain'; taking part in a live radio interview on the 'MacAulay and Co' show on BBC Radio Scotland; producing press releases on the influx of Vagrant Emperors, Southern Damselfly at Penlan and Northern Damselfly at Aviemore; and supplying information to 'The Independent' about medieval pictures of Demoiselles.
- e) The large 3-day 'Gardening Scotland' event held near Edinburgh was attended, together with a rota of six BDS volunteers. This is Scotland's national celebration of gardening and outdoor living, attended this year by 39,000 visitors. A 'Scottish Dragonflies' leaflet and Citizen Science postcard survey were launched at the event. Approximately 1000 leaflets were handed out, leading on to discussions and advice on subjects such as pond design and maintenance. Many attendees were keen to submit records of their dragonfly sightings. The event was a good opportunity to showcase the BDS to a large audience, many of whom were unaware of our existence, and to encourage people to get out and about and look for dragonflies. Networking with other conservation organisations based in Scotland may lead to future partnership projects.

Dragonflies in Focus Project

Considerable progress has been made with records received over the last year, with some 134,000 new records being added to the DRN national database. Other highlights are:

- a) Recording for the Atlas has progressed with noticeable improvements in previously under-recorded areas.
- b) The new website www.british-dragonflies.org.uk went live as scheduled in April 2011, and the first phase of the redeveloped online recording system went live with the new website. This phase replaces the functionality of the previous system and adds the extra functionality of displaying a map of the current record plus other records of the same species. The second phase will enhance the system to enable historic records to be imported with suitable validation and verification. To date, some 2,168 records have been submitted. Enhancements, including online verification by Vice County Recorders, are planned to go live in April 2012.

Future Plans

Utilising the BDS Development Strategy as agreed by the Chief Executive and Trustees in late autumn 2011 we intend, whilst working closely with allied environmental organisations and Government Agencies, to implement further phases of development to increase the growth in membership, influence, and acceptance of the Society as the single major source of information and knowledge regarding dragonflies in the UK. A contact plan to gain support from Trusts, Foundations and Companies in industry will be used to seek funding to implement these new initiatives, whilst at the same time ongoing BDS projects, recording and conservation work will continue as before. Planning for the BDS 30th anniversary in 2013 will also continue, as will plans for publication of the Dragonfly Atlas and activities to follow on to retain the recording momentum already achieved.

Accounts

For information regarding our Accounts for this financial year please see the associated document "BDS Accounts 2011-2012".

Spring 2012 Issue 29

Darter

Magazine

BDS
British Dragonfly Society

Hi and welcome to the 2012 issue of Darter. As usual there is an update on the Atlas and Atlas recording progress. The map below shows the National Atlas progress, you will notice that this year's map has a lot less red than the map on the cover of Darter 2011. Despite a poor year weatherwise, you got out and have made a real difference. Thank you.

I must also say a huge thank you to all of the Vice County Recorders who have written reports for this edition of Darter. These give you the highlights from last year and also point out places that need to be visited this year. This issue has a report from Ireland.

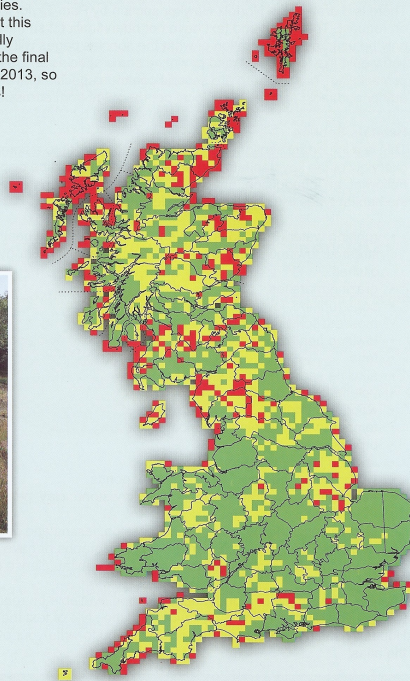
We have accepted the Biological Records Centre's (BRC) offer to publish the Atlas. In 2011, they published 'Ladybirds (Coccinellidae) of Britain and Ireland', the Ladybird Atlas. Helen Roy and Peter Brown, two of the main authors for the Ladybird Atlas have written an article on page 4 about the Ladybird Atlas and Recording Scheme. 2011 was an exceptionally good year for migrant species. Adrian Parr has given his usual migrants round up, but this year it is taking up twice as much space! It will be really interesting to see what turns up in 2012. This year is the final year of recording before the publication of the atlas in 2013, so fingers crossed for some good weather for dragonflies!

Claire

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Maentwrog Bog Lake is a new site for the Small Red Damselfly in North Wales. Allan Brandon.



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