

British Dragonfly Society

Annual Report 2015



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for the year ended **31 March 2015**



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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 2015

Trustee	Position
Vacancy	Chairman
Vacancy	Vice-Chairman
Mr H G Curry	Hon. Secretary
Mr B Walker	Hon. Treasurer
Mr D Smallshire	Convenor of Dragonfly Conservation Group
Mr M Parfitt	
Mr D Goddard	
Mr S Irons	
Mr N Scott	

Bankers

The Bankers of the Society are Lloyds plc.

Cover photos

Front: *A male Scarce Chaser seen on a BDS guided walk at Woodwalton Fen NNR (Henry Curry)*

Back: *One of the display boards at the Dragonfly Centre, Wicken Fen*

1. About the Society

Aims

The aims of the British Dragonfly Society (BDS), as stated in Article II of our Constitution, 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*”. Membership is open to anyone with an interest in the aims of the Society. The BDS is a non-profit making Society with no political affiliations or stance.

Study and conservation

We have two main linked areas of interest, recording and conservation. The first of these consists of a dedicated group of individual enthusiasts each collecting and supplying records to a Dragonfly Recording Network (DRN) of Vice County Recorders (VCR). 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. Raising public awareness is vital because 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 through direct contact, public events, other meetings and publicity in the national press and social media.

2. Key Achievements & Highlights

Atlas of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland

A major achievement in 2014 was the publication of the Atlas of Dragonflies of Britain and Ireland which was the culmination of many years of data gathering, during which the total number of dragonfly records in our database exceeded 1 million. This was followed by a period of feverish activity to ensure data collation, cleansing and analysis took place. Simultaneously, many members were involved in drafting introductory sections and species' accounts. Material finally went to the printers, FSC Publications, during the winter under review, and it was published in May, 2014, to wide acclaim. The data in the atlas show:

- Fourteen (31%) of the 42 established breeding species have expanded their ranges, including the Scarce Chaser and the Red-eyed Damselfly, and appear to have benefited from a warming climate, together with a general increase in the number and quality of wetlands.
- Eight species (19%) have declined including the Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly and the White-faced Darter. The reasons for this change are not fully understood, but may include climate change and/or habitat loss or deterioration.
- Three species were lost from Britain in the 20th century, but one of these has recently recolonised (the Dainty Damselfly in Kent).
- Five new species have colonised or attempted to colonise Britain since a previous atlas was published in 1996 including the Small Red-eyed Damselfly. Two new species have also colonised Ireland since 1990.

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- No less than 7 species have appeared in Britain and 5 in Ireland for the first time since 1990.
- The most commonly recorded species, with 115,375 records, is the Blue-tailed Damselfly, closely followed by the Common Darter with 103,251 records.
- The most widespread species was the Large Red Damselfly, which was found in 80% of the hectads - 10 km x 10 km Ordnance Survey grid squares - from which dragonflies were recorded during 1991-2012.

The atlas was edited by Steve Cham, Brian Nelson, Adrian Parr, Steve Prentice, Dave Smallshire and Pam Taylor, all from the BDS. The Biological Records Centre (BRC), which is part of the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (CEH), collaborated with the BDS in the production of this atlas both through the analysis of trends and editorial support. We are grateful to CEH / BRC for funding the printing, which removed a financial burden from the Society.

Dragonfly Week 2014

Our popular 'Dragonfly Week' took place from Saturday 5th to Sunday 13th July, during which there were a number of national events and field trips. The first weekend coincided with our fourth annual Dragonfly Day with the National Trust at Wicken Fen. Popular with adults and children alike, the event was well attended and gave people a fun introduction to dragonflies, including pond dipping, and a chance to learn & ask questions about all aspects of the life-cycle.

Rutland Water Birdfair 2014

Over the three days of this hugely popular Birdfair we had a large stand and the event was very busy with visitors' questions. This year's special Membership Offer, in its second year of operation, again attracted a number of new members joining the Society.

Annual Meeting & AGM 2014

Our 31st Annual Meeting and 27th AGM, open to all, was held in mild November weather at the marvellous Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT) site in Barnes, south-west London. Members of BDS have given a number of free guided dragonfly walks and talks at this site, so we have a good working relationship with WWT. Surprisingly, this is the first time we have held our Annual Meeting in London, and we were pleased at the feedback & the level of attendance, no doubt helped by the public transport links and popularity of the site, together with the quality of the material on the agenda. The series of presentations included talks by Vincent Kalkman on the forthcoming European Dragonfly Atlas, an account of the production of our UK Atlas by Steve Cham, a history of the Dragonfly Project by Ruary Mackenzie Dodds, and an account describing photography of larvae by Christophe Brochard.

The new *Cynthia Longfield Certificate*

On Saturday 5th May at the Dragonfly Centre in Wicken Fen, Cambridgeshire, there was a special occasion as our Membership Secretary took the opportunity to present our first *Cynthia Longfield Certificate*, awarded annually to a BDS member who has made a significant contribution in educating the general public about dragonflies. This was awarded to our volunteer Tim Gossling, who faithfully presented himself for duty at the Centre during the whole of the previous season and was there to welcome the public, answer queries, and enthusiastically share his passion for dragonflies.

Dragonfly Project

Having 'handed the baton' of educating the public on to the BDS at the end of 2013, the Dragonfly Project generously donated a significant amount of its shop stock to us this year, together with a generous donation, for both of which we are very grateful.

3. Conservation

England

White-faced Darter Re-introduction Projects, BDS continue to provide advice and monitor progress on these projects in Cumbria and Delamere. In Cumbria the relocated population seems to be developing well and in Delamere Forest the second year of translocations is now complete and funding has been gained by the project for a part-time project officer for 3 years.

Scotland

Planning: We commented on the proposals for translocation of larvae of Northern Damselfly, a Red List species, from a pond that was to be destroyed to allow a Tesco supermarket to be constructed at Aviemore. The translocation went ahead but Tesco have subsequently abandoned the construction plans. We have made it clear that monitoring of the new sites should proceed as originally agreed and that any future plans for the site should maintain the pond, which had not been destroyed when work was stopped.

Key sites: These are now confirmed as Logierait Mires (Atholl Estates) and Castle Fraser (NTS). Communications with RSPB Abernethy regarding Northern Damselfly sites are ongoing and we are investigating further new Key Sites for 2015.

Dragonfly Recording & Reporting:

Citizen Science leaflets have been distributed throughout Ranger Service Bases, Country Parks, Information centres and other appropriate outlets.

Dragonfly Hotspots:

Five Hotspots have been established, with two in the Central Scotland Green Network. All of these have been the focus of events and/or training sessions, with more work ongoing regarding interpretation panels, leaflets, habitat improvement & volunteer engagement. These are Crombie Country Park, Morton Lochs, Greenhead Moss, Gartcosh and Portmoak Moss.

Wales

Key sites: Work plans were by written for five important dragonfly sites (Key Sites) three sites were visited by our Conservation Officer and the local VCR, and habitat advice was given.

Practical Conservation: We jointly secured grant funding for 3 practical conservation projects for Southern Damselfly in Pembrokeshire, to restore three areas of habitat during the winter. Better grazing is being discussed which is a major improvement. Our Conservation Officer also co-wrote the local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

4. Training & Education

England:

During June we delivered a complete 'Damsels & Dragons' weekend at the WWT London Wetland Centre in Barnes, home to 22 species of dragonflies and damselflies. This gave us a chance to introduce large numbers of the public to Odonata. A team of knowledgeable dragonfly enthusiasts led free walks around the reserve and described the habitat requirements, and they also gave short illustrated talks in the lecture theatre and manned a stand offering advice and membership details.

Throughout the year various other field trips, courses and events have been either run by BDS or offered jointly by us and other interested groups, and advertised on our website.

Scotland:

The bulk of time of our Scotland Officer has been spent on working in this category. Seven events were attended, ten Dragonfly Identification & Recording Workshops run, and four presentations delivered, with further site visits & advice on improving ponds for dragonflies also delivered to two other groups.

Wales:

Our Conservation Officer, assisted by the North Wales VCR, Allan Brandon, ran three Dragonfly Identification training courses, in Pensychnant, Conwy, Teifi Marshes, Pembrokeshire and Dinefwr NNR, Llandeilo. All went well and we received excellent feedback.

5. Publicity & Outreach

Press / Media

In the BBC Wildlife Magazine (June) we suggested 12 species for a spotters guide, to include larvae, exuviae and adults, and commented upon the sketches. Also in June, in The Times, we gave guidance on how dragonflies have coped with the wet winter. Further, in September, as part of a promotion for the Atlas, we followed up from the previous communication with information for the 'Weather Eye' column. BBC SpringWatch (June) – we responded to researcher enquiries regarding emergence temperature information for a dragonfly feature on the television show. In a SpringWatch radio interview with Brett Westwood at the Birdfair we had an opportunity to promote the Atlas, recording and field guides.

Identification Enquiries

The volume of identification queries to our dedicated e-mail address continues to rise and covers enquiries from all over the world.

Photo library

One of our key members, David Kitching, has compiled a photo library as a resource for all BDS / dragonfly promotion needs. This can be given to people wanting to deliver illustrated talks promoting understanding about dragonflies, their conservation and the work of the BDS.

Social Media

The BDS Facebook page is regularly maintained and updated, carrying posts from us and followers. We also use our BDS Twitter account and Flickr page for news items and photos, and these both have a significant following.

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Website

The 'Latest Sightings', 'Star of the Month' feature and news items continue to attract considerable number of visitors to the BDS website, as do the Wales and Scotland pages. Feedback remains very favourable. We are currently reviewing the site with a view to making some areas more easily accessible.

Volunteer Support & General Public Awareness

Our Scottish Dragonfly Conference was a successful event bringing together many dragonfly enthusiasts and recorders, with 55 attendees. We issued press releases for this Conference, together with Citizen Science Project, attendance at Gardening Scotland, training courses and summer recording. There were also local news items, Facebook posts, Information on training courses and events posted on our website. We're now working on Species & Habitat Information to go on the website.

Presentations

Our team of volunteers gave a number of illustrated presentations all over the country to interested parties such as Wildlife Groups, Natural History Societies, U3A and the W.I.

Dragonfly Centre

In May a team of members met at the hugely popular BDS Dragonfly Centre on the acclaimed National Trust site at Wicken Fen for the annual training event, to plan the new season's opening and introduce new volunteers, giving them a chance to get to know how things work. A new leaflet has been printed advertising the Centre, which is open from May to September each year and is free to enter.

6. Recording

The now annual Recorders' Day meeting was held in March 2014 in Warwickshire. It was well-attended, and feedback from attendees was very favourable. As well as an update on progress with the forthcoming dragonfly atlas, there were presentations on the role of the Vice-county Recorder, *DragonflyWatch*, iSpot, the iRecord and Living Record online recording systems, recent migrant and rare dragonfly reports and the new Scottish Officer, with guest speakers on phenology and the UK Ladybird Survey.

DragonflyWatch is our new recording framework, aimed to give members and others encouragement to continue recording in the post-Atlas period. It offers the opportunity for everyone, depending on their skills and interest, to provide dragonfly records and shows how records will be put to a variety of uses. One element aims to provide more data for monitoring dragonflies at the national scale, something we have aspired to for some years.

We collaborated with specialists at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology in various analyses of our data to determine population trends. The results were incorporated into the new Atlas and pave the way for future population monitoring.

The range of many dragonfly species continues to expand, including new colonists from the Continent. The status of three species was 'upgraded' following recent breeding records: Southern Emerald Damselfly, Dainty Damselfly and Southern Migrant Hawker. The second of these had previously been lost as a breeding species following inundation during the North Sea floods of 1953 on the East Coast.

7. Publications

Dragonfly News

This twice-yearly magazine publication, in full colour, has now reached its 66th edition. The content is a mixture of articles by members, including suggestions of sites to visit, photos of anomalous sightings, book reviews, news regarding conservation, and BDS business from the Trustees. We also intend to run a Photographic Competition in the next issue, the prize being a signed first edition of a book by Steve Brooks the late Professor Philip Corbet.

BDS Journal

Our internationally acclaimed Journal is at Volume 31 and is in a healthy state. It has contained over 100 pages per volume for each of the last six years (i.e. since 2009) and over this period there have been 52 different authors. There has been a steady increase in the average number of pages per volume since 2006.

Darter Magazine

Published annually, and in colour since 2010, this magazine provides a summary of dragonfly recording highlights and progress and is a focus for our VCRs to see the results of their hard work.

8. Outlook - Future Plans

Finance

Our financial target was to achieve an approximate balance so that we were not continuing to draw on reserves; overall income during the year exceeded expenditure by a small amount so this was heading for a satisfactory outcome. However, we received a substantial legacy of £50,000 in February 2015 so this will now allow us some headroom to re-think our staffing situation.

Trustees

The early part of the year continued to be a testing time in terms of attracting people to serve on the Board of Trustees and fill the vacancies. We were fortunate in being able to attract the services of a new President in spring 2014, but unfortunately he felt unable to continue under the current constitution and left at the end of the year. However, we were able to carry on running the Society despite these problems, and things are looking better as we have now attracted further Trustees, with more expected to take up office at the end of 2015. As a result of these difficulties we are discussing options for an amended constitution which would allow more flexibility such that roles can be distributed differently and in ways that will attract members to come forward and serve, particularly as President.

Dragonflies in Focus / Recording

With the cessation of the 'Dragonflies in Focus' Officer post in May we began investigating what skills and experience we want from a potential replacement, balanced against our financial climate. Current thoughts are that we may employ a part-time Records Officer to maintain records transfer during a critical time of change, whilst examining ways to improve and further automate systems in the future. With the new *DragonflyWatch* recording framework, we need to encourage people to continue recording now that we have achieved publication of the Atlas, so that trends can continue to be monitored.

Meetings

We are planning to widen the scope of our Spring meeting to make it more inclusive, rather than just being a day for recorders, whilst maintaining the opportunity to invigorate recording for the season ahead.

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9. Accounts

For information regarding our Accounts for this financial year please see the associated document “BDS Accounts 2014-2015”.

Spot the difference

Can you tell a dragon from a damselfly? The insect order known as **Odonata**, means "toothed jaw". The two different sub-orders are Dragonflies *Anisoptera* (meaning "unequal-winged") and Damselflies *Zygoptera* (meaning "yoke-winged").

Dragonflies are robust insects with strong, purposeful flight and can often be found well away from water.



Dragonflies have eyes meet on the top of the head.

The hind wings of a dragonfly are broader than its forewings.



At rest a dragonfly holds its wings apart.

Darter Dragonflies are not much bigger than damselflies, but they have a thicker body, large eyes and they hold their wings out when at rest.

Larvae

Dragonfly larvae have no external lamellae and are slightly different shapes according to species



Damselflies are delicate insects and look like flying matchsticks. Their flight is quite weak and fluttery and they tend to stay by the water margins.

Damselflies eyes are set apart on the head.



At rest a damselfly holds its wings in line with its body.

Although Emerald Damselflies can't seem to make up their minds!



All four wings of a damselfly are the same shape.

Larvae

Damselfly larvae have external plates called lamellae at the end of the abdomen, which act as accessory gills.

They are all similar in shape.



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