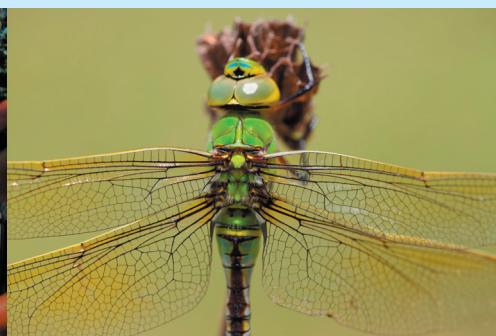


Creating Engagement Between People and Dragonflies

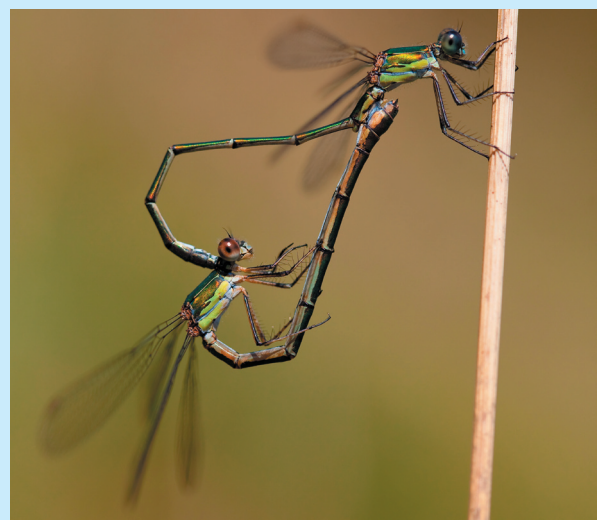


Dragonflies and damselflies are charismatic and beautiful insects with the power to grab the attention, whether with their incredible powers of flight, intriguing behaviour or formidable larvae. The following ideas can be used to adapt areas of your reserve, enabling interactions with dragonflies and damselflies

Visible Basking Space Dragonflies need warm open spaces in which to bask in the sun's heat. These include habitat such as sunlit walls, bare wood (e.g. fencing rails), rocks surrounding a pond or edging a path and bare areas of ground. For example, wooden bridges over ditches can give excellent views of dragonflies. By providing these in areas easily visible to visitors, you will allow close-up views of stationary dragonflies. Pale coloured paths, for example made of limestone, chalk, sand or pale paving slabs also attract dragonflies to bask, allowing good views for visitors. However, it is important to ensure the material used in the path does not leach into the water, adversely affecting water quality.

Visible Perches Dragonflies use perches to survey territories. These are usually sticks or other prominent plant matter protruding from the water. Place these in areas easily seen by visitors to provide great views of stationary dragonflies. Tandem (mating) pairs will also settle on perches, providing good views of female dragonflies (which are often harder to see). This also gives the opportunity to teach visitors about the life-cycle of the dragonfly. Species such as Ruddy Darter will sit in the 'obelisk' position in order to cool down. Sunny perches in easily visible positions provide good views of this fascinating behaviour.

Visible Damp Wood Species, such as Brown Hawker, lay their eggs in damp, partially rotten wood protruding from, or placed beside, the waterbody. By providing these in ponds where they can be seen by visitors, you are allowing close-up views of egg-laying behaviour. Dragonflies can also lay eggs in damp mud and moss on pond edges and into water plants and water. Providing these habitat features in easily viewed positions creates fantastic views for visitors as well as suitable habitat for dragonflies.





Visible Emergent Vegetation Dragonfly and damselfly larvae climb emergent vegetation to transform into adults. Creating access, such as a boardwalk, near to plants such as rushes, horsetails and yellow flag iris can allow visitors a safe view of this fascinating behaviour. It will also provide educational opportunities for school groups and other events. Some species, such as the Emerald Damselfly, descend down emergent vegetation as adults, venturing underwater to lay eggs. Clear views of emergent vegetation will allow people to witness this incredible behaviour.

Flight Corridors Dragonflies leave the water as young adults to feed and shelter. They often use linear features when hunting flying insects or moving away from water. Providing linear strips of hedge away from or past water, with paths alongside them, will allow visitors views of flight and hunting behaviour. The better the surrounding habitat for other invertebrates, the more food there is for dragonflies. Therefore, ensure you are also providing appropriate features for other insects, such as native, nectar-rich plants.

Pond Dipping Platforms and Boardwalks These are tried and tested ways of engaging young and old alike with dragonflies. Boardwalks are most effective when they allow visitors to walk through areas which are otherwise inaccessible, such as marshy ground or reedbed. You should provide good views of a mix of open water and emergent vegetation. This will create engagement opportunities with all stages of the dragonfly's life-cycle: pond dipping for larvae, collecting exuviae (skin casts) and watching adults skim over open water.

Raised Pond This is one of the best tools for a pond dipping session, allowing people of all ages and abilities to access the water. Provide plenty of emergent and submerged vegetation, but ensure the pond is cleared of excess vegetation during the winter. This creates areas of open water, important for the dragonflies and to enable pond dipping without excess damage to the vegetation.

Glass Pond Use a large glass tank to create an outdoor pond where the underwater larvae can be watched through the glass. Use native plants and emergent vegetation and allow the tank to fill with rainwater and invertebrates naturally. Ensure you regularly clean the glass to allow good views but don't use toxic products as this will harm invertebrates.

