

## Best places to see Dragonflies and Damselflies on...

### CANNA - 7 species present

Any pools in the moorland on the island. Canna's one lochan is found on Sanday.

### EIGG - 9 species present

The paths around the Blar Dubh bog and the Giant's Footstep lochan are excellent places.

### MUCK - 8 or 9 species present

The most accessible ponds are the two southwest of Druiam Mor and another near the cottage at Blar Mor.

### RUM - 12 species present

Any sheltered ponds or pools, especially those to the southwest of the island on the road to Harris. There are plenty of new sites to find, since Rum is so big that it has not yet been fully surveyed.

If you do not know where any of these sites are, ask an islander as they will!

## Watching damselflies and dragonflies

- Choose warm, sunny days with little or no wind
- Check the flight period table to see what might be flying
- The best equipment is your own eyes – sit quietly and wait
- Close-focussing binoculars can be useful for identifying distant insects
- Dragonflies are delicate creatures, so avoid handling them when possible
- They do not sting or bite
- Ponds can be dangerous – do not enter the water, your safety comes first
- Watch out for deep water, steep banks and other hazards
- Be aware of water-borne diseases and ticks
- Make sure you wear appropriate footwear and clothing
- Carry food, drink, a map and a compass (and know how to use them)
- Take a notebook and pen to record any sightings of dragonflies and damselflies

## Get involved and help dragonflies

You can contribute to the National Dragonfly Atlas Project, which seeks to update the known distribution of British dragonfly and damselfly species. Recording is essential to help map these amazing insects and to help identify important areas for them. Volunteers are needed to record in one or more 10-km squares – there are many squares in the Highlands that have few or no records. You can help fill in these gaps.

Contact Jonathan Willet, Biodiversity Officer, Highland Council, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness, IV3 5NX, for more information about under-recorded areas in the Highlands.  
Email: jonathan.willet@highland.gov.uk  
Tel: 01463 702274

Any record of a damselfly or dragonfly is useful, and you should record which species you saw, how many, when and where you saw it and, if possible, a grid reference from an Ordnance Survey map. Records of egg-laying and mating are particularly important. Send all records to either Jonathan Willet or to the Scottish Dragonfly Recorder, Pat Batty:  
E-mail: pat@patbatty0.wanadoo.co.uk

For more information about dragonflies and information on local or national events, check out the British Dragonfly Society's website:

[www.dragonflysoc.org.uk](http://www.dragonflysoc.org.uk)

To see the distribution of dragonflies and damselflies in the Highlands, look at the National Biodiversity Network:

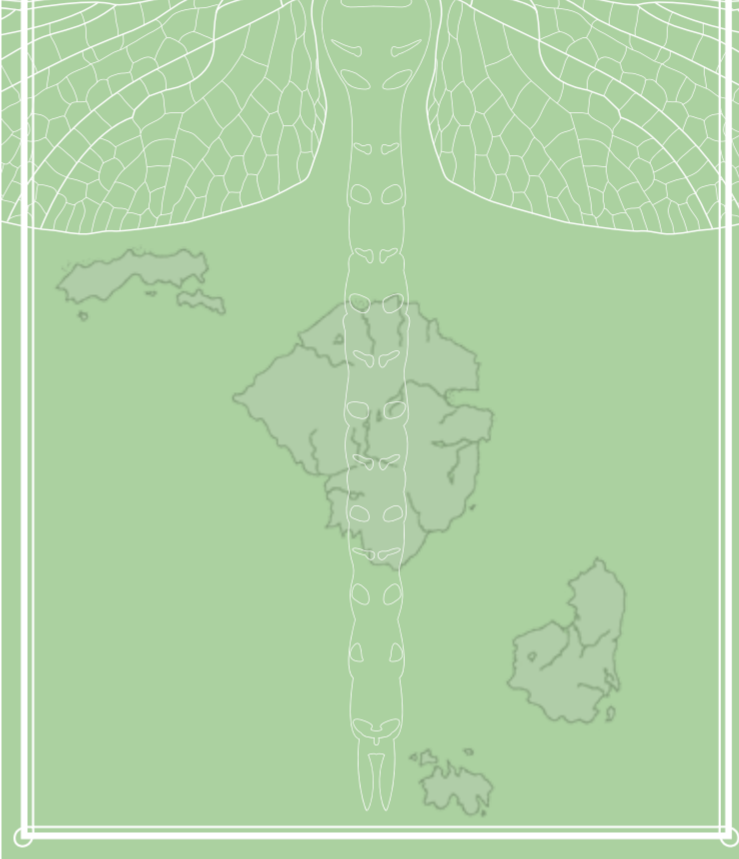
[www.searchnbn.net](http://www.searchnbn.net)

This leaflet was funded by Scottish Natural Heritage, British Dragonfly Society, Inverness Field Club and the Highland Biological Recording Group. Thanks to Kat Parkes, Pat Batty and Craig Macadam for their help in putting together this leaflet.



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## Dragonflies and Damselflies of the Small Isles



## Dragonflies and Damselflies of the Small Isles, An identification guide

Dragonflies are amazing, stunningly colourful insects that exhibit awesome aerial displays. This guide will help you identify the 12 species of dragonflies and damselflies that can be found on the Small Isles. You can get involved and record all the species you see and help put together a national atlas of dragonflies.

### Dragonfly life-cycle

Dragonflies and damselflies belong to the order of insects called Odonata (meaning toothed jaw). There are over 5,500 species worldwide and around 52 found in Britain; 18 of these breed in the Highlands. Dragonflies were one of the first flying insects, and fossilized dragonflies have been found that are 350 million years old.

The majority of a dragonfly's life is spent underwater as a larva. Some species can spend five years or more as larvae. In late spring or early summer, when the larva is fully grown, it crawls out of the water and seeks a suitable spot close to the edge of the water to emerge. Once free of its larval skin, it emerges as a fully formed adult. The adult may only survive for 3-4 weeks, but this is long enough for breeding to take place and the next generation to begin.

### Emergence and Flight Periods

	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Beautiful Demoiselle							
Emerald Damselfly							
Large Red Damselfly							
Common Blue Damselfly							
Blue Tailed Damselfly							
Azure Hawker							
Common Hawker							
Golden-ringed Dragonfly							
Northern Emerald							
Four Spotted Chaser							
Keeled Skimmer							
Black Darter							

Key flight period: Weather is a major factor in early emergence and extended flight period:

During mating, the male and female form a wheel shape with the male holding onto the female's neck using his claspers. Egg-laying takes place after mating, and in most species the male will continue to hold onto the female's neck (known as being in tandem), or he will hover close to her, guarding the female to prevent other males mating with her. The female lays eggs directly into water, in mud or on vegetation, depending upon the species.

### Dragonflies and Damselflies - what's the difference?

Damselflies are delicate insects - about the size of a matchstick - with a weak, fluttery flight. They have oblong heads with eyes at each end. When at rest, their wings are held closed over their abdomens. Dragonflies are fast, powerful fliers. They are bigger and chunkier insects than damselflies. They have large eyes that meet at the top of their heads. Dragonflies' wings are held open at rest.

## LARVAE

You can identify dragonflies by examining their larvae. A basic guide is provided below. For more in-depth information, see the British Dragonfly Society website.

### There are three main types of larvae:

#### HAWKERS

These are about 4cm long when fully grown and torpedo-shaped.



#### CHASERS, DARTERS AND EMERALDS

These are about 1-2cm long with squat, rounded bodies.

#### DAMSELFLIES

These are around 1cm long. They are much less chunky than the dragonflies. The Emerald Damselfly larva (pictured) is the exception, being up to 3cm long, very slim with long tail fins and swimming in a sinuous, fishy manner.



## DAMSELFLIES

### Cuilleagan Cruinneig

#### 1 Beautiful Demoiselle

*Òigheag Bhrèagha*  
**Length:** 45 – 49mm  
**Range:** Possibly on Rum  
**Rarity:** Not yet recorded on any of the islands  
**Habitat:** Only found in running water, burns and rivers with stony bottoms  
**Seen:** Late May to late August  
**Description:** Females have metallic, bronze-green bodies with golden-brown tinged wings. Most activity takes place near water with the males displaying to females using a fast, fluttering flight. Females only come to the water to mate or lay eggs and can be found at the edges of Bracken stands or woodland.



#### 2 Emerald Damselfly

*Cruinneag Uaine*  
**Length:** 35 – 39mm  
**Range:** Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum  
**Rarity:** Common  
**Habitat:** Well-vegetated standing water, ditches and loch margins  
**Seen:** Late June to September  
**Description:** A slender species with a weak, fluttery flight. Females are a duller green with pale brown abdomens. On dull days, they can be found resting on vegetation near water holding their wings half-open. This is the most common late summer damselfly.

#### 3 Large Red Damselfly

*Cruinneag Dhearg*  
**Length:** 33 – 36mm  
**Range:** Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum  
**Rarity:** Common  
**Habitat:** Standing or very slow-moving water  
**Seen:** May to August  
**Description:** A distinctive damselfly that is the first to be seen in late spring. Females are darker with black and yellow bands on their abdomens. Unusually for damselflies, the males are territorial, which keeps their numbers low at waterbodies.

#### 4 Common Blue Damselfly

*Cruinneag Chumanta*  
**Length:** 29 – 36mm  
**Range:** Eigg, Muck(?) and Rum  
**Rarity:** Common  
**Habitat:** Most wetlands, including very slow-moving water  
**Seen:** June to mid-September  
**Description:** Males fly fast and low over the water, often in large numbers. Females are much drabber than males. They have more black and can come in yellow, pale green or brown forms.

#### 5 Blue-tailed Damselfly

*Cruinneag Ghrinn*  
**Length:** 30 – 34mm  
**Range:** Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum  
**Rarity:** Common  
**Habitat:** Most wetlands  
**Seen:** May to early September  
**Description:** Commonly seen flying low among waterside vegetation but also far from water. Females usually have a dull brown band (segment 8) and brown/pale grey/pink thorax.

## DRAGONFLIES

### Tarbh Nathrach

#### HAWKERS

These are fast-flying insects, chasing after prey and seldom perching (apart from the Azure Hawker).

#### 6 Azure Hawker

*Tarbh Nathrach Liath*  
**Length:** 54 – 64mm  
**Range:** Rum  
**Rarity:** Rare  
**Habitat:** Boggy moorland, open birch woodland and moss-rich bog pools  
**Seen:** Late May to July  
**Description:** This is a sun-loving hawker. It spends a lot of its time perched, basking on rocks or tree trunks. In cold weather the blue fades to grey, providing the perched insect with



excellent camouflage. The males are seen flying low and fast over the edges of ponds. Females have two colour variations: either yellow/beige or blue. Unlike males, Azure Hawker females have no coloured stripes on top of their thorax.

#### 7 Common Hawker

*Tarbh Nathrach nan Cuilcean*  
**Length:** 65 – 80mm  
**Range:** Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum  
**Rarity:** Common  
**Habitat:** Most standing waters  
**Seen:** July to October  
**Description:** This large hawker is a fast, powerful flier and is difficult to approach. They almost never perch. Although colourful, males appear very dark in flight. Females can still be actively egg-laying on cold mornings at the end of the flight season.

#### GOLDEN-RINGED

These are represented by only one species in the UK. They behave exactly the same as Hawkers.

#### 8 Golden-ringed Dragonfly

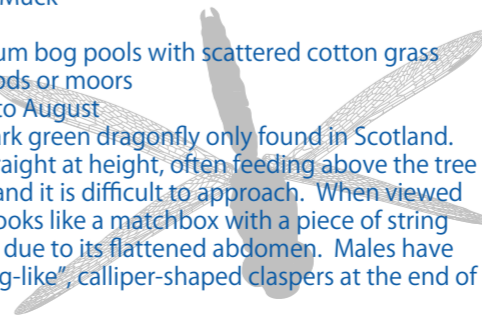
*Tarbh Nathrach Òrfhàinneach*  
**Length:** 74 – 85mm  
**Range:** Canna(?), Eigg and Rum  
**Rarity:** Localised  
**Habitat:** Burns, moorland and woodland rides  
**Seen:** June to mid-September  
**Description:** One of Britain's largest and most distinctive dragonflies, it is often readily approachable. Males have a pinched waist on their abdomens. Females have a pointed spine at the end of their abdomens for egg-laying.

#### EMERALDS

These are similar to Hawkers – they seldom perch.

#### 9 Northern Emerald

*Smàrag na Mòintich*  
**Length:** 45 – 51mm  
**Range:** Rum and Muck  
**Rarity:** Rare  
**Habitat:** Sphagnum bog pools with scattered cotton grass among open woods or moors  
**Seen:** Early June to August  
**Description:** A dark green dragonfly only found in Scotland. It flies fast and straight at height, often feeding above the tree tops or bracken, and it is difficult to approach. When viewed from the side, it looks like a matchbox with a piece of string trailing behind it, due to its flattened abdomen. Males have distinctive "earwig-like", calliper-shaped claspers at the end of their abdomens.



#### CHASERS

As the name suggests, the males constantly patrol low over the water, at about knee-height, to find prey, chase off rivals and find females.

#### 10 Four-spotted Chaser

*Ruagaire Ceithir-bhallach*  
**Length:** 40 – 48mm  
**Range:** Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum  
**Rarity:** Common  
**Habitat:** Moorland bogs, ditches and ponds  
**Seen:** May to August  
**Description:** Males are extremely active, being aggressive and territorial. Both sexes have the same colouration. In fine weather, 30+ males can be seen at a single waterbody.

#### SKIMMERS

Their behaviour is very similar to darters, but they fly low over the ground or water in an erratic flight.

#### 11 Keeled Skimmer

*Uachdarair Direach*  
**Length:** 38 – 46mm  
**Range:** Rum and possibly Eigg  
**Rarity:** Rare  
**Habitat:** Runnels and open bog pools  
**Seen:** Late May to August  
**Description:** Females have parallel-sided, golden-brown abdomens.

#### DARTERS

They dart from a perch to catch prey or chase after mates.

#### 12 Common Darter

*Gathair Cumanta*  
**Length:** 35 – 44mm  
**Range:** Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum  
**Rarity:** Common  
**Habitat:** Ponds, lochs and very slow-moving burns  
**Seen:** July to mid-September  
**Description:** A small, restless dragonfly that regularly perches on bank-side vegetation, often returning to the same spot. The black legs have a distinctive yellow stripe.

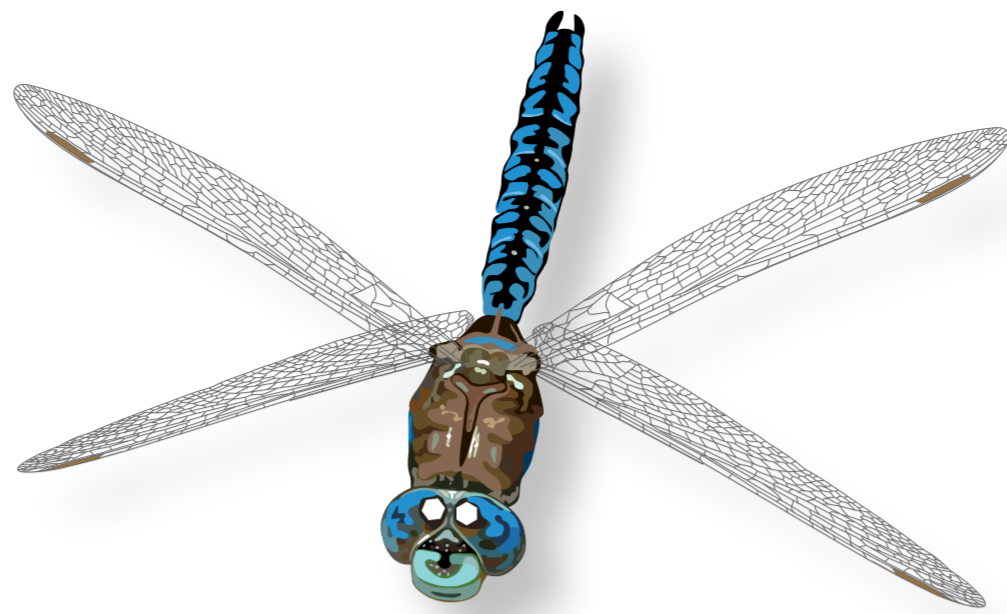
#### 13 Black Darter

*Gathair Dubh*  
**Length:** 29 – 34mm  
**Range:** Canna, Eigg, Muck and Rum  
**Rarity:** Common  
**Habitat:** Moorland pools and bogs with plenty of vegetation  
**Seen:** Mid-July to September  
**Description:** This small dragonfly has a short, erratic flight with frequent perching on vegetation near water.





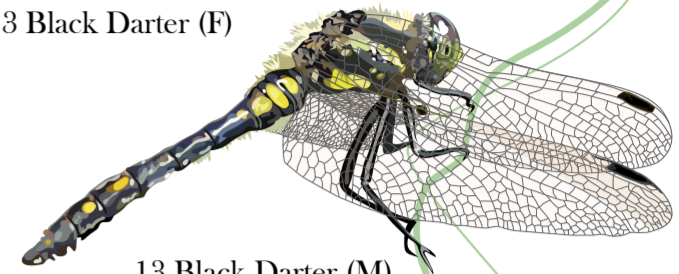
8 Golden-ringed Dragonfly(F)



6 Azure Hawker(M)



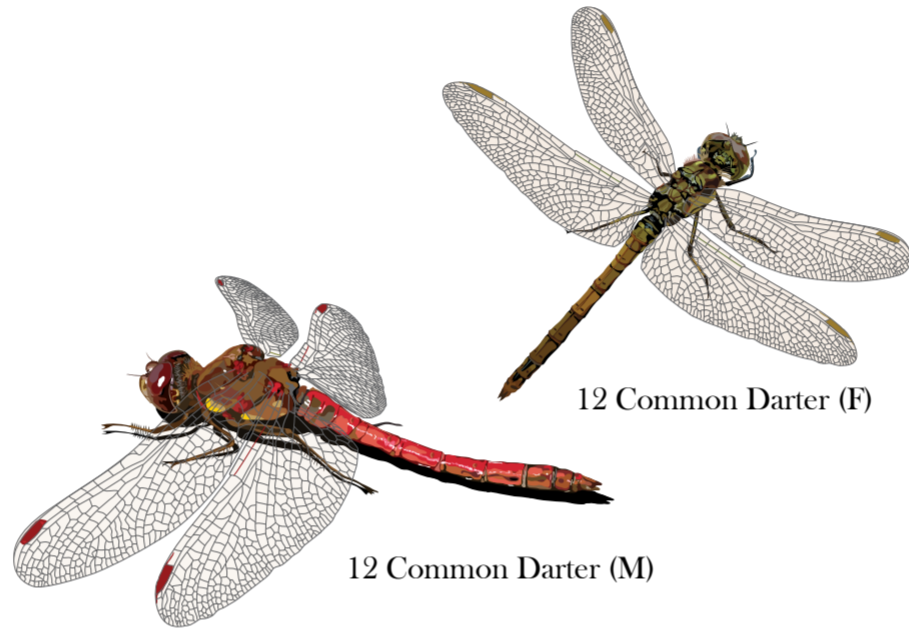
13 Black Darter (F)



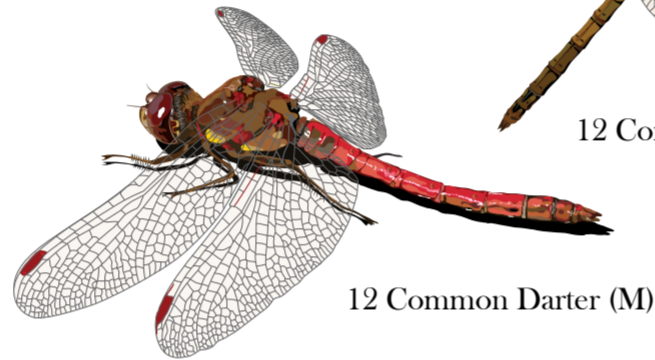
13 Black Darter (M)



9 Northern Emerald (M)



12 Common Darter (F)



12 Common Darter (M)



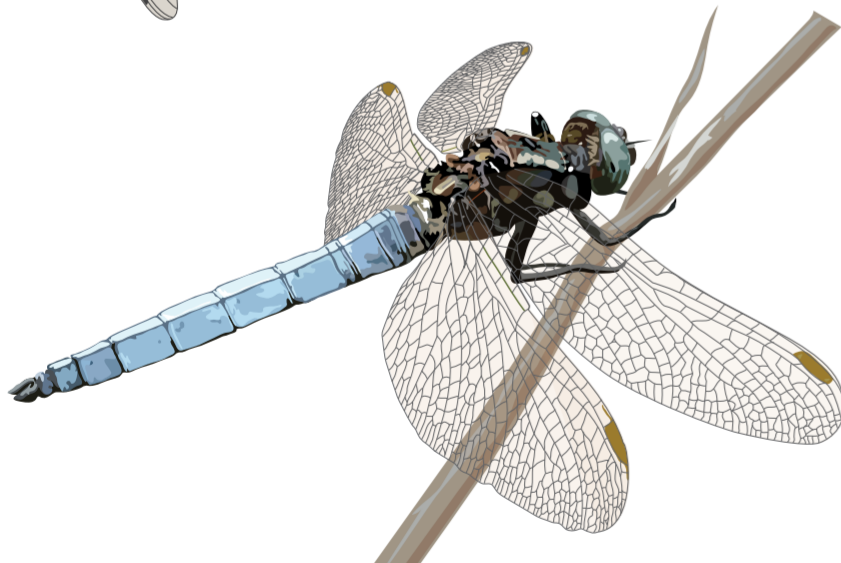
10 Four-spotted Chaser (M)



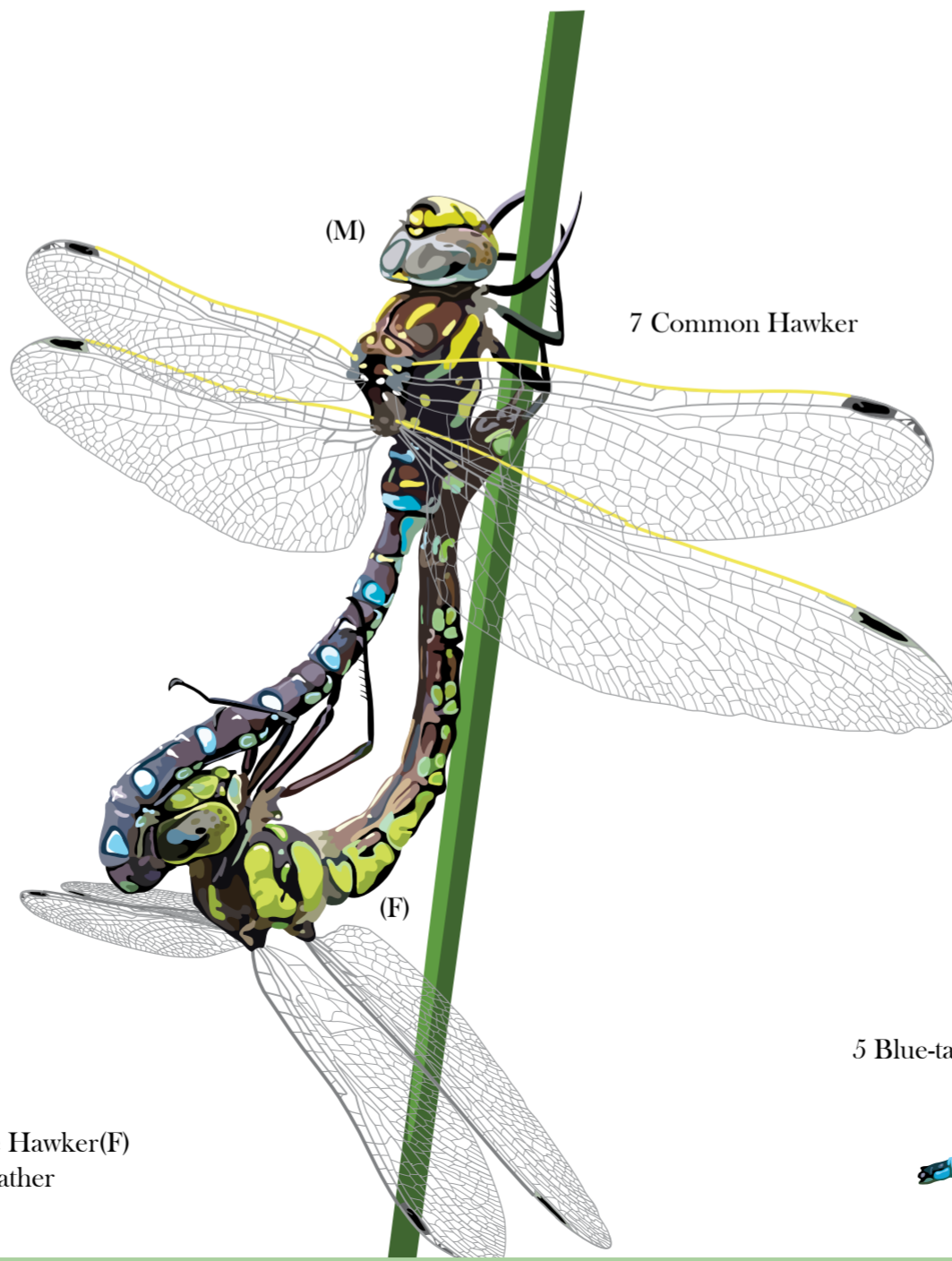
3 Large Red Damsel (M)

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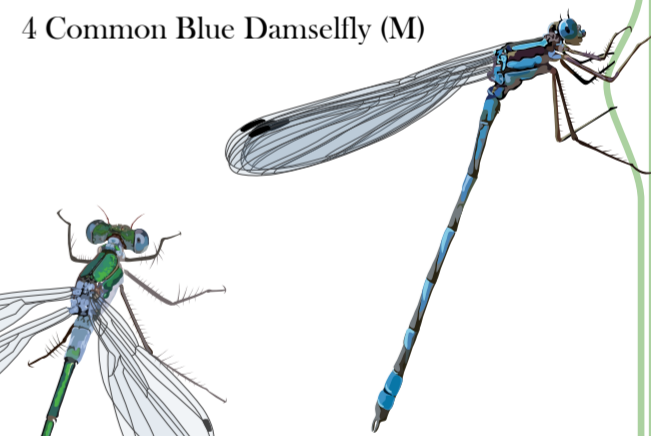
*Pictures are larger than life-size and not to scale*



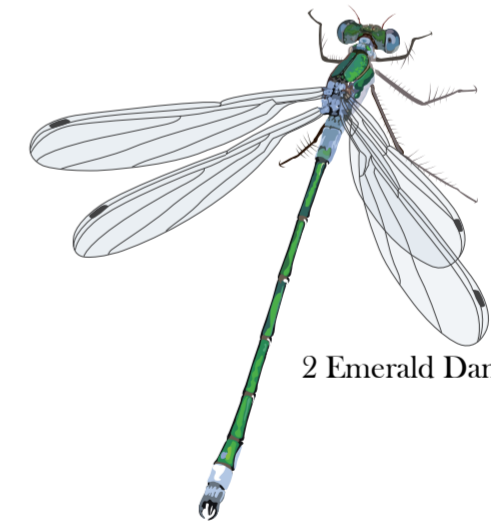
11 Keeled Skimmer (M)



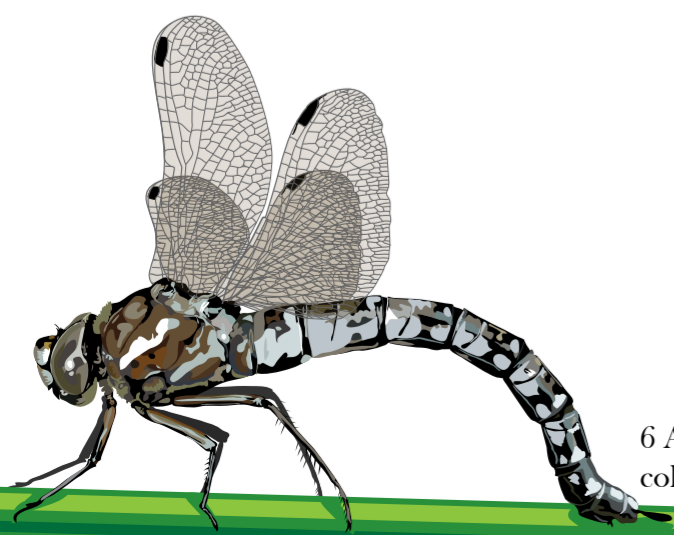
7 Common Hawker (M)



4 Common Blue Damsel (M)



2 Emerald Damsel (M)



6 Azure Hawker(F)  
cold weather



1 Beautiful Demoiselle (M)

5 Blue-tailed Damsel (M)

