

British
Dragonfly
Society



Male Dainty Damselfly © Marc Heath

2020 England Country Dragonfly Recorder Reports

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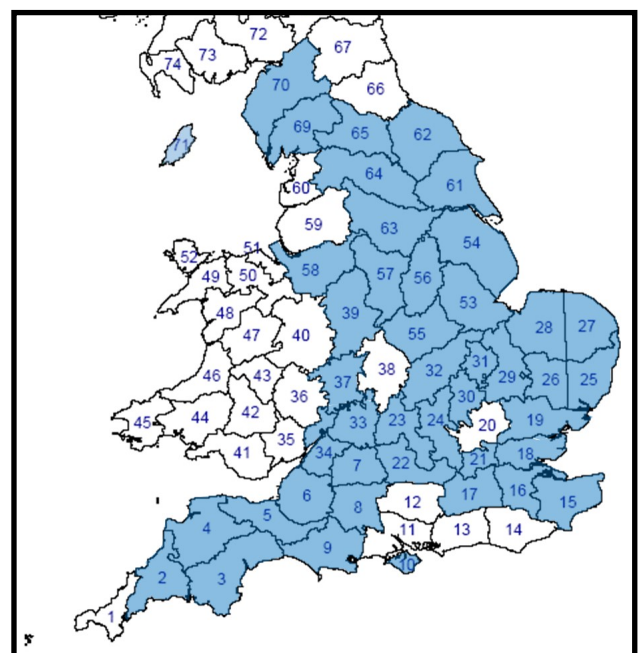
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Can be found on the BDS website under the 'About'

[**www.british-dragonflies.org.uk**](http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk)



Cornwall, East VC2 ~ by Dave Cooper

The obvious interruption to daily activities postponed the first sighting of **Large Red Damselflies** until early April. From then on it was almost business as usual with the blue damsels emerging (**Common Blue** and **Azure**) as well as the **Broad-bodied Chasers** which beat the **Four-spotted Chaser** this year by a few days. Each season has its fluctuations in species abundance; in 2020 **Emerald Damselflies**, **Common Hawker**, **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** and **Beautiful Demoiselle** were more plentiful than in 2019 .

I am fortunate to have a site close to my house which, for the past five years, has rewarded me with sightings of many other species of Odonata (around 19-20 species) including both **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies** and **Small Red Damselflies**. This past 2020 season, I was delighted to see that the Small Reds were still doing well although sadly the Scarce Blue-tails had dropped in numbers.

I would say that my highlights of the season were at the two furthest ends of Cornwall; on the Lizard I witnessed four teneral **Red-veined Darters** taking their maiden flight, while at the complete opposite end of Cornwall, on the River Tamar, **Banded Demoiselles** were in good numbers, although there was no sign of **White-legged Damselflies** again this year.

I also had the brilliant opportunity of being asked to monitor the Cornish Beaver Project. 14 species of Odonata were recorded over the season and arrangements are being made for more site visits throughout this coming season if restrictions are lifted.

I would like to thank everyone who sent in their recordings; please keep them coming in while keeping as safe as possible. I am looking forward to better times as I'm sure everyone else is. Keep Safe, Keep Well.

Devon VC3-4 ~ by Dave Smallshire

Fine weather predominated during the first lockdown period, giving some good weather during the spring emergences. In May-June, **Hairy Dragonflies** were reported as usual from Stover (up to five, with several records of egg-laying) and Exminster Marshes (nine on 31 May). The first **Downy Emerald** exuvia was found at Little Bradley Ponds on 9 May and four more on the 16th, when a territorial male was on patrol. Several territorial males were also seen at Stover in late May-June, with a pre-flight emergent on 21 May. Systematic counts at Stover through the season produced maxima of about 1000 **Azure Damselflies**, 785 **Common Blue Damselflies**, 106 **Large Red Damselflies**, 119 **Red-eyed Damselflies** and 114 **Small Red-eyed Damselflies**, 44 **Four-spotted Chasers**, 46 **Black-tailed Skimmers** and 61 **Common Darters**.

Small numbers of **Red-eyed Damselflies** were seen at Eddison Pond, Exeter and Grand Western Canals, Little Bradley Ponds and Magazine Pond, with 20 at Gallows Cross SUDS ponds, 24 at Decoy Lake (Newton Abbot) and 49 at Ventiford Pools. A single male was at Blackhill Quarry in June.

Scarce Chasers appeared in record numbers at Exminster Marshes, with 66 (58 males) counted in the northern section on 31 May. Other records included 19 on two sections of the Grand Western Canal on 27 May, eight males in the Clyst Valley near Bishops Clyst on 26 June, and singles in Exeter (Countess Wear, Redhills and St Leonards, where the earliest Devon record came on 8 May) and the Clyst valley at Darts Farm and Topsham, and a male at Clennon Valley Ponds in June.

Up to 10 immature **Red-veined Darters** were present at Blackhill Quarry in early June, with 3-4 territorial males at a near shallow pool on the 25th. Despite searches then and in September, only **Common Darter** exuviae could be found. An immature male was at Bovey Heath on 6-18 September. Ruddy Darters were seen at Meeth DWT Reserve on 7 August, Trentishoe on 9 August and Hill Wood, Loxhore, on 1 September. A peak of 75 **Common Darters** was counted at Ventiford Pools in August. More than 50 **Black Darters** were seen at Quickbeam Hill, Dartmoor, on 1 September, while a territorial male in a bed of New Zealand Stonecrop at Little Bradley Ponds on 13 September was the first record there since 1978.

An early emerging **Migrant Hawker** was at Dawlish Warren on 11 July and a **Brown Hawker** was reported from Roborough, near Torrington, on 12 July, only the fourth county record. A female **Lesser Emperor** at Dawlish Warren on 3 August became the 26th species for the site, while two males were present at Stover on 11-12 August and one was at Venford Reservoir on 12-13 August.

Southern Damselfly sites on Dartmoor could not be monitored, but this species had an unexceptional year in East Devon: peaks in Lesley Kerry's transect counts were 66 at Aylesbeare Common and 38 at Venn Ottery, but only singles at Colaton Raleigh Common, bringing the last colony a step closer to extinction. In contrast, **Small Red Damselfly** is thriving at Colaton Raleigh Common, with transect counts of up to 39; small numbers were also seen at Bicton Common, Blackhill Quarry and Bystock.

Other notable transect counts made by Lesley included **Keeled Skimmer** maxima of 55 at Aylesbeare, 49 at Colaton Raleigh and 138 at Bickton Common, while over 50 were at Blackhill Quarry. This species seems to have emerged early, with one on 21 May at Emsworthy Mire DWT Reserve and 34 at Bick Tor Mines as early as 1 June. Small numbers were seen in the Bovey Basin at Chudleigh Knighton, Gallows Cross and Stover. Later in the summer, Rob Macklin saw two territorial males at an acidic coastal mire at West Soar on 3 August.

Small Red-eyed Damselflies are now well-established in the Bovey Basin, with 61 at Little Bradley Ponds, 7 at Gallows Cross and 8 at Ventiford Ponds, as well as those taking advantage of the lush growth of pondweeds at Stover. At East Soar, three males, presumably migrants, remained from 11 August to 1 September.

A moribund **Vagrant Emperor** was found on the edge of Bideford on 5 November. The final record for the year was a **Common Darter** at Dawlish Warren on 4 December.

I'm pleased to note that 1528 records for 2020 were submitted via iRecord, of which an encouraging 400 were from North Devon, including a good number from past BDS Chairman Andy McGeeney. Thank you Andy, and to everyone else who contributed – please keep them coming!

As it's been 37 years since Bob Merritt summarised the state of dragonflies in Devon, I decided that an update was long overdue and set about putting time made available because of the travel restrictions imposed by COVID-19 to good use. The resulting 'Dragonflies in Devon' was emailed where possible to BDS members and others with a known interest in dragonflies, and made available more widely via the BDS website at the end of 2020. A revised version, containing a few minor amendments, is now available to download as an [illustrated PDF file here](#).



Male Lesser Emperor, Stover Country Park, 11 August 2020

© Dave Smallshire



Male Red-veined Darter, Blackhill Quarry, 25 June 2020

© Dave Smallshire

Somerset VC5-6 ~ by Chris Iles

The last Somerset report was for 2017, so I am providing here a short summary for 2018 and 2019, as well as 2020.

2018 was the best of the three years for dragonflies. There were some good records for both migrant and rare resident dragonflies. A new species to the county, **Southern Migrant Hawker**, was found at Priddy on 15 July, with the insect being seen in the area until 21 July; a further example was seen at Berrow on 4 August. **Lesser Emperor** and **Red-veined Darter** also put in an appearance, the latter surprisingly only being a second record for VC5. The highlight of the year amongst resident species was the discovery of a second site for **Downy Emerald**, at Gare Hill on the Somerset/Wiltshire border, close to known Wiltshire populations but distant from the lonely population at Priddy. The Gare Hill site also held **Keeled Skimmer**, which is generally a species of the upland west in Somerset, with its nearest populations in the county also being in the Priddy area.

2019 was quieter, although it saw a **Vagrant Emperor** at Brean (second Somerset record), a **Red-veined Darter** at Porlock Marsh (third VC5 record) and a further **Southern Migrant Hawker** at Westhay. A **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** at Shipham was the first seen on the Mendips for some years and suggests that the little resident population in the area continues to survive; the species abounds in the south and west of the county. Online recording has given us a much better knowledge of its distribution. An isolated population of **White-legged Damselfly** was found in a small patch of suitable habitat on the coast at East Quantoxhead, well to the west of its previously known sites.

The 2020 lockdown resulted in a fall in the number of dragonfly records of about two-thirds on 2019, and those records that were received were concentrated in gardens rather than prime dragonfly sites or the wider countryside. Records of early-emerging species were most seriously impacted – there were very few records of **Blue-tailed Damselfly**, just two **Red-eyed Damselfly** and **Hairy Dragonfly** records, and no records at all of **Variable Damselfly** and **Small Red-eyed Damselfly**. Two species bucked the trend: **Scarce Chaser** has been expanding through the centre of the county for over a decade and was seen far and wide in 2020. In common with many species expanding their range from south-east England, it entered Somerset via the Avon valley in the north-east of the county and has spread southwards and westwards. This year it made further 10 km jumps to East Quantoxhead on the west Somerset coast and to Chard in the far south of the county. **White-legged Damselfly** was also recorded right across the county, from most areas where it is known to occur, including the 2019 site at East Quantoxhead. The only historic area from which it has not been recorded recently is the north Somerset levels around Nailsea and Clevedon – it would be great to know if it still occurs there.

Wiltshire VC7-8 ~ by Rosie Ray

I took on the role of County Recorder following the sad death of friend, and dragonfly enthusiast, Steve Covey. It was a case of 'in at the deep end' in more ways than one but, with the support of David Hepper, I think I've managed to muddle through.

The first record for the county was of a **Broad-bodied Chaser** on the 9 April by R. Gill.

My own first sighting, was just over the border in Gloucestershire, where I found a male Hairy **Dragonfly** at Whelford Pools Nature Reserve in late April. This was followed by several more sightings at Lower Moor Reserve within the Cotswold Water Park (Wiltshire). I was fortunate to catch a pair mating, and subsequently the female ovipositing deep within the reedbed. There were also good numbers of **Downy Emerald Dragonflies** at this location but nowhere near the mass emergence numbers of a few years ago.

After this, there was a mass of records during the warm spring and early summer of all the usual suspects. There were many sightings of **Large Red Damselflies**, which began to emerge around the usual time, followed by large numbers of **Blue-tailed Damselflies** and, later on, a healthy number of **White-legged Damselflies** around the middle of the county and along the border with Oxfordshire at Coleshill. **Small Red-eyed Damselflies** seemed to be a fairly common sight to the south of Devizes too.

The Hawkers had a long season with a **Southern Hawker** recorded on the 17 October, which was a surprise following the cold autumn weather. **Common Darters** were still on the wing well into November which makes it a long season for them too.

According to records received, which I was able to verify thanks to clear accompanying photographs, there seems to be a range expansion of several species, notably: **Emperor Dragonfly**, **Black-tailed Skimmer**, **Brown Hawker**, **Migrant Hawker**, **Blue-tailed Damselfly**, **Beautiful Demoiselle** and **Small Red-eyed Damselfly**. This may be due to previous under-recording of the various locations but could also be the result of warmer temperatures and cleaner habitats. I guess time will tell.

My sincere thanks to all who submitted records for Wiltshire in this, the strangest of years.

Dorset VC9 ~ by Andrew Brown

I guess like most people it's strange to look back on 2020 and assess it objectively as it's been such a difficult year. What I would say is that being able to get out and record dragonflies, and be in communication with other people sending me records and photos, has been a real source of joy. I'm sure others have found this too: I have appreciated nature, its resilience and beauty, at a deeper level in 2020 and I'm sure this will continue.

In so many ways 2020 has possibly been one of my 'best' years as during lockdown (observing the rules) I was able to get out and do more recording than normal at local sites, discovering a couple of new places, and I was able to focus on certain sites. I felt blessed in that I have a reason and purpose to go out, so there was motivation and reward, and I think this sustained me during the first lockdown and the summer.

I managed to see almost all the species that were recorded in Dorset in 2020, but for some reason I didn't get to personally record **Red-veined Darter** or **Vagrant Emperor** - one can't have everything!

Early in spring, perhaps because I was out more in the glorious weather, at virtually every site I visited I found **Hairy Dragonfly**, which surprised me as they had always seemed so elusive in previous years. I think they do have a brief window in the season so it was good to record these at many sites where they had previously not been.

Canford Park SANG (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace) has only recently been developed; it was formerly a golf course and has now been turned into a green space. The site borders the River Stour and has some great ponds and streams; as a result, it almost instantly became a great site for dragonflies. In 2020 alone 12 species have been recorded there, but I suspect there were more present as these sightings were from just ad hoc recording. Longham Lakes, which is just a mile away, has 22 species so far recorded. I will contact the land managers and see if more regular recording is possible.

The most exciting and intriguing sightings of 2020 were from Weymouth, where the VC's first **Norfolk Hawker** was spotted just outside of town on 29 May 29. This was very exciting; it was thought it could have been blown into the country on warm southerly winds. However, looking closely at the photo it appeared to be a recently emerged teneral, so this was perplexing! Over the next couple of weeks there were more sightings, this time around Radipole Lake in the centre of Weymouth. I, myself, went across and managed to see six adults in total! There was also a record of a copulating pair at the site. Subsequent to this I was told that one of the birders in Weymouth had been informed by someone (no names given) who claimed responsibility for 'introducing' the Norfolk Hawkers, as well as the Large Tortoiseshell Butterflies, which had been recorded at Portland! I'm not sure what the instances of unauthorised Odonata introductions are, perhaps Adrian Parr and Dave Smallshire can advise, can they be 'counted'? It does seem surprising to suddenly get a thriving population as larvae take two years to develop, and there has not been a single sighting before. These will be monitored, of course, and it will be interesting to see if there are more sightings next year.

Speaking of plans for 2021, there has recently been an exciting announcement that a new Nature Reserve has been created in Dorset: the Purbeck Heaths National Nature Reserve, which incorporates existing Nature Reserves, private estate land and Forestry Commission forest into a very large 'Super Reserve'. The area is the stronghold of the Southern Damselfly in Dorset. It's hoped that there can be some preliminary surveys to ascertain what the hotspots are across the reserve, though it'll take a few years to survey the whole site, but a fantastic opportunity right on my doorstep!



First Norfolk Hawker for VC, discovered near Weymouth.

© Paul Harris

Isle of Wight VC10 ~ by Jim Baldwin

Despite being in lockdown at the start of the 2020 recording season, there was a welcome increase in records received.

25 species were reported, which equalled the previous best year in 2007. It also included the first confirmed records of **Southern Migrant Hawker**; the sightings on 30 July of a single male at Bouldnor and at Briddlesford Woods were the undoubted highlight of the year for VC10. The species remained at both sites; two males were seen at Bouldnor on 6 August and the last report was of a single male on 11th. At Briddlesford, the maximum count was of four males on 1 August with the final sighting, of a single male being chased by a male **Emperor Dragonfly**, on 12 August.

Unsurprisingly, garden pond sightings provided the majority of the records in April and early May. The first record of the season was a newly emerged **Large Red Damselfly** at Niton on 8 April.

The small breeding colony of **Southern Emerald Damselfly** at Bouldnor was again well monitored by Peter Hunt, with a maximum of four seen on 30 May. There were no sightings between 20 June and 20 August when a lone female was located a distance from the two breeding scrapes. This constituted the last record of the year for this species. Although there was a reduced number of sightings, it is hoped that the colony will remain viable to breed at this site.

The warm early spring weather possibly contributed to a record number of **Hairy Dragonfly** sightings. The first seen on 21 April (setting a new earliest sighting county record) from no less than three locations: Newchurch, Rookley and Sandown Meadows Nature Reserve.

After no records of **Downy Emerald** in 2019, it was pleasing to receive reports from seven sites, including a new one on private land in East Wight. The first sighting, at Newport, on 7 May was the earliest county record for this species.

It was a good year for the **Broad-bodied Chaser** with new early and late county records. One emerged from a garden pond in Carisbrooke on 14 April while a pristine male appeared at a garden pond in Shanklin, on the comparatively late date of 23 August, and was last seen and photographed on 1 September.

Scarce Chasers had a bumper season along the Eastern Yar valley with a record count of 16 at one site on 26 June. James Gloyn's recording effort at these sites during the past three years is producing some excellent records. This year also saw the earliest (18 May) and latest (29 July) sightings for the county for this species. In addition, there was an interesting record of an immature female photographed at a new site, on private land, in the East Wight.

The final record of the year was a **Common Darter** at Bembridge Lagoons on 12 November.

Thanks to everyone who submitted their records and photographs during the year. You can keep up to date with photos and Isle of Wight Odonata news with our [Facebook group IOW Dragonflies and Damselflies](#).



Male Southern Migrant Hawker

© Jim Baldwin



Female Hairy Dragonfly

© James Gloyn



Male Downy Emerald

© James Gloyn



Male Southern Emerald Damselfly

© Peter Hunt

Kent VC15-16 ~ by Marc Heath

Despite many observers not being able to get out as usual due to the pandemic, 2020 was quite a good year for several species in Kent. 2020's records started off with the first **Large Red Damselfly** on the 27 March followed on the 15 April by the first **Hairy Dragonfly**.

After small numbers of the **Dainty Damselfly** were discovered in 2019 on a private area of the Sandwich Bay estate, I was able to survey this area a few times in 2020 with the warden. On 21 May 30 **Dainty Damselfly** were noted and, amazingly, on the 2 June 180 **Dainty Damselfly** were seen, including many mating and ovipositing pairs; several exuviae were also collected of this species. It is hoped that in 2021 organised small groups may be able to visit the site so that others can enjoy this rarest of Damselflies.

Late May saw **Norfolk Hawkers** emerge and their numbers peaked at a count of 28 at Grove Ferry during June, while others were seen well away from the Stour Valley.

Scarce Chaser peaked at a count of 25 at Westbere Lakes during late May and one **Red-veined Darter** was seen on 1 June at Sandwich Bay, where exuviae of this species were also found.

The first **Willow Emerald Damselfly** record of the year was seen at Grove Ferry on the early date of 23 June, with a peak of 378 seen at Nethergong Campsite during early September; the last one was seen at Nethergong on 14 November.

Southern Migrant Hawkers had another good year with 35 seen in the Cliffe area on the 7 July, but numbers were down at Oare Marshes to a max count of seven; this is probably due to areas becoming overgrown. Three **Lesser Emperor Dragonflies** were seen at a site in west Kent and six **Southern Emerald Damselflies** were noted in the Cliffe area on the 13 July; seven **Southern Emerald Damselflies** were seen at Sandwich Bay on the 30 July along with five **Scarce Emerald Damselfly**. At Bedgebury, three **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** and one **Brilliant Emerald** were noted on 29 July. Sandwich Bay featured again with 17 **Southern Migrant Hawkers**, including mating and ovipositing pairs, recorded on 30 July along with four **Red-veined Darters**.

Ten **Lesser Emperor Dragonfly** were seen on private land in the Cliffe area on the 6 August and a few **Keeled Skimmer** were seen in early August well away from their only other Kent site at Hothfield Common on Dartford Marshes which, apparently, have been present there for a few years. It will be interesting to see if this small colony can continue to thrive in this area and hopefully they will be seen in 2021.

A few **Common Darters** were also still being reported during mid-November.

Despite the restrictions being put on everyone this year, there have been some excellent sightings and I'm sure everyone is looking forward to getting out more again in 2021 to enjoy Kent's Odonata.

For more information on Kent's dragonflies and the latest sightings, please visit my website:

www.marcheathwildlifephotography.zenfolio.com



Dainty Damselflies egg laying

© Marc Heath

Surrey VC17 ~ by Linda Pryke

Of the 40 species that comprise the species list for Surrey, 30 were recorded in 2020; in addition, the county's first **Common Clubtail** was recorded which brings the Surrey list total up to 41. Thanks go to the 176 recorders who submitted their sightings in 2020.

Our first sighting was a basking **Large Red Damselfly** female, on 27 March in Epsom, with things getting fully underway from 13 April with more **Large Red Damselflies**, a male **Banded Demoiselle** photographed at Merton Park, and a single **Beautiful Demoiselle** seen in the outskirts of London (Tolworth) on 15 April.

The 2020 dragonfly season was a long one. A female **Southern Hawker** on the wing in the afternoon sun at Lightwater finally brought the season to a close on 22 November.

In terms of monitoring population trends, records from 2020 come with caveats. Coronavirus lockdowns and restrictions made access difficult to some of Surrey's most popular dragonfly sites for much of the season. Sadly, on 30 May, fire broke out at Thursley Common rendering the most recorded parts of the site inaccessible, including the boardwalks which currently await replacement. Fire also broke out on Chobham Common, blazing for ten days, destroying around 500 acres of heathland.

There was good news: the **Scarce Chasers**, first noted at the River Tillingbourne near Guildford in 2018, maintained their presence with sightings of both males and females in May.

Black Darters have been of concern, particularly as the population around Wisley appears to have been in decline in recent years, so Steve Chastell's 7 August record of **Black Darter** individuals in copulation, and 5 pairs in tandem, is very welcome.

Surrey also welcomed its first **Common Clubtail Dragonfly**, when a female was seen and photographed by a householder by the river Thames near Laleham. Sue Webber followed up on the lead and added the record to the county list.

The oddest record of the year goes to Martin Angel who noticed a **Broad-bodied Chaser** nymph wandering across his patio in the dark, on 16 March.

Looking ahead to 2021, it's to be hoped that we'll be able to get out again, as individuals, or in groups, and I'm very much hoping to be able to put faces to some of the names attached to records of 2020. If you'd like some like-minded company the Hampshire and Surrey Borders Group maintains a newsletter via email ([contact David Hepper](#)), and group field meetings are listed on the BDS events page.

Essex VC18-19 ~ by Neil Phillips

The first Odonata sighting in 2020 was a **Large Red Damselfly** in Colchester on 8 April.

Downy Emerald were present at the usual spots in Epping Forest, like Wake Valley Pond, from 15 May, which was the only place they have been recorded until 2019. A male was photographed patrolling at Hornchurch County Park (CP) on 21 May, and another perched at Belhus CP the following day. They are some 12 miles across urban Greater London from the nearest Epping Forest colonies, a long way for a species that was previously sedentary in the county!

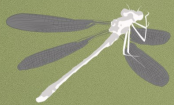
The **Norfolk Hawker** was pretty much unheard of in Essex before 2018 when it was found at Holland Haven; this year it turned up there again on 2 August. Excitingly, one also turned up in South Essex, at Little Belhus CP on 28 May, and another on River Chelmer, Boreham on 15 June. Perhaps it will colonise Essex?

The 'Canvey Way Ditch' on Canvey Island was again the hotspot of dragonfly tourism in the County, beginning with **Scarce Emerald Damselflies**, first noted there on 18 May, which reached numbers over 100 on a number of days in June. However, it was the **Southern Emerald Damselfly** that was probably the main attraction. This is a species that first appeared in Essex in 2010 and it has, in recent year, seemed to have become established here. There have been records of this species on Canvey Island for a few years, and more were spotted in 2020 in terms of days present as well as numbers, with counts peaking on 28 June (six females and one male). This is possibly due to more people looking at the site in the right area. This species is most often found away from the water and typically on the hedgerow away from the ditch. The species occurred again at Little Belhus CP, and also on two new sites in the South Essex Marshes area; one site had a count of 27 (including eight tandem pairs) during my survey on 9 August. This site is usually full of **Scarce Emerald Damselfly**, of which I only found one. The ditches were dry, even for this time of year, and were obviously more suitable for the **Southern Emerald Damselflies**.

Southern Migrant Hawkers appeared in good numbers at their regular sites. Again, Canvey Way Ditch was a top site, one was seen emerging on 8 June, followed by eight more on the 13th, with the first mature male seen that day too. Over 35 were seen there on 18 July. The 30 recorded hunting in Friday Woods on 2 July was an interesting sighting. The species turned up at some new sites too including Thorndon CP as well as people's gardens!

Lesser Emperor were recorded a number of times; Little Belhus CP had at least one throughout July and the species was present at Rainham Marshes on 12-13 July. These records follow sightings in 2019, which suggest the species may have colonised somewhere in the area.

The last dragonfly record for the VC was a **Common Darter** on 18 November at Daws Hall Nature Reserve.



© Neil Phillips
www.uk-wildlife.co.uk

Southern Emerald Damselfly pair egg laying

Middlesex VC21 ~ by Linda Pryke

This is my first report after taking on the role of County Dragonfly Recorder for Middlesex in mid 2020.

My thanks to everyone who took the time to submit records in what has been a strange, challenging and seemingly endless year.

Rather neatly, our first and lasts of the 2020 season came from around Enfield: ten plus **Large Red Damselflies** on 21 April (south-west), and a single **Common Darter** on 4 November (Anon.).

In addition to the wider 'countryside', dragonflies were seen even in the most built-up of areas; the county's boundary takes in central London. Sylvia Myers' three species of Damselfly and four species of Dragonflies, recorded at the Natural History Museum pond and garden in Kensington, between 10 August and 15 September, included **Willow Emerald Damselflies**. The most notable sighting of the year for the county came from Yiewsley High Street: a **Lesser Emperor** was photographed on 7 June.

19 of the county's 20 most regularly recorded species were found to be present in 2020, the exception being the **Emerald Damselfly**. Dwindling over the years, past records have tended to be from the south-west and, sadly, the last record was made in 2018, near Heathrow.

Although it's one of England's smallest Vice-counties, Middlesex contains a multitude of diverse wildlife sites, some private, some public, many of which are looked after by active 'friends' and volunteer groups. I'm looking forward to getting out and about in 2021 and exploring; if anyone would like a bit of company anytime, do get in touch.

As a supplement to this year's sightings, I've also been looking at past records, to get some insight into what's what, where, and when, and created a species list.

VC21 Middlesex regularly recorded species 1850-2020 (species with >30 records).			
Dragonflies		Damselflies	
Common Darter		Common Blue Damselfly	
Emperor Dragonfly		Blue-tailed Damselfly	
Migrant Hawker		Banded Demoiselle	
Brown Hawker		Azure Damselfly	
Black-tailed Skimmer		Large Red Damselfly	
Southern Hawker		Red-eyed Damselfly	
Broad-bodied Chaser		Emerald Damselfly	2018, Heathrow
Ruddy Darter		Small Red-eyed Damselfly	
Four-spotted Chaser		Willow Emerald Damselfly	
Hairy Dragonfly		Beautiful Demoiselle	
VC21 Middlesex infrequently recorded species 1850-2020 (species with <30 records).			
Dragonflies	Most recent	Damselflies	Most recent
Red-veined Darter	2019, Kensington	White-legged Damselfly	2017, Hampstead
Common Hawker	2018, Chiswick	Variable Damselfly	1975, Egham/ Staines
Downy Emerald	2013, Bushy Park	Scarce Emerald Damselfly	1903, Greenford
Brilliant Emerald	1997, Bushy Park	Small Red Damselfly	2014, Mile End
Lesser Emperor	2020, Yiewsley		
Common Club-tail	1997, Bedfont		
Golden-ringed Dragonfly	2017, Harmondsworth		
Vagrant Emperor	1997 Bushy Park		
Black Darter	1969, Barnet		
VC21 Middlesex BDS Category B Vagrant species 1850-2020			
Yellow-winged Darter	1995, Monken Hadley		

Berkshire VC22 ~ by Des Sussex

As of 31 December 2020 over 4000 records have been received for VC22 from many regular as well as new recorders. It was an excellent year with 34 species seen in VC22 – 15 Damselflies and 19 Dragonflies.

There were numerous highlights; spring started with **Common Clubtail** being quite well reported (34 records) from both regular and new locations on the Thames, although all records were from upstream of Purley / Mapledurham Lock. There was also a record of one on downland 4 miles from the river. It would be great to target some searches and see if it is present downstream of Reading in 2021. A male **Scarce Chaser** on the River Blackwater at Sandhurst was only the second county record for the species, and in spite of further searches no more were seen.

The highlight of the year was the discovery of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** at two sites, resulting in 14 records altogether - a big improvement from zero records since 2011. Two observers found it at a heathland site in Mortimer, and there was a chance discovery of a colony at Buckler's Forest, Crowthorne. This is a recently created open space with numerous ponds and wetlands created beside a large housing development. Following the initial discovery in May a number of recorders visited the site and photographed the species at two different ponds, as well as seeing a very good diversity of other species. One lucky observer also picked up a **Lesser Emperor** whilst lining up a photo of a **Scarce Blue-tailed damselfly**! There were two other records of **Lesser Emperor** in 2020 (in Mortimer and Drayton).

Diligent recording by one conservationist confirmed the **Variable Damselfly** is still doing well at its sites close to Cookham, and a new sub site was also located there. The species was also seen at the Burghfield and Radley/Barton sites. Radley lakes attracted quite a few recorders and is clearly an important site, with an impressive diversity of 20 species recorded in 2020 including **Willow Emerald Damselfly**, **Downy Emerald**, **Hairy Dragonfly** and the only Berkshire sighting of **Red-veined Darter** for 2020. The 'Cothill' sites were well visited with good numbers of records of the key species including **Southern Damselfly**.

It was quite a good year for **Brilliant Emerald** with 12 records from the Swinley Forest and Crowthorne areas. Late season interest was maintained when some great September weather encouraged a number of successful searches for **Willow Emerald Damselfly** with 18 separate records submitted – many with great photos. It was found in good numbers at a number of sites including Cookham, Englemere Pond and Swinley Forest, as well as at Radley Lakes, and at Rook's Nest Wood and Kentwood Meadows – both near Wokingham.

For those interested there is a [Berkshire Dragonflies facebook group](#).



Oxfordshire VC23 ~ by Stephen Burch

While 2020 was a difficult year for recorders, it was an exceptional one for Odonata in VC23. There were several sightings of two new species for the vice-county (**Southern Migrant Hawker** and **Willow Emerald Damselfly**), as well as reports of two very scarce species for which the last VC23 records were 20 or more years ago (**Keeled Skimmer** and **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**)! The total number of species seen was a record at 27, compared with the 20-22 norm.

With the favourable spring weather, the season got off to a good start with four species seen in April, including the first of an unprecedented number of **Common Club-tails** along both banks of the River Thames downstream from Abingdon. These included records of multiple emergences from the traditional site of Goring Railway Bridge, as well as sightings of adults in at least one garden.

In mid June a small breeding colony of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies** was discovered at a surprising new site on a housing estate in Banbury. This was the first record of this species for about twenty years in VC23. Only two days later this was bettered by the first ever sighting in VC23 of a **Southern Migrant Hawker** when an immature was found on the western side of RSPB Otmoor. Several immature adults were then seen at the same location, so it is likely that this species had bred there undetected for the first time in 2019. Subsequently, small numbers of adults were seen at various locations across this reserve, although this species remained elusive throughout. It is hoped that this charismatic species will be easier to find in 2021.

In July, there was a single record of a **Keeled Skimmer** from the Banbury Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly site. This is another very rare species in VC23 and was last recorded around 20 years ago. Another mid-season highlight was the spread of **Small Red-eyed Damselflies** into new sites. A pond on Otmoor had the highest numbers, into double figures, found by observers searching, often in vain, for Southern Migrant Hawkers. Additionally, there were reports from three other sites. Also during mid-season, there was a single report of **Variable Damselflies** from a site near Yarnton from where there have been intermittent records in previous years.

The final highlight was the arrival of **Willow Emerald Damselflies** in VC23, which followed a single isolated record from a site in VC22 near to the vice-county border in 2019. The first confirmed record for VC23 came from Otmoor, where small numbers of both males and females were subsequently found. However, larger numbers, into double figures, and confirmed breeding was reported from the Trap Grounds nature reserve, Oxford.

The last record was of a **Common Darter** at Otmoor on 22 November.

There were about 1000 records entered into iRecord for VC23 in 2020, which was a welcome and large increase on the 2019 total of around 600.

[Further details can be found at here.](#)



Male Downy Emerald at Barton Fields
© Stephen Burch



Female Willow Emerald Damselfly at Otmoor
© Stephen Burch



Male Emerald Damselfly at Otmoor

© Stephen Burch

Buckinghamshire VC24 ~ by Alan Nelson

For me it's been a stunning year; as I was furloughed I got to survey many local sites and a few further away.

The advantage was being able to cover a series of sites almost daily, or regularly, to survey all species and their abundance. I even noted some unexpected colour forms on female dragons, including a female **Broad-bodied Chaser** with the blue coloration of a male (what is referred to as andromorphic coloration).

Willow Emerald has finally spread in Buckinghamshire and I've received a good few records. Also, locally to me, in North Buckinghamshire we found them at many new locations but still only in low abundance.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly was still abundant in 2020.

Lessor Emperors were recorded in Milton Keynes: at least two males and a female.

White-legged Damselfly definitely made a comeback in 2020 but were not near to the species' abundance in 2000.

Suffolk VC25-26 ~ by Adrian Parr

Recording during 2020 was significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic, with fewer recorders travelling to distant sites, though conversely there was increased attention given to, for example, garden ponds. The season started relatively early, with the first Large **Red Damselfly** reported on 14 April, **Broad-bodied Chaser** on 21 April and **Hairy Dragonfly** on 2 May. For most of the commoner species, the coming months then proved relatively uneventful. Some of the county's rarer species however produced notable highlights.

White-legged Damselfly was reported in moderate numbers from its strongholds along the River Stour, with a record also from the River Brett near Semer. The species was discovered at this latter site only as recently as 2018, and numbers reported here seem to be on the rise. Following records in 2017 and 2019, **Scarce Chaser** was noted once again near Shottisham, strongly suggesting that the species has now successfully colonised this area, continuing its range expansion within the county. **Hairy Dragonfly** also continued its ongoing range expansion, with a new 10 km square record in the Bury St Edmunds area, near Thurston.

Being situated in south-east England relatively close to the continental mainland, Suffolk is well placed to receive new colonist species. **Southern Migrant Hawker** was reported from at least eight localities during the year, including the Walberswick area where records of immatures had been made during both 2018 and 2019. Especially with oviposition having been reported during 2020 from Lopham and Redgrave Fen on the Suffolk/Norfolk border, it would seem that the species is likely now permanently established in the county, as well as occurring as a migrant. Hopefully it will continue to consolidate its position over the coming years. The other "new colonist" to produce interesting sightings was something of a more unconventional one. The first record of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** for Suffolk was as recently as 2019, when a few wanderers, perhaps of continental origin, were noted at Kessingland on the east coast. In 2020, the species was then found breeding near Ipswich at the end of July! This is a significant find, and it will be interesting to see how long the colony persists.

There were a number of reports of migrant species during 2020. **Red-veined Darter** produced a few coastal records; single individuals were at Minsmere on 22 May and at Gunton Warren on 3 July, five were at Carlton Marshes on 17 July, three were at Minsmere on 18 July and one was at Kessingland Beach on 16 October. **Vagrant Emperor** continued to grace the county during 2020, with a male being attracted to an actinic moth trap at Pakefield over the night of 30 September, near the start of a significant national influx. Finally, **Lesser Emperor** was reported from three sites on the east coast during the year, including Carlton Marshes where the species had also been seen in 2019, and where the possibility for local breeding therefore exists. There were, however, no reports from Loompit Lake, where local emergences had been suspected the year before. Much still remains to be learnt about the status and breeding biology of **Lesser Emperor** in Britain.

Norfolk VC27-28 ~ by Pam Taylor

The first **Large Red Damselfly** was reported on 9 April. This was one of the earliest ever dates for Norfolk and only three days later than the county record. A further four species were on the wing before the end of the month. These were: **Azure Damselfly**, **Hairy Dragonfly**, **Four-spotted Chaser** and **Broad-bodied Chaser**. It gave promise of an excellent dragonfly season.

Scarce Emerald Damselfly is a species known mainly from the pools of Breckland in West Norfolk, VC28, but one or two individuals were also found during 2020 at St Faith's Common near Horsford and at Felbrigg Park in East Norfolk, VC27. To the far west of VC28, the species was again reported from Roydon Common and Grimston Warren, while numbers at East Winch Common reached double figures. The normally more common and widespread **Emerald Damselfly** was reported from surprisingly few sites last year, reinforcing the view that it could be declining both in the county, and nationally. **Willow Emerald Damselfly** by way of contrast seems to be further consolidating its hold, with reports now spanning all of Norfolk, including several new localities in 2020.

Small Red Damselfly has just two known sites in Norfolk and was again reported from both, although numbers at the second site were extremely low. **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** also has just two known sites, one predominantly on private land near the east coast and the other in West Norfolk.

Of the larger dragonflies, it was **Southern Migrant Hawker** that made the local news. The species was once again present at East Winch Common, where an ovipositing female was photographed and a male was seen. There were also repeat sightings on the north side of the river at Redgrave and Lopham Fen, bordering Suffolk. Then new records came in from Horsey and Winterton Dunes on the east coast and from Beeston Common near the north Norfolk coast. The real stars, however, were a group of up to eight males and two females at Thompson Common in the Brecks. They arrived in late July and were seen and photographed by numerous observers until well into August. In late July a pair were observed on two separate days making use of the pingos at the site for breeding attempts. It looks as if Norfolk could soon be another of this species' many conquests.

Two other large dragonflies are also spreading to further sites in Norfolk. **Lesser Emperor** not only appeared once again at the Trinity Broads (7th consecutive year) and Felbrigg Lake, but was also seen at Winterton Dunes. The presence here of at least four adults, including a fresh teneral female, is indicative of local breeding. Further individuals were also reported from Blickling and from Whitlingham Lake on the edge of Norwich.

Away from the Broads, our resident **Norfolk Hawker** was seen at several sites within Norwich, as well as to the north-west of the city at locations including Litcham Woods, Narborough Railway Line, Sparham Pools and Pensthorpe, near Fakenham. The most distant north-west record so far for the county came from Courtyard Farm, Ringstead, only three miles from the coast at Hunstanton. To the north-east the species has appeared once again as far out as Pigney's Wood on the North Walsham and Dilham Canal. To the south there are sites throughout the county, with a steadily increasing population present at Thompson Water.

There were fewer migrant records in 2020 than the previous year, but three coastal reports of **Vagrant Emperor** did reach me. A female was photographed at Winterton Dunes early in October, followed by a male at Holkham Pines and an unspecified individual at Horsey Dunes later in the month.

Few of the smaller dragonflies were note-worthy last year, but wandering **Scarce Chasers** were found at several sites. These included Hickling, Hoveton Hall Gardens, Little Plumstead and Upton Fen in VC27, plus Nar Valley Fisheries and Grimston Warren in VC28. **Red-veined Darters** were once again present at both Kelling Water Meadows, where ovipositing was observed, and Felbrigg Lake, which is also a known breeding site. Additionally, a single individual was located near the coast at Trimingham in September.

Finally, a huge thank-you to everyone who submitted their sightings from Norfolk during 2020. Despite all the constraints imposed due to the pandemic, I still received, either directly or via iRecord, over 7,600 records.



Female Scarce Chaser

© Pam Taylor



Male Scarce Emerald Damselfly at Thompson Common

© Pam Taylor



Male Southern Migrant Hawker
at Thompson Common

© Pam Taylor



Female Vagrant Emperor at
Winterton Dunes

© Mike Crewe

Cambridgeshire VC29 and Huntingdonshire VC31 ~ by Val Perrin

Despite the restrictions on personal freedom that the Covid pandemic put on us all, continuing access to the natural world (with social distancing!) has for me, and many other people, been an absolute lifeline during 2020. I have been very pleased to see that lots of others have been out recording dragonflies, and overall I have received a good number of records from across our two vice counties last summer. Most of these have been of the common, resident species, but every record is valuable and I am very grateful to all recorders for doing their bit and entering these on to iRecord and Living Record for me to easily verify.

One highlight has been a marked increase in the number of **Willow Emerald Damselfly** records reported, continuing through into the autumn, with many new locations being flagged up at wetland sites. **Southern Migrant Hawker** was again seen at Quy Fen, east of Cambridge, where it has been present for the last few years and is almost certainly breeding now. However, additional records of this species in the county came from Ditton Meadows, alongside the River Cam in Cambridge itself, as well as one from the Wildlife Trust local nature reserve at Paradise, just to the west of the city, again beside the Cam. Other records came from Fen Drayton lakes RSPB and from Fulbourn Fen, all in late July and August.

Another species of which the BDS is currently featuring in a national survey, **White-legged Damselfly**, was again recorded at Cambourne. Additional sighting records were received from Middle Fen at Fen Drayton, Mare Fen in Swavesey, and Webbs Hole sluice at Overcote, all adjacent to the River Great Ouse. Besides these, other records came from: Rookery Waters at Pidley Fen near Warboys, Paxton Pits nature reserve, Houghton Meadows and St Ives.

Duncan Mackay saw and photographed a **Lesser Emperor** at Trumpington Meadows, just south of Cambridge, on 1 August.

New records for **Norfolk Hawker** were received at sites away from its breeding stronghold at Little Paxton Pits, where several observers made records from the early date 15 May on throughout June. The new locations were Fen Drayton lakes RSPB (two locations), Barford Road pocket park, St Neots and on a backwater of the Great Ouse at Hemingford Abbots, near Huntingdon. This Dragonfly is clearly spreading along the river corridor and it will be interesting to see if breeding populations become established at these sites, and others, in the coming years.

The continued presence of **Downy Emerald** was again confirmed at a private lake at Shepreth on 20 May, its only known location in our vice counties.

In terms of species assemblage richness in 2020, two sites stood out: Quy Fen had 11 species present in mid-July, and one of my recorders reported 14 species in total on her large garden pond at Cardinal's Green, Horseheath, in the south-east of Cambridgeshire, including **Banded Demoiselle**, **Willow Emerald Damselfly** and **Scarce Chaser**!



Mating Large Red Damselfly

© Val Perrin



Male Broad-bodied Chaser

© Val Perrin

Bedfordshire VC30 ~ by Rory Morrissey

The dragonflies of Bedfordshire VC30 kept a lot of people amused this past year. The number of records received was the greatest ever, but some species were still difficult to find.

For the first time a pair of **Lesser Emperor Dragonflies** were seen ovipositing in the county, at a new lake on the edge of a housing estate in Astral Park, Leighton Buzzard. On the same day, 26 June, another flew inside a house in Marston Moretaine. Two more records of single males followed, at Stewartby and Willington.

Scarce Chaser turned up along many stretches of the River Great Ouse, and several spotters had them in their gardens. **Downy Emerald** was found in reasonable numbers in its usual haunts in the south-west of the county, but there was no evidence of dispersal to the north of the county (as was reported in 2019).

No **Beautiful Demoiselles** were seen in the county in 2020, and very few records of **Variable Damselfly** came from their usual location at Felmersham nature reserve, although singletons were seen at Willington and Clophill.

Keeled Skimmers were seen at Sundon Quarry, where there is a small breeding population. **Norfolk Hawker** was seen again at Felmersham, including an ovipositing female. No records of **Norfolk Hawker** were received from the west side of the River Ouse at St Neots, Cambridgeshire, just inside VC30, where many were seen in 2019.

It was one of the best years for the reporting of **Large Red Damselflies** – perhaps partly because many were stuck at home and could only look in their garden. Several observers did get out though, and huge swarms of the common species of Damselflies were seen at several lakes. **Banded Demoiselle** was seen in large numbers in the fields and later on the rivers. **White-legged Damselfly** reports were comparable with previous years, with good numbers near the River Great Ouse at Kempston and Stafford Bridge.

The cold and wet weather experienced later seemed less conducive to the well-being of the Odonata, although there was no apparent reduction in the numbers of records received for the later Hawkers and Darters. There is a trend of record inflation, however, with some observers submitting records of one or two insects every ten metres now that it is simple to do it on iRecord. I would prefer to have summary records over a larger area for common species.

The biggest increase in population and breeding locations was, once again, for the **Willow Emerald Damselfly**. Over a hundred were seen on one occasion at Stanford Lake and good numbers were counted at several other sites. The last adult **Willow Emerald** was observed near Sandy on 21 November – the latest sighting of any Odonata in the county, beating even the **Common Darter**.

The number of breeding species confirmed in VC30 still stands at 23. Breeding of **Variable Damselfly**, **Beautiful Demoiselle** and **Norfolk Hawker** remains tantalisingly unconfirmed, plus now we add **Lesser Emperor** to the list of potential species.



Egg laying Large Red Damselfly
© Rory Morrissey



Rook with a female Southern Hawker
© Rory Morrissey



Egg laying Lesser Emperor

© Geoff Dawes

Northamptonshire VC32 ~ by Mark Tyrrell

An on-schedule start to the 2020 season had **Large Red Damselflies** appearing from 14 April onwards (for those lucky enough to have them near their home address). An early **Banded Demoiselle** on 24 April and a **Broad-bodied Chaser** on 26 April indicated a good early start, and we went on to record six species in April for the first time in several years.

My first trip out wasn't until the first week of May, to my closest site where I knew I'd find 500+ emerging **Common Blue Damselflies**. I wasn't disappointed and managed to record five of the six species that had been seen by others. By 16 May I was finding emerging **Scarce Chasers** along my regular stretch of the Nene from 6am.

Beautiful Demoiselles consolidated their position on the Brampton Valley Way, with records from new parts of the stream, and on the River Ise with more adults recorded than in previous years.

Our only site for **Downy Emeralds**, on a private estate, was closed due to lockdown so I was unable to see any for the first year since their discovery in 2006. However, after a very stormy period, a territorial male was photographed at a site near Corby, some distance from their usual site. He was seen on a couple of consecutive days before disappearing. I suspect he was a wind-blown individual.

The real excitement of the year came via our local Birding WhatsApp group in early July, when a number of **Lesser Emperors** were seen at Pitsford Nature Reserve near Northampton. As you would expect, I rushed over there and was lucky to find an ovipositing pair and to get a real good shot of them.

Willow Emerald Damselflies continue to do well, with 2020 records from several new sites including Stanwick Lakes Irthlingborough Lakes & Meadows and Ditchford Lakes & Meadows nature reserves.



Ovipositing Lesser Emperor

© Mark Tyrrell

Gloucestershire VC33-34 ~ by Richard Mundy

The 2020 season started in typical fashion with the first **Large Red Damselfly** on 15 April with many emerging on 25 and 26 April. Before the month's end the first **Hairy Dragonfly** was recorded on 22 April, the first **Broad-bodied Chaser** on 24 April, and the first two **Banded Demoiselles** on 26 April at Barton, on the River Avon, the earliest record of this species for the county.

Relatively few observers were out and about during the spring but, despite this, there were interesting records of several scarcer early-season species. **Scarce Chasers** were seen from 27 May to 21 June, with records received mainly from the species' strongholds on the Severn and Avon, in the north of the county. However, continued range expansions were recorded elsewhere; records at St Anne's, on the Bristol Avon, representing a 7km extension downstream, and at Stonehouse, on the Stroudwater Canal/River Frome, a 4km range extension upstream. Continuing from 2019, **Scarce Chaser** was again recorded at Pittville Park in Cheltenham.

A total of only five **Common Clubtails** were recorded between The Mythe and Severn Hams, Tewkesbury on the River Severn between 2 and 27 May. One photographed at Cannop Ponds, in late May, established 2020 as the third consecutive year that this species has been found in the Forest of Dean. These individuals are generally assumed to come from the River Wye population, but no records were received this year from the river itself.

Hairy Dragonfly was seen in five established areas along the Severn between 22 April and 07 June: Coombe Hill Meadows, a Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) Reserve; Alney Island, Gloucester; Hempsted, Gloucester; the Stroudwater Canal and Severn Beach.

Downy Emerald was recorded in three parts of the county between 20 May and 02 June: Newent Woods, Cotswold Water Park, and the Forest of Dean where a record of six together at a small pond on 21 May was exceptional.

Three rare species were recorded later in the summer. For the third year running, **Southern Migrant Hawkers** were recorded at a site at Netheridge, Gloucester, with at least four different males photographed between 31 July and 18 August. It seems that this is now an established population, albeit small, and with limited suitable habitat available nearby for the population to expand into. One **Lesser Emperor** was recorded at Flaxley on 12 August. **Red-veined Darters** were recorded at GWT's Woorgreens Reserve on 25 and 26 June, with at least two males and a female present.

Woorgreens also played host to a male **Black Darter** in September, a scarce species in the county which was also seen at another nearby site during that month, and four males were present at the only known breeding pond on 08 August, indicating that the small Forest of Dean population probably remains stable.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly continues to colonise the county with three new sites recorded in the Forest of Dean and three in the Gloucester/Cheltenham area. Surprisingly, however, this species remains unrecorded from most of the Cotswolds and from the Thames catchment in the east of the county.

Worcestershire VC37 ~ by Mike Averill

At time of writing 2120 records had been received so far for 2020 for 27 species from 120 recorders, including one new species for the county.

The migrant dragonflies were once again dominated by the appearance of the **Lesser Emperor**, and sightings jumped from eight in 2019 to 19 in 2020, mainly at Ripple, with Throckmorton and Pirton getting a few records. It is really good to get this fabulous emperor making regular appearances in the county, and there was some evidence of breeding as well this year. A species which is usually a regular visitor, the **Red-veined Darter**, was only seen once at Pirton Pool.

Hairy Dragonfly, which, apart from one record in 2011, was only known from two records in the late 1970's. Despite predictions that it might arrive one day, it had failed to choose Worcestershire, until 2020 that is, when it showed up at several sites and was recorded 17 times between 8 May and 13 June at Ryall and Ripple and the Croome River.

Scarce Chasers did very well in the county in 2020, and, apart from Croome and their usual sites on the Avon, it was seen many times on Bredon Hill, at Westmancote, Defford, Fladbury and near Nafford. It is sometimes seen along the Severn towards Tewkesbury but it was good to find larval cases near Ripple in 2020, giving us the first proven breeding on the River Severn. Up at Hillditch Pool, Hartlebury, where there were fears that the eight year run of breeding might be coming to an end, there was, in fact, a good showing of up to eight dragonflies at any time with larval cases found as well.

One of the species predicted to arrive in the county was the **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**. It was thought that with all the gravel workings along the River Severn, they would appear somewhere on those, so it was very nice to hear that Andy Warr had found the county's 31st species at Feckenham on one of his visits.

One other Damselfly that deserves a mention is the **Small Red-eyed Damselfly**. This species first arrived in Worcestershire in 2006 after a rapid sweep across the country starting in 1999. After that there was a consolidation in the sites around Croome, then Grimley but not much happened for about five years and they had resisted spreading into Shropshire & Herefordshire. That was until the last two years when after some filling in around Kidderminster and a few sites towards Birmingham, they have jumped into Staffordshire and up the Teme valley into Shropshire and Herefordshire.



Male Lesser Emperor

© Andy Warr



Male Hairy Dragonfly

© Andy Warr

Staffordshire VC39 ~ by Dave Jackson

A TAIL OF TWO COUNTIES (With apologies to Charles Dickens)

In 2019, whilst verifying record submissions for VC 39 Staffordshire, I came across a couple of records, supported by photographs, of what appeared to be the first county sightings of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies**.

I was somewhat elated at the time and wanted to know more, as the only other nearby site, where I personally knew this species occurred, was in the Clee Hills, Shropshire. Even there they are only known to occur along one shallow stream.

I set about e-mailing the finders Andrew and Angela Goodwin, and Dennis Swaby, and we struck up an exchange of correspondence. After finding out the exact Ordnance Survey Map reference, and investigating the none too evident line for the county boundary thereabouts, the said recorder's and iRecord managed to burst my bubble of hopeful anticipation. The exact location of the colony turned out to be circa 250 yards into the neighbouring county of Cheshire!

In 2018 and 2019 the Scarce Blue-tailed colony inhabited two small cattle drinking ponds on the Cheshire side of the county boundary. Their discovery in 2018 constituted the first records for this County. On one occasion the recorders saw a teneral flying in the direction of Staffordshire! Both Andrew and Dennis kindly offered to keep me informed of further sightings and made several visits, taking detailed notes, during the late spring and early summer of 2020.

In early 2020 Andrew reported that he had seen his first Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly of the year, albeit, on the Cheshire side. He tried to find them on the pool which the county boundary intersects but didn't see a single Odonata. This could have been because it had dried out completely during previous years' heatwave. However he stated "It looks brilliant for Scarce Blue-tails and they may find it. The spring has stopped flowing into it already and a group of bullocks are drinking from it so cross your fingers for a big thunderstorm to top it up." His records continued to come in:

20 May: two immature males on Cheshire no.1 pool (three days earlier than in 2019).

12 June: 10 males, three pairs mating and one aurantiaca female on pools 1, 2 and 3, Cheshire.

16 June: 21 males on pools 1, 2 and 3.

23 June: 13 males on pools 1, 2 and 3. A visit made to the cottage farm pond in Staffordshire was unsuccessful, but it looked in excellent condition.

25 June: 13 males on pools 1, 2 and 3. A male on the cottage pond crossed and perched on the Staffordshire side – BOOM! (AG and A Goodwin).

26 June: three hour stake out of the east bank of the cottage farm pond produced three males and a female aurantiaca perched in Staffordshire (AG). One of the males left the pond and perched in the hay field 5 yards from pond inside Staffordshire.

1 July: three males present on the cottage farm pond. One individual seen in a hedgerow and dyke 8 yards from pool inside Staffordshire.

After receiving confirmation from Andrew I just had to visit the pond myself, so on the warm and sunny 24 July 2020, Brian Marsh and myself arranged with Andy to meet up at Mow Cop.

As the pond is on private land Andrew arranged with the farmer for us to go into his field. He also very kindly oiled the wheels by leaving a couple of bottles of wine on the farmer's doorstep, as a thank you for allowing his visits.

When we reached the pond Andrew quickly located a couple of Scarce Blue-tails and we followed them with our binoculars, occasionally losing them amongst the long emergent grasses growing in the watery wallow. But the Blue-tails were still on the Cheshire side of the pond. After probably less than an hour we located a male Scarce Blue-tail skirting the edge of the pond and we followed it until – yes! It crossed the imaginary line into Staffordshire and flew down the grassy ditch in VC39 – joy. I remember punching the air like Sir Lewis Hamilton. We later saw two more fly into Staffordshire air space. The farmer latterly joined us and we informed him of the importance of the records for both Counties and, being a nature lover, he was keen to see the damselflies for himself so we found him a perched individual to see through my binoculars.

My eternal thanks to “uber sleuths” Andrew and Angela Goodwin from Sandbach, Cheshire, for thoroughly and diligently researching our respective County boundary from old maps, on which the line varied historically in the area of the pond. They also talked to “ageing” locals, and after checking Google Earth's aerial views and the County Council's on-line mapping, he confirmed that the pond had been enlarged in the recent past. He stated “We measured the kink in the field boundaries on the O.S. map, halved it and then marked it out at both ends on east side. This gave us a 4ft 7inch strip of the eastern side of the pond in Staffordshire. I think we can thank the digger driver whose instructions were to make the pond deeper but in the process enlarged the pond on the northern and eastern sides.”

Andrew jokingly maintains he is now the self proclaimed authority on the county boundary at Mow Cop. On one occasion they had to beat a hasty retreat from the shared boundary pond due to the approaches of a herd of boisterous bullocks! The things we do for our shared love of wildlife; after all the initial frustration, there comes the latter pleasurable result: a fellow enthusiast successfully confirms the presence of a new species albeit tenuously in one's own County.

Andrew wishes to thank all who have ventured to Mow Cop to see the Scarce Blue-tails for their care in avoiding damage to this small population and their habitat. A special thank you to John Rainer for the initial confirmation after a long drive from Cornwall and all the other photographers for the help in documenting this population.

Tailpiece –During the summer of 2020 I was also made aware that Andy Warr had discovered the first Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly county record for Worcestershire on a reserve.



Male Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly at Mow Cop

© Andrew Goodwin



Mow Cop pond

© Andrew Goodwin

Lincolnshire VC53-54 ~ by Nick Tribe

Southern Migrant Hawker was recorded in 2020; this follows the species' first appearance in the county in 2019. A male was seen on the coast at Rimac, Saltfleetby-Theddlethorpe National Nature Reserve (NNR), on 8 August by Darren Wozencroft. Cliff Morrison saw two males at the same place the next day.

A male **Lesser Emperor** was recorded from Gibraltar Point National Nature Reserve on 24 July by Melanie Penson, a new site record. Only one other record of this species was made; an individual was seen at RPSB Frampton Marsh on 1 July.

A single **Red-Veined Darter** was at Gibraltar Point NNR on 10 September, a low number by recent standards for this species.

Black Darters were seen on the Humber at Alkborough Flats on the 2 September (Neil Drinkall) and Winteringham on the 6 September (Clare Gillatt). These may well be local dispersers from the large breeding populations in the Humberhead Peatlands NNR. A possible migrant individual of this species was seen at Gibraltar Point on 12 September (Ben Ward).

Ian Nixon reported a **Scarce Chaser** at Throckenholt on the Lincolnshire/Cambridgeshire border on the 25 May. This species was recorded at two sites in south Lincolnshire in 2016 and 2017, but does not appear to have spread since then.

Willow Emerald Damselfly continued to be recorded more widely throughout Lincolnshire, with several records from new sites for the species.

Leicestershire with Rutland VC55

~ by Ian Merrill

2020 will long remain in the memory as an exceptional year in many ways, and this description certainly holds true in terms of dragonfly recording in VC55. A period of unusually favourable early-season weather coincided with a large number of recorders having much more time on their hands than usual, either agreeably or imposed under duress! Overlay onto a period of significant change within the local Odonata population, which included a handful of new colonists and several other species with clearly expanding populations, and the result is what can only be described as a season of dragonfly revelation.

Hairy Dragonfly was the first species to hit the headlines, as more and more sightings materialised from previously unrecorded localities. Between the end of 2019 and the end of 2020 this species demonstrated a 31% population increase in terms of 1km grid squares occupied. Although the increased-observer factor must be considered, an ongoing range expansion of this species seems beyond doubt.

The warm and dry spring weather also enabled focussed recording efforts to establish a much better understanding of the VC55 populations of two new colonists, the **Scarce Chaser** and **Beautiful Demoiselle**, in the south of VC55. The distribution of the **Scarce Chaser** was plotted along the River Welland and, although more work remains to be done, it is apparent that its distribution is restricted to certain favourable sections of the river and it is certainly absent from many narrow and fast-flowing legs. Similarly, the **Beautiful Demoiselle** is tied to the relatively few suitable sections of the rivers Welland, Avon and Swift and therefore exhibits a very patchy distribution. Concerted observer effort did, however, pay dividends and between the end of 2019 and the end of 2020 this species demonstrated a 67% population increase in terms of 1km grid squares occupied; there are now 15 occupied squares on the three rivers.

Another significant upsurge in records was witnessed with the **Small Red-eyed Damselfly**, which really seemed to come to the fore in 2020 as the species' status leapt from something of a scarce and erratically distributed resident to the most common late summer species at a significant number of sites. Between the end of 2019 and the end of 2020 this species demonstrated a 38% population increase in terms of 1km grid squares occupied. The most recent arrival to VC55, the **Willow Emerald Damselfly**, also made its presence felt with some force, with recorded sites rising from two to six and with three-figure counts being made at Melton Mowbray Country Park; it seems inevitable the expansion of this species is set to continue with some vigour.

The species with the most enigmatic distribution in VC55 is the **Common Hawker**, which has, for the last ten years, retained a toe-hold in the sub-optimal habitat of remnant lowland heaths in the north west of Leicestershire. After a recording absence of three years it was fantastic to chance upon a pristine adult close to a likely breeding pool at Albert Village, renewing confidence that our scarcest resident is still alive and well in VC55.

Two other events worthy of mention in this 2020 summary were the creation of a [Leicestershire and Rutland Dragonfly Facebook Group](#), which has served as a great conduit for information and a general stimulant of wider dragonfly interest, and also the publication of a fully revised VC55 Dragonfly Checklist, which is hosted on the NatureSpot website. I would conclude by thanking the small but diligent band of VC55 recorders for their continued support in plotting the ever-changing distributions of our Odonata population during a particularly fascinating period of change.



Small Red-eyed Damselfly, Measham, Leicestershire,
© Ian Merrill



Common Hawker, Albert Village, Leicestershire, August 2020

© Ian Merrill

Nottinghamshire VC56 and Derbyshire

VC57 ~ by Chris Bradbury

This report covers the 2019 and 2020 dragonfly season.

Willow Emerald Damselfly arrived in Nottinghamshire in September 2020. It was first seen on 1 September at Rampton, in the north of the county, by David Hursthouse and photographed there on 14 September. Further September reports came from Gringley on the Hill and Snape Wood. There have been no records for Derbyshire as yet, but worth searching for in the 2021 season.

The **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** has now colonized both counties.

Two to five adult **Variable Damselflies** were seen at Netherfield, Nottinghamshire, on 25 May 2019 (by Robert Woodward).

Common Hawker continues to be widespread in the Peak District. Although the species is not currently known to breed in Nottinghamshire, it breeds in nearby South Yorkshire and also in Lincolnshire. In the past it has been almost an annual visitor to Nottinghamshire with small numbers seen from July to mid- September mainly. However, there have been no known records in the county in 2019-2020; I would appreciate photo-records of this species in Nottinghamshire please.

Vagrant Emperor was first seen and photographed about a series of pits in north Nottinghamshire by David Hursthouse in July 2019. Initially: two males on 7 July, six males and a female on 17 July, and five males on 24th July. The last sighting was of four males on 8 August.

Lesser Emperor records for 2019 consist of one male on 17 July and on 24 July 2019 at Misson by D. Hursthouse. For 2020 a pair were recorded at Netherfield on 6-8 August and 10 August 2020 by Robert Woodward; this includes sightings ovipositing.

Hairy Dragonfly has been photographed in Derbyshire from Forbes Hole at Long Eaton (by Marion Bryce on 20 May 2019). This, and a photo from Skylarks Nature Reserve, and another from the River Devon, south of Newark, encouraged me to accept further sightings in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire gravel pits, from Attenborough to Langford Lowfields (including records from previous years).

Golden-ringed Dragonfly was recorded in the usual Derbyshire moorland areas; the Barbrook and Ramsley area, and also Burbage Brook, produced the most records.

Scarce Chasers were seen on the River Soar, north of Kegworth, in 2016 and 2018. The river is the border between Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. In 2020 I managed to snap a poor photo of the species at 20m range from the footpath on the Leicestershire side (the Nottinghamshire side is private and inaccessible). This species may expand further into Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire and might make a long-distance jump as it has in Leicestershire.

A fine male **Keeled Skimmer**, the 3rd record for Derbyshire, was found and photographed at Seymour in Markham Vale by Mark Radford on 15 August 2019.

There were a few records for **Red-veined Darter** in 2019; I was lucky to find and photograph a male at Newstead and Annesley country park on 29 June 2019 and it was sighted again on 30th. Then there was a flood of sightings; one male at Lound on 16 July 2019 (by David Hursthouse). Subsequently, at Misson, 27 males and two females were recorded on 7 July 2019, eight males on 17 July, 11 males on 24 July, one male on 29 July, and 2 males on 8 August (by David Hursthouse).

Black Darters have a very healthy breeding populations at certain places in the peak district in Derbyshire; at the former Ramsley and Barbrook Reservoirs, and along the Bar Brook it is commoner than the **Common Darter** (David Hursthouse). However, in Nottinghamshire there are no recent records.





Keeled Skimmer at Seymour in Markham Vale © Mark Radford



First Scarce Chaser photographed in Nottinghamshire
chrisbradbury.com

Cheshire VC58 ~ by Chris Meredith

Despite the difficulties that the country faced during 2020, it was great to see that so many recorders still managed to get out surveying, making the most of their daily allotted exercise. While total records submitted were down from 1467 in 2019 to 968 in 2020, the number of people submitting records was only two less than the previous year.

The total number of individual dragonflies recorded in 2020 was 1794, down from 3011 the previous year. While the number of earlier flying species remained similar to those counts in 2019, the later flying species, such as **Common, Ruddy and Black Darters**, as well as **Migrant Hawkers** were noticeably down. The weather throughout much of the season was similar to that experienced in 2019 and so the current assumption is that the impact of rolling local lockdowns after the initial nationwide lockdown may account for these differences.

All of the species that we would expect to find were recorded across VC 58, although the **Keeled Skimmers**, spotted in 2019, were not recorded in 2020. Fairly recent colonisers of sites in VC 58 were again well recorded, including **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies** and **Small Red-eyed Damselflies**. Other uncommon species, **Downy Emerald**, **Hairy Dragonfly** and **Variable Damselfly**, were all recorded in good numbers from their known locations.

For those that haven't found the VC 58 blog yet, we have now gone online: for the yearly update you can [follow the link here](#).

We try to keep the blog up to date with sightings and pictures sent to the [County Dragonfly Recorder email account](#) throughout the year. In addition to the sightings page, John has been busy adding identification tips for species found in VC 58 and most recently a series of maps showing the locations of some of Cheshire's more uncommon species. With both historic and more recent records we hope that these maps will help people visit some of the sites where these species were historically found and tell us whether they are still there.

Finally I would like to say a huge thank you to everyone that has been out recording dragonflies (or anything else for that matter) this year. I know some of you have been doing it for decades, while others are very new to it, but everyone's records are equally valued. Keep an eye on the blog for updates and possibly the odd request for help surveying some of the vice county's record 'black holes'.

Happy hunting for 2021.

Yorkshire, South-east VC61 ~ by Martin Roberts

Given that the recording effort in 2020 must have been affected by the pandemic, it was gratifying that a total of 1130 records were submitted, though it must be noted that approximately 800 of those came from the city of Hull and its immediate surrounding area. The total for the VC was virtually identical to that of 2018, and only slightly below our best ever year of 2019 when 1335 records were submitted.

The high proportion of records originating from Hull was a consequence of 2020 being the second year of a coordinated survey of Odonata in and around the city by Africa Gomez and Dick Shillaker, both of whom are members of the Yorkshire Dragonfly Group. A total of 19 Odonata species were recorded in 2020, with evidence of breeding for 14 species. Their detailed report on the 2019 survey can be [downloaded here](#): (13.8 MB file)

It has been apparent for several years that **Large Red Damselfly** is rarely recorded in the Hull area. This year, only eight records of the species were received from the whole of the VC, one of which came from Hull. This is surprising given the widespread distribution of this species in the UK.

Two notable species were recorded at Spurn Bird Observatory; a **Norfolk Hawker** was caught in the Heligoland trap on 17 July and a **Vagrant Emperor** was seen on 17 September.

The main excitement of the year was confirmation of the arrival of **Willow Emerald Damselfly** in the VC. This species was recorded for the first time in 2019 at two sites about 15 miles apart in the south of the VC, close to the Humber. A single individual was seen at each site. During September of this year I received 15 reports of sightings of **Willow Emerald Damselflies** from five different locations in the south of the VC. The Beverley and Barmston Drain, which runs through the Northern suburbs of Hull before emptying into the River Hull, was the source of seven records from various locations along a one-mile stretch, and copulation was witnessed on at least one occasion. This bodes well for further expansion across the VC.

As usual, the final sightings of the year were of **Common Darter** and **Migrant Hawker**. The 13 November, the latest 2020 sighting for **Common Darter** was typical of the latest dates for the last five years (ranging between 9-18 November). For **Migrant Hawker**, the final 2020 sighting was 21 November; this sets a new record by five days (previous five year range is between 24 October-16 November).

Many thanks to all those who sent in records during this challenging year.

Yorkshire, North-east VC62 and North-west VC65 ~ by Keith Gittens

While 2020 could not be considered a normal year for recording it was still pleasing to have over 800 records submitted across the season.

The year's highlights again focused on species' range expansion. In late May/early June there were confirmed sightings of male **Hairy Dragonflies** patrolling a well vegetated redundant fishing lake at Wykeham Lakes, near Scarborough and a lone sighting of a male at Worlds End, Strensall, York.

As we moved into August attention turned to sightings of **Small Red-eyed Damselfly**, with records from a number of new sites and evidence of breeding at others. A large relatively shallow weedy pond near Catterick was the highlight with over 500 individuals recorded on one visit, with many ovipositing pairs.

From September Wykeham Lakes again came to the fore with a second year of records for **Willow Emerald Damselfly** and this year ovipositing females were seen.

Other notable records included **Red-veined Darter**. This species has now been recorded on two consecutive years at gravel pits near Catterick.

There was a first record of **Migrant Hawker** from Foxglove Covert LNR, Catterick Garrison, on the eastern edge of the Pennines.

In the North York Moors National Park I have been monitoring some woodland pools which are part of Forest England's Beaver re-introduction project. Since their arrival the beavers have opened up the pools considerably through tree felling and increased the water level by dam building. While records of Odonata for the site have been low as yet, one species has come to the fore. On one visit three male **Golden-ringed Dragonflies** were recorded patrolling the pools along with an ovipositing female. It will be interesting to see how the dragonfly fauna develops at this exciting project.

In terms of conservation work and events, these have been curtailed since March due to the ongoing pandemic. However, on a positive note, Yorkshire Water have agreed funding for further conservation work at Boltby Reservoir, near Thirsk, which will be managed by the Freshwater Habitats Trust (FHT). When possible, conservation work at this site will be continued by a combination of volunteers from FHT, Yorkshire Dragonfly Group and Butterfly Conservation Yorkshire.

Many thanks to all those who sent in records. A special thank you to Anne Carter from the FHT for her enthusiasm and commitment to helping develop a conservation programme at Boltby.



Beaver Pool, North York Moors (site for Golden-ringed Dragonfly).

© Keith Gittens



Small Red-eyed Damselflies at Catterick

© Keith Gittens



Pallet Hill Pond, Catterick. Weedy conditions perfect for Small Red-eyed Damselfly

© Keith Gittens

Yorkshire, South-west VC63 ~ by Alistair McLean

For obvious reasons, 2020 has been a difficult year for South-West Yorkshire's recorders, but the various lockdowns appear to have presented many with an opportunity to catch up with data entry and to take advantage of the advances in online recording. This year has seen over 1300 records being reported, covering all 22 commonly recorded species, some of which date back many years. I am extremely grateful to those who took the time to review their records and pass on their data.

Another upshot of the lockdown has been the publication of the long awaited Dragonflies of the Sheffield Area (McLean, Richards & Whiteley, 2020), published by Sorby Natural History Society and Museums Sheffield and [available through Amazon](#). The authors began writing the book in the mid-1990s, but other projects have prevented its completion until now. At least the pandemic has had some positive benefits!

Yorkshire, Mid-west VC64 ~ by Simon Joseph

The high point of 2020 was the culmination of the campaign to prevent the building of 516 houses at Askham Bog, supported by Sir David Attenborough. The planning application was declined following the campaign in 2019 and the Secretary of State upheld this decision in May this year.

As of December 2020, 463 records for 22 species have been received for the year, a similar number to 2019.

The most frequently recorded species were **Common Darters**, **Large Red Damselflies**, **Migrant and Brown Hawkers** and **Banded Demoiselles**.

The least frequent were **Golden-ringed Dragonflies**, **Red-veined Darters** (three records in 2020 compare to none in 2019) and **Common Hawkers**. No Southern Migrant Hawkers were recorded in 2020 (three were seen in 2019).

Still no **Willow Emerald Damselflies** despite their gradual expansion close to the VC.

Wildlife and birdwatching groups have again been a rich source of records, with their detailed knowledge of their local sites. Thanks to staff, bird watching groups and volunteers at Denso Marston, Rodley, Staveley and St Aidans nature reserves. Planned presentations and walks at these sites were cancelled because of the pandemic, and I am hoping to hold these in the summer of 2021.

Staveley Nature Reserve is an interesting site as it is a stronghold for **Small Red-eyed Damselflies**, **Black-tailed Skimmers** and **Hairy Dragonflies**, which are not found in many other areas of the VC.

Members of the [Yorkshire Dragonfly facebook group](#) have been very helpful in recording at the eastern end of the VC, which is too far away for me to survey.

The plan for the coming year is to revive presentations and walks at key sites, strengthen links with birdwatching groups and revive plans to work with the Ministry of Justice to record at prisons.



Female Common Hawker, Grindleton Fell

© Simon Joseph

County Durham VC66 ~ by Michael Coates

The BDS work in conjunction with the Durham Wildlife Trust (DWT) to actively survey the region between the River Tees and the Tyne. 80% of the recorded sightings came from this organised approach to surveying, and as a result over 1100 records were submitted. This was only 300 down on 2019, despite the pandemic restricting the movement of spotters. Over the years, 24 species have been spotted, but of those, 21 appear to be established. In 2020, despite the lockdown 20 species were spotted, which is a great achievement.

The season started earlier than in 2019, with the first **Large Red Damselfly** being seen at Cowpen Bewley Nature Reserve in the south of the region on 17 April, followed a week later at a variety of other sites, including Malton Ponds, a DWT reserve that has traditionally been the place to go for the earliest sightings in the north east. The first Dragonfly, a **Broad Bodied Chaser**, was recorded on 5th May, again, earlier than normal.

With the temporary access restrictions at National Trust Gibside, spotters took their daily exercise on the adjacent Derwent Trail and banks of the river Derwent that runs through the NT grounds. As a result, a wide variety of species, including plenty of **Banded Demoiselle**, were spotted. Once Gibside opened up again, nine species were seen, however, the early species would probably have been missed.

The DWT headquarters are at Rainton Meadows, between Sunderland and Durham, and once again it proved to be a dragonfly hotspot, with 16 of the 20 species seen here, often in very large quantities. The only **Small Red Eyed Damselfly** sighting was at Rainton, and we hope that this will be the first of many, as they are rarely seen in VC66. Rainton, with its newt scrapes, ponds, wetland and lakes, all alongside rich nectar bearing flowers, is also home to **Black Tailed Skimmers**, **Broad Bodied Chasers**, **Ruddy Darter**, and as the season progresses the paths are covered in **Common Darters**.

Making a welcome return, two **Lesser Emperor** sightings occurred in the south of the region, and the **Golden Ringed Dragonfly**, was spotted in June up on the moors near Waskerley Reservoir. The pond and boggy ground at the rather poorly maintained Greencroft NR (please take a litter bag if you go) once again proved ideal for **Black Darters**, an otherwise uncommon species in this region.

Uncharacteristically for the north east, the year was dry, with about 75-85% of national average rainfall. This impacted the many volunteer dug ponds and scrapes that are the breeding ground of a wide range of species. Luckily, late autumn rains refilled most of these ponds and sightings continued until 13th November, with a newly emerged **Common Darter** seen on November 12th.

The largest number of species were spotted at Rainton Meadows, Coatham Woods, Greencroft NR, Malton Ponds, Twizell Woods, and Bowes Valley NR. If you visit VC66, you can see a full list of 58 great dragonfly sites here <https://tinyurl.com/rdr75zd>

Black Darter at Greencroft NR

© Carol Spencer



Small Red-eyed Damselfly at Rainton Meadows

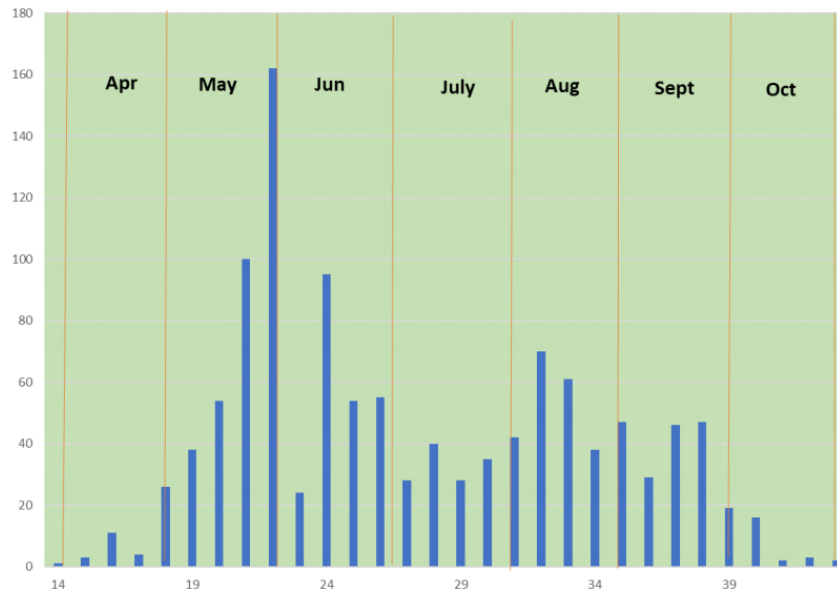
© Joe Finlay



Westmorland with Furness VC69 and Cumberland VC70 ~ by David Clarke

The 2020 dragonfly season was complex from the viewpoints of weather patterns and recorder activities, the latter which must have been affected by the coronavirus restrictions. The prolonged spring drought, which lasted into June, brought species emergence forward but did little for the species' habitats with shallow water, or those mainly dependent on rainfall. Early emergence dates for our area included 7 April for **Large Red Damselfly**, 9 May for **Downy Emerald**, 26 May for **Common Darter** and 9 June for **Keeled Skimmer**. The change to cooler, very unsettled and often sunless conditions from mid-June until early August was unsuitable for dragonfly activity generally, though a short hot spell in early August brought some revival before the unsettled conditions returned.

The chart shows numbers of records by week and reflects the impact of weather patterns on recording. Week 22 (late May/early June) was the most productive of the year. The season thereafter was patchy and ended rather abruptly at the end of September. The covid situation seems to have resulted in fewer sites than usual being visited, though perhaps those that were received visits more regularly. One observer submitted some 247 records for Solway sites to iRecord, which gives a certain 'bias' to the data. In all, some 1200 records were received by the end of December 2020, of which 51% were via iRecord.



Cumbria records per week in 2020 (max=162)

Downy Emerald was again confirmed, in good numbers, at the southern end of Derwentwater (NY21) – still its most northerly breeding site in the county. The individual in the photograph on the next page was a casual visitor to Foulshaw Moss (SD48) during the warm spring. It is the 19th Odonata species to be recorded at this site. **Downy Emerald** emergence was also confirmed at Blea Tarn, Langdale (NY20) - altitude 200m. From 2021, we will monitor Harrop Tarn, Thirlmere (NY31) as a potential site for this species in a warming climate, 100m higher than Blea Tarn.



Distribution of Broad-bodied Chaser records from 2020

Contains Ordnance Survey data: Crown copyright & database rights 2021

As an early-season species, **Broad-bodied Chaser** benefited from the fine spring. As the map on the previous page shows, there was a wide spread of records, except in the west of the county. These included several instances of emergence and oviposition, so might amount to a significant consolidation of the species' range in the area. The more slowly advancing **Black-tailed Skimmer** did not appear to show a similar response to the weather and was only seen at a few lowland sites near the head of Morecambe Bay and at North Walney and Hodbarrow (SD17).

Migrant Hawkers were ovipositing at coastal sites in the Morecambe Bay area and in the west in the Workington/Maryport area in September. Although the species has been recorded annually for many years, local emergence is still unproved.

The weather downturn in June seemed to have a particularly bad effect on **Emperors** and **Golden-ringed Dragonfly**, as it coincided with their main flight periods. Records for both showed an over 80% decrease compared to 2019.

Ruddy Darter is now very rare and was not seen at its Solway site, due to poor weather.

Unusual sightings included a **Banded Demoiselle** on the remote upper reaches of the River Irthing (NY67) in June, echoing similar records in 2018. The **Beautiful Demoiselle** shown below was photographed in a garden near Aspatria (NY13), on 1 August, which was not in the vicinity of a known population. The species was seen again in Swindale (NY51), in June, where it was previously recorded in 2018 — perhaps a sign of ongoing range expansion into this valley. A **Keeled Skimmer** was recorded for the first time in the adjacent Haweswater valley, at the foot of Riggindale (NY41), on 10 July. A modest-sized garden pond near Carlisle (NY45) produced at least 54 emerging **Southern Hawkers**, commencing 16 June (NY45). A 'fly-through' **Migrant Hawker** was seen in an Eden valley garden at Kirkoswald (NY54) in mid August. **Brown Hawker** was unexpectedly noted at two inland sites in the Lake District: Wharton and High Arnside Tarns (NY30 and SD39), both on 14 September. Perhaps the most unusual record of the year was a pair of **Large Red Damselfly** mating on 11 October, near Barrow (SD27). Odonata specialist Adrian Parr advises this is one of the latest ever for this species in the UK. Such anomalies are not totally unknown in what is normally a well synchronised spring emergence: our previous latest record was 26 September 2008.



Male Banded Demoiselle © Jo Lister

Monitoring of **White-faced Darter** was not carried out in 2020, though a transfer of egg/larva-rich Sphagnum moss to the Drumburgh Moss Reserve on the Solway, as part of the on going introduction project, was done on 21 July. In common with other species, adults emerged early, the first was seen at the Carlisle donor site (NY46) on 6 May. The species was still being recorded at Foulshaw Moss as late as 24 August. Once again, a male was recorded at Meathop Moss, 1.5 km distant from the Foulshaw colony, on 12 May - quite early in the flight season. The single exuvia shown below was found at Claife Heights (SD39) after a 2-year interval of no finds. An account of that history of that population appears in the current volume of BDS Journal (Vol 37:1).

Finally, following the appeal at the 2020 BDS Members Day, a wing sample from the March 2019 **Vagrant Emperor** specimen from SW Cumbria has been provided to Johanna Hedlund at Exeter University for isotopic analysis. Hopefully this may throw light on the area in which the dragonfly developed as a larva.



White-faced Darter exuvia

© Mo Richards

Isle of Man VC71 ~ by Pete Hadfield

2020 had a very late start to our Dragonfly season, the first record being a **Large Red Damselfly** on 3 May at Ballannette.

Our earliest ever record of **Four-spotted Chaser** then followed on the 21 May with one spotted at the POA Gravel pits and one seen at Stoney Mountain.

Surveys at the Gravel pits were disappointing this year but **Lesser Emperor** was recorded again on the 21 July and 11 August. Unfortunately, **Black-tailed Skimmer** wasn't found so we can't add that to the Manx resident list yet.

Through July the weather was unsettled and windy but on 1 August at Stoney Mountain there was a good emergence of **Emerald Damselflies**; 34 exuviae with 14 teneral nearby were found. An individual was witnessed to be emerging, taking longer than an hour to fly. Unfortunately, 6 had died whilst emerging and another 4 were dead in the water; the gusting wind was a possible culprit. A count of 73 **Emerald Damselflies** on the 8 August at Stoney Mountain showed the emergence troubles had not affected the population as that is a very high count for the site.

Another new location was found for **Emperor Dragonfly** and **Emerald Damselfly**. On the 12 July at Conrhenny plantation two **Emperors** were seen, then on the 15 August six **Emerald Damselflies** were also found there.

On the 9 August a **Migrant Hawker** exuvia was found at the Gravel pits followed by an adult **Migrant Hawker** sighting on the Calf of Man on the 10th. This was the start of what felt like a **Migrant Hawker** influx for the IOM. Reports were then quite consistent up until 29 September, and resulted in the confirmation of two new breeding areas, with teneral being found at Ballachurry and Ballannette.

The [Manx Dragonflies and Damselflies](#) facebook group membership grew very well in 2020 and Dragonfly interest appears to be increasing within the Government Environment Department and the Manx Wildlife Trust charity. The latter is planning a new Dragonfly pond at their Ballachurry reserve.