

2023 England
Country Dragonfly
Record Reports



British
Dragonfly
Society



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Cornwall with Scilly VC1-2

by Steve Jones

The dragonfly season in Cornwall kicked off with Dave Cooper's sighting of an adult **Large Red Damselfly** on 27 March along the Carnon Valley at Bissoe, the first of 1680 Odonata records submitted for VC1-2 in 2023 (at the time of writing) .

It appears the **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** may have finally established itself in Cornwall with good numbers being reported at Rosewarne Mill along the Red River Valley LNR near Camborne through mid-July. No exuviae have been found yet but I did find a very fresh teneral at the pool on 18 July, strongly suggesting that successful breeding has taken place. Elsewhere, Libbie Bosisto photographed a male at Mount Edgecumbe on the Cornwall/Devon border on 6 August.

There was just a single record for the **White-legged Damselfly** in Cornwall during 2023, a male photographed at Canworthy Water on the 16 June by Tom Parsons. In fact, there have only been 10 records from the county in the last eight years which, worryingly, suggests a decline. However, breeding has always been restricted to the River Tamar and its immediate tributaries, an area which has perhaps become less well recorded on the Cornish side. In the past, exploring the riverbanks at road crossings like Boyton Bridge, Polson Bridge, North Tamerton & Gunnislake has been fruitful.

A substantial colony of **Small Red Damselflies** was discovered at a private site in West Penwith on 20 July by Laura Snell; over 100 adults were noted on 11 August when I carried out a follow up visit in far from ideal conditions. After a gap of 25 years it was good to find the breeding colony at Horseshoe Pool, Borlasevath, still thriving; Cerin Poland and I recording 30+ adults on 20 July including tenerals. On 27 June Cerin also found **Small Red Damselflies** at Cornwall WT's brand new Reserve/land purchase at Creny Farm, which will form part of the Trust's ambitious rewilding project at Helman Tor.

The **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** continues to do extremely well at Great Wheal Seton near Camborne, thanks to the ongoing management work carried out by the Red River Rescuers; a count of 50+ was recorded during a field trip I led there on 2 July, including a few individuals with mite infestations on the abdomen. On 16 & 27 May, Laura Fox also found the species just half a mile upstream from Great Wheal Seton, at a completely atypical site along the Brea/Tuckingmill Valley. If these insects had dispersed from Great Wheal Seton then at some point their movement would have taken them across a mostly urban landscape, including a dual carriageway on a 30-metre-high embankment that cuts across the valley. There have been no recorded sightings upstream of this point since habitat destruction in the late 1980s. It was good to see a record from the long-standing

coastal site, in an old tin streaming area at Chapel Porth, where John Curd photographed one of a small group of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies** on 9 July. Dave Cooper submitted several records from his Falmouth colony where the species seems to have survived even though the site was bulldozed over the winter of 2022/2023. Given the species preference for relatively bare open habitats this may have been a positive for the short-term future of the colony. In mid-Cornwall Cerin Poland discovered a new site for the **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies** at the excellent Chyverton Cornwall WT Reserve on 20 June where he also noted a male and female on 6 July.

Management work by Natural England across Goss Moor NNR has opened up large swathes of previously shaded ditches which has benefitted the **Beautiful Demoiselle** enormously with circa 250 being present along one 400 metre stretch of water when I visited on 28 May. Dave Cooper recorded two males and a female at Tehidy Woods on 6 October, quite a late date for the species.

Another species that seems to be finally establishing in East Cornwall is the **Scarce Chaser**; 2023 sightings included: immature males at St. Teath on the 28 May and 12 June (by Alex Panter), an immature male at Greenscoombe Wood (Lockett) on 3 (by John Chapple) and 4 June (by David Allan), a mature male along the Bude Canal on 21 June (by Hilda Bowman-Harris), and three mature males at Lethytep (Lanreath) on 4 June (by Pamela Robertson). Interestingly, one of those three males was actually in tandem with a female **Four-spotted Chaser**. Both Lethytep and the Bude Canal seem to be ideal habitats for the **Scarce Chaser** so there's a good reason to be optimistic for more sightings in 2024.

Notably, both Christine Moore and Tony Blunden independently recorded mixed pairings of **Southern Migrant Hawker** and **Migrant Hawker**. On 23 August Christine photographed a male **Southern Migrant Hawker** in tandem with a female **Migrant Hawker** at Marazion Marsh, while on 9 September Tony photographed a male **Migrant Hawker** in tandem/copulating with a blue form female **Southern Migrant Hawker** at Windmill Farm! Dougy Wright, the warden at Windmill Farm, photographed a "normal" copulating pair of **Southern Migrant Hawkers** at the site on 6 September. All in all, there were at least 16 records of **Southern Migrant Hawkers** from Cornwall during the year - the first was a female photographed by Shaun Poland in a garden at Zelah on 22 June, interestingly, two months in advance of the main body of Cornish records.

Perhaps the biggest news of the Cornish Odonata year involved the 40 or so sightings of the **Vagrant Emperor** that began with a spate of records from 10-17 April across the Isles of Scilly. On the mainland, sightings began on 14 April - Rhonda Newsham found and photographed a dead male in a garden pond at Southdown, at the mouth of the River Tamar. A cluster of records at Windmill Farm Cornwall WT Reserve in May-June included ovipositing pairs (by Tony Blunden); this ultimately led to first evidence of successful breeding by the species in Britain. Dougy Wright spotted a teneral adult at the reserve on 18 September which then prompted a search of the Plantlife Pond for the all-important exuviae by myself and Dougy on 22 September. We were delighted that the search yielded

a single male Vagrant Emperor exuvia, a first for Britain, (see the April 2024 edition of the BDS Journal for more details). The last reported sighting of the year came on 12 October when Philip Sharp photographed a female at the Eden Project. The question is: was it a fresh arrival from Southern Europe or North Africa, or was its journey a little more modest, 33 miles as the "Cornish" **Vagrant Emperor** flies?!

Another species surely vying for the top spot in 2023 for VC1 must be the **Green Darner**. The species was last seen in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly back in September/October 1998, which at the time was the first occurrence of this North American species in Europe. Wind forward to October 2023 and **Green Darners** made that incredible journey across the Atlantic once again with a number of reported sightings confirmed by photographs from the Isles of Scilly in the wake of Storm Babet. A full account of these extraordinary events can be found in Adrian Parr's Spring 2024 Dragonfly News article.

The **Lesser Emperor** was once again reported from Windmill Farm throughout the summer by a number of observers, and ovipositing pairs were photographed by Christine Moore on 9 September. Elsewhere there were records from Drift Reservoir, Porthgwarra and Walmsley Sanctuary; the last record of the year was a male at Shipman Head Down, Bryher observed by Jonathan Farooqi and others on 8 October.

Three remarkably similar photographic records of what were presumably elderly female **Broad-bodied Chasers** were submitted, firstly on 8 June from Marazion Marsh (by Christine Moore), secondly on 24 June from Treraven Farm, Wadebridge (by Lucy Birchall), and lastly on 9 July from Lostwithiel (by Graham Handsley). In all three instances the insects had relatively brown abdomens; segments 5-7 were blue in two examples while the individual at Marazion Marsh also had a partially blue segment 4. All three examples retained their yellow spots down each side of abdominal segments 4-7. Although **Broad-bodied Chaser** females are well known for these age-related colour changes, it is unusual to have three photographed examples in such a short space of time. Is it possible that the climate played a part? June-early July 2023 was notable for its hot and dry weather.

One species that was drastically under-recorded in Cornwall during 2023 was the **Black Darter** with just a single sighting from Davidstow on 16 July submitted by Derek Julian. Historically confined to VC2 as a Cornish breeding species, it is widely spread across Bodmin Moor and reaches as far west as the mid-Cornwall Moors. Clearly it would benefit from greater recorder focus during 2024.

After many years of teneral and ovipositing pairs being noted at Windmill Farm, successful breeding by **Red-veined Darters** was finally confirmed at the site on 22 September when Dougy Wright and I found six exuviae around the margins of the Plantlife Pond. Almost all 2023 records came from the Lizard peninsula; exceptions included records from: Porthgwarra (by Mark Wallace), Drift Reservoir and Godolphin Woods in West Cornwall (by Christine Moore), and Dewey Meads, Colliford Reservoir (by Steve Jones). A teneral male was found as late as 14 October by Peter Fenn along the track at Traboe Cross on Goonhilly Downs, suggesting that the species may have persisted into November.

Four species definitely remained on the wing into November: **Green Darner**, **Southern Hawker**, **Migrant Hawker** and **Common Darter**. The final record of the year was two male and two female **Common Darters**, including a copulating pair at Marazion Marsh on 24 November, photographed by Christine Moore.

Enormous thanks to everyone who submitted records during the past year. 2024 promises to be an exciting year with so many species about to make their mark in Cornwall! Do get in touch if you would like to lend a hand in recording on the road less travelled - there are many under recorded areas in Cornwall that need up-to-date surveys for even the most common of species, which sadly may become tomorrow's rarities.



Image credits: Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly with mite infestation on the underside of the abdomen at Great Wheal Seton, Red River Valley LNR. By Steve Jones, Scarce Chaser male & Four-spotted Chaser mixed pairing at Lethytp. By Pamela Robertson, Vagrant Emperor at Windmill Farm. By Dougy Wright, Female Broad-bodied Chaser at Marazion Marsh. By Christine Moore.

Devon VC3-4

by Dave Smallshire

May and June saw above average temperatures and below average rainfall, which proved to be a good combination for spring-emerging Dragonflies, so let's look at some of these first. . .

Scarce Chasers had another excellent year, with hot, sunny conditions throughout most of the flight period. Exceptional numbers were counted on 13 June at Exminster Marshes, with an unprecedented 92, plus an additional 52 along the Exeter Canal between Countess Wear and Topsham Lock. The species was recorded again at Braunton Marsh, Darts Farm, the Grand Western Canal and Stover (maximum of eight, with one egg-laying, on 23 June). Small numbers were also seen at the following sites as in previous years, suggesting that breeding may be established: Clennon Valley Lakes, Little Bradley Ponds, Meeth Quarry Devon WT Reserve and Riverside Country Park. It was also seen for the first time at 10 new sites: Bowling Green Marsh (up to six males), Bystock Devon WT Reserve, Dawlish Warren, Decoy Lake (three), Escot Park, Matford Marsh, Powderham Marshes (six) and Slapton Ley, and in North Devon at Darracott Reservoir (near Great Torrington) and Jennets Reservoir (near Bideford).

Likewise, **Vagrant Emperor** had an exceptional year, with a good series of spring sightings at Dawlish Warren: one on 10 and 13 April and at least three different individuals during 10-20 May. Singles were recorded at Wembury on 12 April and 12 May, Slapton Ley on 24-25 April and Mansands on 21 May, while at Southdown Valley, Soar, there were no less than five, including a tandem pair egg-laying on 24 May, with a single male to 4 June. Coincidentally, at least four were on Lundy on 24 May with at least two males remaining on 25-26 May. In autumn, singles were seen at the University of Plymouth on 12 October, as well as Sticklepath, Barnstaple, on 17 October (dead), and Sidmouth Croquet Club on 19 November.

A third species, **Lesser Emperor**, also had an exceptional year, especially at Southdown Valley, Soar, where a sighting of one on 14 June was followed by six, including a tandem pair, on 23 August and two on 1 September; this is the second year in a row this site has produced evidence of breeding. In addition, there were singles at Exeter Canal on 13 June, Stover during 25 June-19 July and Dawlish Warren on 6 September; two males were at Clennon Valley Lakes on 8-9 September and at Home Farm, Fremington, on 12 September, and the final record was at East Prowle on 18 September.

There also a good series of **Red-veined Darter** sightings at Southdown Valley, Soar, and again evidence of breeding was recorded: five males on 24-25 May (clashing with Vagrant Emperors!); two males on 14 and 21 June; eight, including two pairs egg-laying, on 24 June; and one or two males between 7 July and 1

September, with another pair egg-laying on 23 August. Other records came from Exminster Marshes (16 May), Meeth (25 May), Clennon Valley Lakes (up to three on 14-15 June), Dawlish Warren (29 July) and Big Pond, Blackaton Cross (14 September).

Red-eyed Damselfly seemed to have a better than average year with sightings at: Darts Farm (count of 20), Decoy Lake and Magazine Pond (total of 55, including eight egg-laying), all sections of Exeter Canal (with 320 on 13 June), Grand Western Canal (maximum 89 on 4 June), Little Bradley Ponds (a record 63 on 3 June, with egg-laying at both ponds), Stover (over 200 in early June) and Ventiford Pools (44 on 22 June). New sites included: Bystock (a few on 28 May), Dawlish Warren (up to three, including egg-laying on two dates) and at nearby Hazelwood Holiday Park (including a few egg-laying).

Norfolk Hawkers were again seen at Slapton Ley, with up to five between 28 May and 20 July, mostly around the dipping platform; singles were seen at Torcross on 30 May and in Ireland Bay on 22 June.

Hairy Dragonfly was recorded at the usual sites: Exminster/Powderham Marshes, Little Bradley Ponds, Slapton Ley, Stover CP (where it was seen egg-laying at three sites and exuviae were found), Braunton Burrows, Dawlish Warren (where it was recorded more often than usual), Darts Farm, Bowling Green Marsh and Exeter Canal, Grand Western Canal (where an exuvia was found) and Ventiford Pools (seen egg-laying).

Downy Emerald was recorded from the usual sites of Bystock, Little Bradley Ponds and Stover, plus three at Ventiford Pools (where it was also seen in 2021).

In contrast to the good late spring weather, July was cooler and wetter than average and late summer sightings were more typical. As usual, there were good numbers of **Small Red-eyed Damselflies** at Stover (>100) and Ventiford Pools (56), with smaller numbers reported from: Clennon Valley Lakes, Dawlish Warren, Drake's Place (Plymouth), Exeter Canal, Gammaton Reservoirs (near Bideford), Grand Western Canal and Southdown Valley (Soar). New locations comprised Bowling Green Marsh/Topsham and the Lower Otter Restoration Project site.

Following last year's discovery of **Small Red Damselflies** at Coombeshead Rewilding, an amazing count of about 580 was made on 2 July by Andy McGeeney and others. Otherwise the species was noted as usual at: Bystock Devon WT Reserve, Smallerhanger (near Cadover Bridge) and Aylesbeare RSPB Reserve. In North Devon, it was seen again at Godborough (near Bideford), three adults were confirmed at a garden pond(!) near Brandis Corner, and there was a report from the Hartland peninsula at East Titchberry.

Large numbers of **Emerald Damselfly** were also found at Coombeshead Rewilding on 2 July, estimated at over 800, including 500 at just one pond – not bad for a species that is declining nationally.

A good series of **White-legged Damselfly** records came from ten sites in North Devon, while others were reported along the River Otter.

Four species were reported from only a few locations in late summer, mainly from Dartmoor.

Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly records came from south-west Dartmoor on 25 July: at Blackaton Cross (eight, including one egg-laying) and nearby Brisworthy Settlement Lagoon, Cadover Bridge (but only two at this long-established site). Common Hawker records comprised four, including a pair copulating, at Witheridge Moor on the early date of 14 June and one on Dartmoor at Runnage on 23 June.

There were only two records of Black Darters, both from Dartmoor, at Big Pond, Blackaton Cross (280m ASL) and Swincombe (320m).

The only record of Ruddy Darter was, typically, a presumed migrant male at Southdown Valley, Soar, on 14 September.

Devon Group meetings were limited to one at Coombeshead Rewilding, where the highlights were the large numbers of Small Red Damselflies and Emerald Damselflies noted above.

2023 was the start of a three-year Lottery-funded project as part of '[Restoring Stover Park](#)', whereby up to a dozen 16-25-year-olds will be taught to identify and monitor dragonflies before and after part of the lake is dredged (dredging has just started as I write this); a team of five local BDS members took part in the monthly visits during May-September. The South West Lakes Trust is looking for a volunteer to help monitor dragonflies within SWW's Countess Wear sewage works. Please let Dave Smallshire know if you would like to help out there, or at Stover.

To make your recording contribute most to monitoring dragonflies, please consider:

- adopting a site and making complete lists during visits through the season; [instructions](#).
- recording numbers and breeding activity at sites for locally- and nationally-important species; [instructions](#).
- checking Dartmoor and Exmoor blanket bog, valley mire and ponds, and suitable heathy lowland ponds for evidence of Common Hawker and Black Darter.

Finally, an updated version of 'Dragonflies in Devon' is now available to download from the BDS website [here](#).



Image credits: Vagrant Emperor (*Anax ephippiger*). By Luke Harman and Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura pumilio*). By Dave Smallshire.

Wiltshire VC7-8

by Rosie Ray

The season began early in the south of the county with **Large Red Damselflies** reported emerging from a garden pond on 17 April. There were a dozen or so more sightings of this species from various sites a week later.

The first **Hairy Dragonfly** was spotted by Steve Birt at Lower Moor Farm Reserve in the north of the county, on 3 May.

Other early emergers were **Banded Demoiselle**, first recorded at Bentley Wood, spotted by Anthony Thorpe on the 1 May, as well as the **Common Blue Damselfly** and **Red-eyed Damselfly** which were both first recorded by Peter Sketch on 7 May, at Lower Moor Reserve.

Blue-tailed Damselflies also started their emergence earlier than usual; Ellis Warbler recorded the first ones on 7 May – again at Lower Moor Reserve.

For the rest of May, the other species to emerge included: **Downy Emerald**, **Four-spotted Chaser**, **Azure Damselfly**, and **Scarce Chaser**. All were recorded at known sites for these species.

A **Hairy Dragonfly** record (14 May) from a new site was sent in by Steve Davies - situated a few miles away from previous known locations at Castle Eaton, so this will be worth more investigation in 2024. A record for another new site for the species was sent in by Robin Griffiths from Somerford Common (18 May). This site is managed by the Forestry Commission and is comprised of a mixed habitat; this will definitely be worth more investigation next year, though much of the site has no public access. Again, this site is some way from previous known locations

The site list for Lower Moor Reserve continues to grow as yet another new species was recorded there in 2023: **Scarce Chaser** – Heather England spotted a lone male on 28 May. After this initial sighting, more **Scarce Chaser** were seen at Sandpool Reserve (an adjacent site), including two females. They were also recorded at Widbrook Woods by Luke Hepples on 30 May. It seems that this species has significantly spread this year from its usual locations in the south of the county.

Another surprise record, from Salisbury, was of a **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** on 25 May, sent in by Bennett; while this is outside its usual flight period a photo was attached so there is no doubt. Another was recorded, in the same area, at Laverstock Water Meadows by Jacki Griffiths on 4 June. Phillip Smith reported another sighting from Hazeldans on 19 July as did Steve Davies from Bewley Common on 28 July. Until recently, this species was rarely found in Wiltshire and then only in the New Forest.

A **Banded Demoiselle** was recorded on 27 August by Simon Ford in Salisbury.

Another notable record was sent in by Teresa Farr, who spotted a **Beautiful Demoiselle** on 31 May on the River Kennet, (a chalk stream), which flows through the centre of Marlborough.

Avebury Manor produced its first **Broad-bodied Chaser** record on 17 June, noted by Steve Violette; this is another location that will need investigating in 2024.

Good numbers of **Brown Hawkers** were recorded across Wiltshire, especially at Cotswold Water Park.

Gareth Harris noted a **Blue-tailed Damselfly** on the River Nadder, Salisbury, on 19 June; this is outside this species' known range. Other records of species outside their core range included: a **Scarce Chaser** at Langford Lakes Reserve (in the far south of the county), an **Emperor** at Corsham, a **Beautiful Demoiselle** at Gauzebrook Noton, and a **Banded Demoiselle** in Salisbury.

There is now a healthy population of **Small Red-eyed Damselflies** at Lower Moor Reserve; further investigation will be needed in 2024 to track their distribution.

As the season progressed, it was clear that a number of species were emerging earlier than usual. **Common Darter**, **Southern Hawker**, **Ruddy Darter** and **Lesser Emperor** all made an appearance in early June - interestingly, all at Lower Moor Reserve.

White-legged Damselflies appear to be spreading from their stronghold site at Caen Hill, Devizes. This year, they were noted at Mortimore's Wood, Chippenham by Ellis Warbler on 13 July, and by Teresa Farr on the Wootton Bassett Canal on 26 June. The latter location is approximately 40 miles from Caen Hill, suggesting they are likely to be breeding somewhere between the two sites - more survey work is needed.

The first **Lesser Emperor** of the year was spotted at Lower Moor Reserve by Ellis Warbler on 10 June. Additional sightings followed a few weeks later, in early July, reported by Bob Philpot. At least six individuals were seen and Heather England photographed a pair in tandem, and ovipositing (the pair were constantly harassed by other dragonflies).

In addition, for the first time the species was recorded at Blakehill Farm, on 11 August by Steve Birt.

I asked recorders to keep a look out for **Willow Emerald Damselflies** in 2023 - and you didn't disappoint! The first was spotted by Ellis Warbler on 12 August at Lower Moor Reserve. This was followed by sightings at: Widbrook Woods, Westbury; Ravensroost Reserve, Malmesbury; Biss Meadows Country Park, Trowbridge; and Shrewton, near Devizes. Thanks to Ellis Warbler, Luke Hepples, Heather England, Michael Smith, Steve Baines and Lyndsey Trewen, I now have a firm dataset of the **Willow Emerald Damselfly** locations in Wiltshire thus far. This will help identify other potential sites for the species to target with future field visits. Ellis also recorded ovipositing on 8 October at Lower Moor Reserve.

Common Darter was the last record received for 2023 - this was on 11 November.

This year I was asked to accompany teams of Water Guardians in the county and give them some basic Odonata ID training. It was all very informal and the sessions were well received; I have already received records from some of the attendees. The habitats varied from main rivers to streams and brooks. Sightings were poor at one or two sites which were adjacent to sewage outlet pipes. It was very noticeable that insect life upstream from these outlets was more prolific than downstream, where nothing at all was recorded.

Finally, I would like to say a huge 'Thank You' to everyone who has sent in records, and photographs, this year. Without you, we would not have such a wealth of information and distribution knowledge for this iconic taxon.

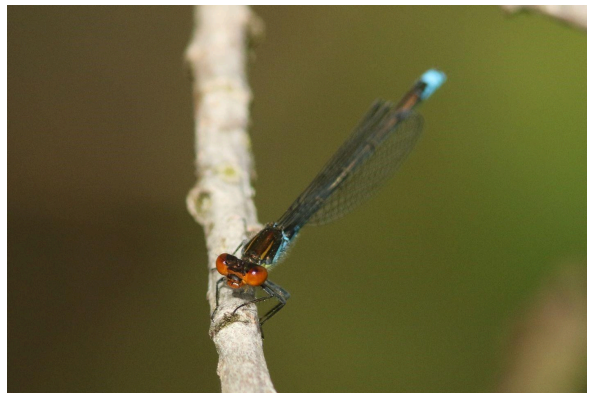


Image credits: Brown Hawker ovipositing and Female Scarce Chaser By Rosie Ray, Hairy Dragonfly By Heather England, Lesser Emperors in tandem and Male Scarce Chaser by Heather England, Male Small Red-eyed Damselfly by Ellis Warbler

Dorset VC9

by Andrew Brown

Greetings from Dorsetshire. The recording year started early in 2023 with a nice influx of **Vagrant Emperors** - some eight sightings in total, mostly centred around Portland Bill, which gets its fair share of migrants, and West Bexington, just a little way west, where keen-eyed birders are looking seaward. Two individuals were also seen at Longham Lakes which is another place which is also favoured by migrating birds. My thanks to Martin Cade at Portland Observatory for the photo.

The total number of records for Dorset in 2023 was a little lower than usual as I myself was quite busy this spring and summer and just wasn't able to do as much recording as I would have liked. However, the total number of species seen across Dorset was 34, if one includes the **Willow Emerald Damselflies** seen at Hengistbury Head; this is still technically part of South Hampshire VC, but as it has been part of the county of Dorset since the 1970's I think this is fair! Surprisingly, there were no records at all of **Southern Migrant Hawker**: I'm not sure if this will be reflected in neighbouring counties. This species been a regular visitor over the last few years and I imagine it will establish itself as a breeding species in the near future.

On the subject of successful migrants, the **Norfolk Hawker** (or should it be called the Green-eyed Hawker?) at Radipole Lake, Weymouth have really taken hold, and on a single survey this summer I saw 44 individuals as I walked across the site. Even if there were a few 'double counts' it was quite incredible that it was by far the most dominant dragonfly species on the reserve!

As noted in 2022, two heathland species seem to be in trouble in Dorset: there was only a hand full of **Common Hawker** sightings and just two **Black Darter** (see photo) records! This could well be related to recent droughts and the drying up of ponds on Dorset's heathlands, but wouldn't this also affect other heathland species? Numbers of other heathland species such as **Small Red Damselfly**, **Emerald Damselfly**, **Common Darter** and **Ruddy Darter** don't appear to be affected. These observations correlate with the results of the [State of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland 2021 report](#). Dave Smallshire remarked in an article for the Guardian in September 2021: "...more extreme weather conditions are not good news for all dragonflies, with hotter weather likely to push declining species such as the Common Hawker and the Black Darter farther north". Have similar observations been noted in other Southern Counties of the UK?

Lastly I want to shine the spotlight on Christchurch Harbour at the request of the group that is now regularly recording there, and have been very active over the last couple of seasons. The number of surveys and number of people surveying means we are getting probably close to 100% coverage of the site across all the

recording season. This year some 22 species were recorded, including the **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**, which has not been recorded at the site since 1983! **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** first recorded in 2021, was also sighted in 2022 and 2023. The most exciting news is that there appears to be breeding evidence of **Willow Emerald Damselflies** (see photo; thanks to Barrie Taylor); this species was first recorded, with much fanfare, in 2022 and the team has been closely monitoring the site at Hengistbury Head, a great effort by all involved

The wildlife of Christchurch Harbour is being actively recorded by CHOG, the Christchurch Harbour Ornithological Group, which has been running since the 1950's. Overall, some 33 species of dragonfly have been recorded in Christchurch Harbour over the years showing how local groups can make an amazing contribution to recording - so my thanks to CHOG and all its members.



Image credits: Vagrant Emperor. By Martin Cade and Willow Emerald Damselfly egg-laying scars. By Barrie Taylor

Isle of Wight VC10

by Jim Baldwin

2023 was a year to remember for Odonata on the Isle of Wight with a record 27 species reported.

The highlights of the recording season were: the first vice-county record of **Norfolk Hawker**, the fifth and sixth confirmed records of **Vagrant Emperor**, the first sightings of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** on the Isle of Wight since 2005, and the ninth record of **Lesser Emperor**, the first reported since 2014.

The first Odonata sighting of the year was a dragonfly seen in flight in Ventnor on 16 March. It was thought to have been a **Vagrant Emperor** although the identification could not be confirmed as the recorder was driving at the time! **Large Red Damselfly** was the first confirmed species of the year with a male recorded at Laundry Lane on 9 April, the earliest vice-county date for this species since 2019. A walk on the outskirts of Brighstone Forest on 13 April was rewarded with a sighting of a male **Vagrant Emperor**. Luckily, the recorder was accompanied by a photographer friend visiting from Canada who managed to get an excellent photo of it. Apparently, he was quite bemused at photographing a dragonfly as he spends his time photographing bears!

The other sighting of **Vagrant Emperor** was on 27 May when a male was photographed in a Ventnor garden, a great addition to the garden list! Also on this day, a single **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** was seen at the pond on the slipped cliffs at Compton Chine. A return visit the next day was rewarded with a sighting of two individuals; two were also seen at the site on 7 June.

It seemed to have been a good year for **Beautiful Demoiselle** with twice the number of records as normal; a majority were of immatures sighted away from known breeding waterways. This species is known to wander and it does appear to be extending its breeding range on the Isle of Wight.

A new species for the Isle of Wight list is always welcome and on 8 June a male **Norfolk Hawker** was seen and photographed at Hill Heath, Newchurch, owned by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. It will be interesting to see if there are further sightings in 2024 at this site or the adjacent Newchurch Moors.

There was a long overdue sighting of a **Lesser Emperor** - a male photographed at the Rocken End lower landslip pond on 20 July, likely a migrant.

Although no records of **Four-spotted Chaser** were received from Brading Marshes RSPB reserve where it is known to breed, there was an interesting sighting of up to two males at Bouldnor Forest ponds between 28 May and 4 June.

For the first time in four years, **Red-veined Darter** were back to their previous maxima at the Atherfield reservoir. Breeding has been reported at this site in the past, but no evidence was seen in 2023. Twelve adults were present on 26 May with a maximum count of 14 on 26 June. The final report of the year was two at the site on 15 September.

The final record of the year was a **Common Darter** which was seen and photographed at Cranmore on 6 November. This is the earliest final sighting of the year on the Isle of Wight since 2018.

Grateful thanks to all who submitted records in 2023, especially Andy Butler, Pete Campbell, Owen Cass, James Gloyn, Peter Hunt, Nikki Kownacki, Iain Outlaw, David Phillips, Sue Sibley, Alex Taylor and Mark Telfer whose records and photos were used in the preparation of this report.



Image credits: Four-spotted Chaser at Bouldnor. By P Hunt, Lesser Emperor at Rocken End. By Alex Taylor, Norfolk Hawker at Hill Heath Newchurch by J Gloyn and Vagrant Emperor at Brighstone. By B Hunt.

Hampshire VC11-12

by Phil Young

The 2023 flight season started in the usual way with sightings of **Large Red Damselfly** in the first week of April in South Hampshire. The prize for the earliest record of an adult on the wing went to Simon King who spotted a single **Large Red Damselfly** at Lower Test Marshes on 6 April. A sprinkling of sightings of the same species, in the area of the Lower Test and either side of Southampton Water, then followed over the next couple of weeks.

Banded Demoiselle and **Beautiful Demoiselle** were the next species to be recorded. On 19 April, along the River Loddon in North Hampshire, Paul Wyatt observed both species while carrying out riverfly monitoring. Paul continued the monitoring project throughout the summer and into the autumn, and produced the last records of both Demoiselle species, on the Loddon, on 24 September. **Azure Damselfly** made its first appearance on 25 April in the South of the county at Titchfield Haven and Nursling.

The first overseas visitor recorded in 2023, a **Vagrant Emperor**, was spotted by Nigel Jones on 29 April at Normandy Marsh on the coast near Lymington. Then on 15 September, Simon Stone recorded one at Normandy Marsh very near to where the individual was found in April. The species also turned out to be the last of the visitors recorded this year: on 21 October, while carrying out a reptile translocation from a building site in Warsash, Ian Williamson was able to photograph a **Vagrant Emperor** at rest.

Records for **Scarce Chaser** in 2023 seem to support the view that the species has been gaining a hold in a number of additional sites in Hampshire over the last few years.

Prior to 2005 the distribution of **Scarce Chaser** in South Hampshire was limited to an area consisting of the confluence of the Stour, Avon and Moors rivers extending out from Bournemouth Airport roughly North-west and South-East. Since 2005 the species has been recorded much further north along the Moors River and further upstream along the Avon and its tributaries, including at: Blashford Lakes, Latchmore Brook, Ashford Water and North-east of Fordingbridge. In addition, **Scarce Chaser** is now regularly recorded at a number of other locations in South Hampshire, such as the Mude River, Mopley Pond near Fawley and particularly along the Lower Test including Testwood Lakes and Nursling. South Hampshire's first and last record dates for **Scarce Chaser** in 2023 were 16 May and 20 July. The species' willingness to travel away from water was observed by Suzy Hill when she discovered a female clinging to a bird feeder in her suburban garden north of Bournemouth on 5 June.

In North Hampshire **Scarce Chaser** were last seen on the River Wey in 2008, near Froyle Mill, and in 2005, near Bentley Mill. On the River Blackwater there are records from near Tongham in 2012 and at Shepherd Meadows in 2012 and 2020. On 15 June an intrepid group of BDS members from the Hants, Surrey and Berkshire local group, led by Stephen Harley, gathered at Lakeside Park near Aldershot on the hunt for a population of **Scarce Chaser** discovered by Stephen in 2022. We were not disappointed; during a very pleasant morning walk north along about a kilometre of the east bank of the River Blackwater we caught glimpses of 8-10 patrolling males. Also spotted were: a **White-legged Damselfly**, a **Hairy Dragonfly** and a **Golden-ringed Dragonfly**. In the afternoon we explored the nearby Basingstoke Canal and spotted two further **Scarce Chaser** and a **Hairy Dragonfly**, among other Odonata.

On 21 June Simon Finnegan photographed a **Norfolk Hawker** - the second ever seen in Hampshire. Coincidentally, the location, Titchfield Haven NNR, was the same as the original record back in August 2007.

Another unlikely visitor to the Hampshire coastal fringe was reported by Bill Seager, whose brother had sent him a photograph of an unusual dragonfly that had expired on the patio in his garden in Cosham near Portsmouth. As he suspected, it was a **Common Clubtail** and, apparently, another was seen flying around the garden. I say unlikely because the location of this sighting was at least 35km west of the nearest currently known breeding site for this species along the River Arun in Sussex.

An uncommon, but welcome, visitor to the Hengistbury Head Visitor Centre Pond on 18 July was a **Lesser Emperor**, seen by Sam Levy. Then on 5 September, along the Ipley Stream near Rush Bush in the New Forest, Steve Hewitt observed a **Southern Migrant Hawker**.

Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly is one of those uncommon species that seems to pop up at sites across the south of Hampshire but is rarely recorded for more than one year in the same place; some notable sites as exceptions include Latchmore Brook, where it is consistently seen in low but reasonable numbers, and the North-east corner of Dibden Bottom, where it is also seen in low numbers. In 2022 it was discovered in reasonable numbers to the west of Roundeye Hill in the New Forest by Steve Hewitt and Simon Stone. Steve and Simon have both returned to the area this year and recorded it again in similar numbers. On 15 August this year Paul Morrison discovered **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** in low numbers at Riversmeet Meadow Pond in the Christchurch Harbour area and its presence was later confirmed by Barrie Taylor in early September. Paul confirmed its presence continued into the first week of September and also that it was present at Priory Marsh, a little to the west of the original site. It will be interesting to see whether the species is found again at either of these two locations in 2024.

It is pleasing to see that a good population of **Ruddy Darter** are still present at the pond in Gravel Pit Copse, Pamber Forest. As part of UKBMS butterfly monitoring, Graham Dennis recorded **Ruddy Darter** on a dozen visits to the site between early July and late September with a maximum count of 32 on 1st August.

Over the last ten years at only three sites have counts of Ruddy Darter exceeded 20 (the species threshold for abundance set by the BDS). These were at: Emer Bog near Romsey (in 2016, 2018, 2019 and 2021), Badminton Gravel Pit, Fawley (2019), and Heath Warren Pond near Bramshill (2019). In North Hampshire, Mary Thompson recorded a small population of **Ruddy Darter** in Hartland Country Park on five separate visits between the middle of July and the beginning of September with a maximum count of six adults on 17 August.

The 2023 season was capped off by the usual suspects; a **Southern Hawker** was seen on 11th tee of the New Forest Golf Club by Derek Jenkins on 17 November. Then, on 23 November, a **Common Darter** was recorded at Titchfield Haven on the south coast and a **Migrant Hawker** was seen near Finchampstead on the Berkshire border. Lastly, a **Common Darter** was seen on 27 November at Dibden Bay South-east of Marchwood.

Once again, many thanks to all the observers who submitted records of sightings during the year. A total of 3,989 Hampshire Odonata records, submitted by 209 different observers in 2023, were accepted after verification. While all records are appreciated, it is worth noting that eight of those observers contributed half of the records and just 30 observers were responsible for 80% of the records. Without their dedication our knowledge of the distribution of Odonata in Hampshire would be much the poorer.



Image credits: Male Scarce Chaser near Skidmore on the River Test by Paul Winter, Male Vagrant Emperor seen on a building site in Warsash by Ian Williamson, Norfolk Hawker with tattered wings at Titchfield Haven NNR by Simon Finnegan and Late season male Ruddy Darter at Hartland Country Park by Mary Thomp

Sussex VC13-14

by Simon Linington

In 2023 a total of 3,842 verified records were received (mainly via iRecord) from 258 observers of whom Alan Martin contributed about a third and six others provided a further third. Only three records related to larvae. In addition, a further 1,267 records from previous years were accepted. A concerted effort to collect records was made in 2023 with the aim of producing a 20-year update of information in Belden, PA et al., *The Dragonflies of Sussex* (2004). Preparations are well underway to publish a new book in 2024 and more details will be announced via the [Sussex Dragonfly Group's website](#).

The year 2023 will be remembered primarily for the increase in records of **Norfolk Hawker**, a species that looks set to become established in Sussex. The species was first recorded in 2019, then there was a small influx in 2021 during which a colony became established at Chichester Canal that has survived into 2023. Up to 12 were recorded at West Rise Marsh, Eastbourne in June 2023 and considerable field work by Alan Martin and others showed the species to be present in 23 1-km OS grid squares on Pevensey Levels with a maximum count of 20 in one. Additionally, there were some widely scattered records from: High and Over (near Seaford), the first of the year on 6 June; Winchelsea; Belle Tout (Beachy Head); well inland at Withyham; and Brede Levels, the last of the year on 26 July.

The first adult dragonfly seen in 2023 was a **Large Red Damselfly** at Watersfield on 9 April followed by widespread reports of this species from 16 April. The next species seen were **Hairy Dragonfly** at Winchelsea on 25 April and **Downy Emerald** at Gottenham Ponds (Robertsbridge) on 28 April. By the end of May, a total of 19 species had been reported on the wing including the first **Common Clubtail**. The latter two species were both recorded at their established sites near Fittleworth on 24 May while teneral were observed dispersing at Fairmile Bottom on 31 May. A **Red-veined Darter** was found at Combe Valley Country Park on 18 May and an early **Common Darter** was at RSPB Broadwater Warren on 27 May.

Brilliant Emerald is important nationally and was recorded in the county during June-July; sites include: Slaugham, Isfield, Barcombe, Wakehurst Place and RSPB Pulborough Brooks (a new site).

A very early **Willow Emerald Damselfly** sighting was reported at Sheffield Park on 14 June.

Southern Migrant Hawker fared better in 2023 than in the previous year and a count of 29 along ditches next to the River Ouse between Southease and Rodmell on 20 July was notable.

Lesser Emperor seems to have a very small but sustained population at West Langney Lake, Eastbourne where the first of several was seen on 27 June.

Emerald Damselfly is a species of concern nationally, including in Sussex; however, surveyors found it spread widely across the Pevensey Levels.

Two of Sussex's heathland specialists, **Small Red Damselfly** and **Keeled Skimmer**, were recorded from several locations across Ashdown Forest during June and July, but sadly there were no records submitted of **Black Darter** in Sussex during the year despite some searching. Hopefully, this is not the end of this species in Sussex.

Good numbers of the usual species were on the wing during late summer and early autumn. Less usual was another **Red-veined Darter** sighting near Newick on 27 August. The last records for the year were: a **Brown Hawker** on 7 October, both **Southern Hawker** and **Migrant Hawker** on 26 October, and finally **Common Darter** on 28 November (the latter near Arlington).

A total of 33 species was recorded in 2023. About 18% of the dataset was comprised of **Azure Damselfly** and **Common Darter** records and a further 36% was related to six other species. Included in the latter is **Willow Emerald Damselfly**, a species that has spread rapidly across Sussex from just one 1km OS grid square in 2016 to 326 over the subsequent seven years. Polly Mair's work on locating ovipositing scars across Sussex has contributed considerably to this data.



Image credit: Male Norfolk Hawker at West Rise Marsh on 15 June 2023 and Immature male Red-veined Darter near Newick on 27 August 2023. By Simon Linington.

Kent VC15-16

by Marc Heath

The first **Large Red Damselfly** was seen at Tenterden on 17 April while the first **Hairy Dragonfly** was recorded on 24 April at Reculver. From then on, both **Variable Damselfly** and **Azure Damselfly** were seen at Westbere and an early **Red-veined Darter** appeared at Sandwich Bay on 5 May.

The first **Banded Demoiselle** was seen at Stodmarsh on 10 May; on the same day the first **Broad-bodied Chaser** was seen at Turners Field Kent Wildlife Trust Reserve.

On 11 May two **Downy Emerald** were noted at Dungeness and another **Red-veined Darter**, probably a newly emerged migrant, was seen at Western Heights, Dover. 16 May produced the first **Scarce Chaser** records, taken at Westbere, and an early **Dainty Damselfly** was sighted at Sandwich Bay; the next day saw the year's first record of **Norfolk Hawker**, taken at Worth, Sandwich.

On 19 May a **Brilliant Emerald** was recorded at Tonbridge and on 24 May 12 **Dainty Damselfly** were at Oare Marshes. Two **Scarce Emerald Damselfly** were noted at Oare Marshes, the first **Common Darter** was on the wing at Dungeness, and 34 **Norfolk Hawker** were seen at Grove Ferry, all on 3 June.

A very early **Willow Emerald Damselfly** was seen at Westbere on 11 June whilst Bexley had their first record of **Scarce Chaser** on 14 June. A **Southern Migrant Hawker** was also seen in a wood on this date.

17 June turned up 12 **Southern Emerald Damselfly** at Cliffe and 70 **Norfolk Hawker** at Grove Ferry; at Sandwich Bay on 19 June, a **Lesser Emperor** and two **Red-veined Darter** were seen.

Another **Red-veined Darter** was noted at Swanscombe on 22 June and four **Scarce Emerald** were found at Dungeness the same day.

Up to 40 **Southern Migrant Hawker** were at Northwood Hill on 24 June and two **Keeled Skimmer** were at Hothfield Common on the same date.

In mid-June, around 20 **Lesser Emperor**, three **Downy Emerald** and a few **Norfolk Hawker** were seen in West Kent at New Hythe.

An impressive 60+ **Southern Migrant Hawker** were at Northwood Hill on 25 June and seven **Southern Migrant Hawker** were inland at Chilham on 28 June.

Up to five **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** were recorded in West Kent on 8 July.

On 18 July eight **Southern Migrant Hawker** were at Oare Marshes and one **Lesser Emperor** was at Dungeness.

One **Southern Emerald Damselfly** was at Sandwich Bay on 17 August whilst 459 **Willow Emerald Damselfly** were counted at Nethergong on 20 August.

Two **Southern Emerald Damselfly** were found at a new site at Seasalter on 21 August and one **Red-veined Darter** was seen at Sandwich Bay on 22 September.

The rest of the autumn produced good numbers of **Migrant Hawker** and at least four **Willow Emerald Damselfly** were still on the wing on 19 November at Nethergong.

It was good to see the **Southern Migrant Hawker** bounce back in good numbers this year after last year's poor showing, due to the hot weather, and **Willow Emerald Damselflies** continue to spread rapidly in Kent.

The **Lesser Emperor** seemed to have its best year in Kent and the **Dainty Damselfly** also did well with numbers remaining stable at a couple of sites. **Norfolk Hawker** seems to continue to expand its range in Kent and it is encouraging that a couple of **Southern Emerald Damselfly** were found at a new site - these could have been migrant or come from a native breeding population. I'm sure 2024 will deliver a few noteworthy species to what has to be one of the best places to see Odonata in the UK.

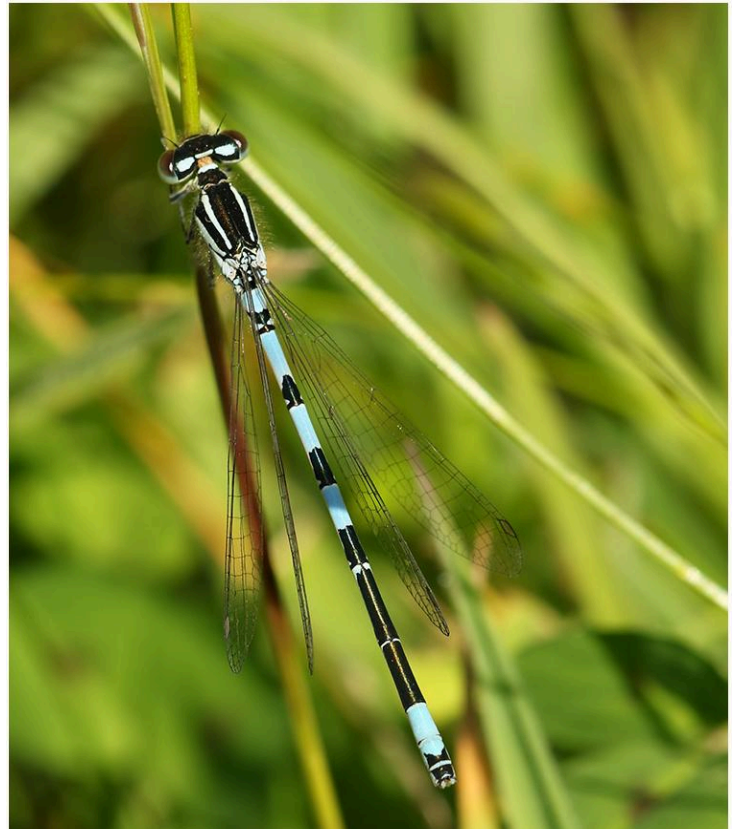


Image credits: Beautiful Demoiselle and Dainty Damselfly by Marc Heath

Surrey VC17

by Linda Pryke

Changeable and unreliable weather, including a very hot dry spell in June and record-breaking heatwave in early September, made recording in and around Surrey tricky at times during the 2023 season. A couple of the HSBG (Hampshire, Surrey & Berkshire Group) field days sadly had to be cancelled or postponed due to wet weather.

When the weather was suitable, the results could be stupendous: at Painshill Park (Cobham), during the peak of the June heatwave, the 'Space 4 Nature Earth Search' Bioblitz, organised by Surrey Wildlife Trust and Painshill Park Trust, found the air thick with Dragonflies and Damselflies. It would be a good site for a more detailed study in the future, as the habitats include both lakes and river.

2023 saw the WWT London Wetland Centre, Barnes, added to our Dragonfly Hotspot network. Dave Smallshire unveiled the plaque on 9 July and led a stroll around the waterbodies. I'm convinced he's some sort of dragonfly magnet and thanks to his (and others) experienced eyes, the species list for the day included **Norfolk Hawker**, **Scarce Chaser** and **Lesser Emperor**! The first-time visitors that I chatted to said that they enjoyed their day and were pleasantly surprised at the 'wild' and spacious feel that the site has, despite being so close to London. Despite this apparent wildness, paths are broad and flat with strategically placed benches, and lots of viewpoints to get up-close to the wildlife.

Scarce Chaser have a limited distribution in Surrey, generally confined to the margins. A group survey effort at River Blackwater (North Hampshire Report VC12) on the Surrey/Hampshire border had great success, finding a population. The species has also occasionally been seen nearby at Tice's Meadow.

A **Scarce Chaser** population associated with the River Tillingbourne, South-east of Guildford, has been recorded by F. Kelley for a number of years, with additional past records from S. Riley and M. Thurner. The species has also been recorded occasionally at scattered locations, and of course, most years at the Wetland Centre at Barnes! The big question is: are they anywhere in-between? Your records, as always, are very much appreciated.

For verification it's a species where a fuzzy photo may prove really helpful, in order to tell them apart from similar species, with which it may be seen; females look rather like **Four-spotted Chasers** at a glance, the males are blue, similar to **Black-tailed Skimmers**. Plenty of information and images are available on the [BDS website](#).

THE HSBG local group maintains a newsletter via email (contact David Hepper to sign up: webmaster@british-dragonflies.org.uk) and has an excellent programme of field meetings through the season, to which all are welcome. This year's destinations include Unstead Wetland Nature Reserve, to see the restoration and

management currently being undertaken, and a couple of sites not usually open to visitors. Do take a look at the [BDS events page](#) for more details.



Image credit: WWT London Barnes by Linda Pryke

Hertfordshire VC20

by Roy Woodward

Survey work for the new Hertfordshire Dragonfly Atlas continued during 2023 with over 7000 records now received. During the first two years of the survey, which will run until the end of 2027, 31 species have been recorded in the county, with as many as 29 of these potentially breeding. At the time of the first full survey of the county, in the six years from 2000 to 2005, there had only been 30 species recorded in Hertfordshire, with 22 found in the county during the survey, of which 19 were confirmed to be, or were probably, breeding.

Since 2005, seven new species have been found in Hertfordshire, and several of these have established breeding populations. The two that have been most successful are the **Willow Emerald Damselfly**, *Chalcolestes viridis*, which has been reported from 105 tetrads in 2022-23, and the **Norfolk Hawker**, *Aeshna isocles*, which is now firmly established in the Lee Valley, is starting to spread along the Stort Valley, and has also reached Hilfield Park Reservoir and a private garden near Harpenden during 2023.

Lesser Emperor, *Anax parthenope*, first recorded in 2006, just after the previous Atlas Survey, has started to show signs of becoming more widespread during recent years with records from 11 sites in 2023. This species also seems to be increasing in other local counties and seems set to become increasingly common in Hertfordshire. **Scarce Chaser**, *Libellula fulva*, continues to be recorded on the Grand Union Canal near Wilstone and at various sites in the Lea Valley, with occasional reports from elsewhere, but numbers remain low at all sites. **Southern Migrant Hawker**, *Aeshna affinis*, also remains scarce but was reported from five sites in southern Hertfordshire. This is another species that has the potential to increase in the county in the near future, as does the **Red-veined Darter**, *Sympetrum fonscolombii*, which was again reported from Hilfield Park Reservoir and Wilstone Reservoir.

Four species that hadn't been recorded for several decades prior to 2000 now seem to be breeding, although all remain scarce. **Beautiful Demoiselles**, *Calopteryx virgo*, and **Downy Emerald**, *Cordulia aenea*, are spreading into Hertfordshire from the south and west, and **Scarce Emerald Damselflies**, *Lestes dryas*, seem to be just about managing to maintain a toe-hold. Interestingly, newly emerged **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies**, *Ischnura pumilio*, were seen at Kingsmead in 2023, confirming breeding at the site after being found there in August 2022, prior to which only a single individual had been recorded in the county, as long ago as 1948.

Other unusual species seen during 2023 included the fourth county record of **Variable Damselfly**, *Coenagrion pulchellum*, at Admiral's Walk Lake on 3 June and the fourth and fifth confirmed records of **Keeled Skimmer**, *Orthetum coerulescens*,

at Balls Wood on 13 June and Kingsmead on 24 June (possibly a single male that moved between the two sites).

It is too early to draw any real conclusions regarding whether the status of any other species has changed significantly but early indications are that most other species are stable or increasing. One, **White-legged Damselfly**, *Platycnemis pennipes*, may have been lost from some of its previous distribution but has also colonised some new areas. The only species that does seem to be experiencing a real decline in the county is **Emerald Damselfly**, *Lestes sponsa*, which was found in 67 tetrads during 2000-05 but has so far only been found in just 13 tetrads during the current survey – although this does include five new tetrads.

Please get in touch if you have any records that haven't already been submitted or if you would like to get involved in the survey - roykwoodward@outlook.com / dragonflies@hnh.org All records will be useful, including records of common species.

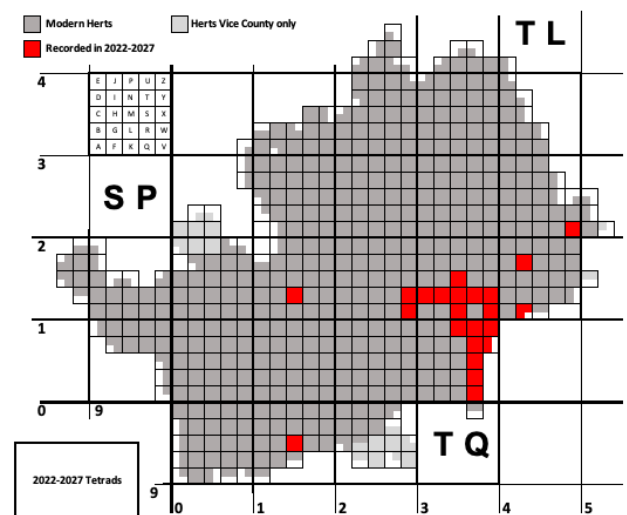


Image credits: Common Emerald Damselfly, Norfolk Hawker, Kelleed Skimmer photographed at Kingsmead by Roy Woodward and Norfolk Hawker tetrad distribution map.

Middlesex VC21

by Linda Pryke

There was certainly no lack of weather in 2023, and February 2024 here in the south has already gained the double distinction as being both hottest and wettest February on record!

Happily, whatever the weather, Middlesex seems to be getting wetter, with a number of pond and river restoration completed, and some other major wetland projects underway. Of particular interest was the reintroduction of beavers into Paradise Fields, Ealing (on the edge of London) in October 2023, in the hopes they'll do what beavers do best, opening up areas and creating pools, to the benefit of all aquatic wildlife.

The Selborne Society have added another pond to their collection at Perivale Wood and are looking forward to seeing what turns up.

It will also be good to visit the ponds at the Natural History Museum once again when their redeveloped gardens open later this year (hopefully in June). They tell me that Damselfly nymphs have already been seen, so once again we shall have Odonata represented in the busy built-up environment of Kensington to delight visitors.

Following a couple of 'possible sightings' over the last couple of years we finally get to add **Southern Migrant Hawker** to the Middlesex list; Angela Bond saw and photographed a male, close to Hampton Court on July 20 bringing the Anisoptera list total up to 11.

As always, huge thanks to everyone who contributed their sightings in 2023, they are very much appreciated.

Photos with records are welcome, and more or less essential to help confirm some of the more unusual and/or tricky to identify species. Please please don't feel that these have to be exhibition quality - a fuzzy or partial shot can often help, as it may show useful characteristics or behaviour or rule out alternatives.

Any excuse to spend time watching ponds and exploring is welcome, so if you would like a bit of company out and about, help with identification or other assistance please do get in touch.



Image credit: Southern Migrant Hawker. By A. Bond

Berkshire VC22

by Des Sussex

At the time of writing, at the end of January 2024, we have 3988 dragonfly records verified for VC22. This report focuses on the modern county - for details on the 'Oxfordshire' parts of VC22, including notes on **Common Clubtail** on the Thames, see the VC23 report.

32 species were recorded, 15 Damselflies and 17 Dragonflies. The 'top five' most recorded species were **Common Darter**, **Common Blue Damselfly**, **Banded Demoiselle**, **Emperor** and **Azure Damselfly**. There were no records of **Scarce Chaser** this year, although it is being well recorded upstream of the county boundary on the River Blackwater along the Hants/Surrey borders- one to be vigilant for.

It was a very slow start to the year. By end of April 2022, eight species of emerged Odonata (five Damselflies, three Dragonflies) had been seen. In contrast, by end of April 2023 just three species had braved the miserable weather: **Large Red Damselfly**, **Common Blue Damselfly**, and **Hairy Dragonfly**. On the plus side, all waterbodies were full again following the 2022 drought.

Nine records of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** were received from four separate sites, which was very exciting. A single was photographed at Wildmoor Heath - a new site worth exploring further in 2024; (Wildmoor is 2km from the colony at Buckler's Forest).

There were only five records of **Variable Damselfly** from two locations: the water meadows at Cookham and at Barton Fields; there were no records from the Burghfield Kennet colony. It is a species of conservation concern which needs better survey effort if recorders can visit these locations.

A photograph of **Common Clubtail** on the Thames just downstream of Reading was very welcome, and we hope more recorders can search for the species between Reading and Maidenhead. It remains fairly well recorded upstream of Reading.

One of the more unexpected records was a fine **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** photographed in an urban garden in Woodley, Reading, quite some distance from more usual habitat.

The five records of **Lesser Emperor** received in 2023 included a pair in tandem at Moor Green Lakes NR in the Blackwater Valley.

Brilliant Emerald was seen at six different ponds, including: Swinley, Crowthorne, Wasing, and, for the first time, at the very well recorded Buckler's Forest.

Downy Emerald is more common, with a good number of records from at least 15 different sites, including: Radley, Swinley, Sole Common, Decoy Heath, Moor Green and Bucklers Forest.

A species of concern is the **Black Darter**, seen in 2023 at six sites, but with very low numbers apart from at Fifty Acre Piece, which is proving to be one of the best sites in the county.

A number of sites attract plenty of visits and records, and we are lucky to have quite a few which rank as Key Sites due to good assemblages and/or priority species.

Bucklers Forest at Crowthorne is one of the most accessible sites, with a good diversity of different ponds and wetland habitats, and new species still being added each year. Since being created and opened in the last 10 years it has rapidly become one of our best recorded locations with 25 species seen in 2023. The complex of sites at Mortimer - Burnt Common and Fifty Acre Piece – are also of very high value and 24 species were seen during the year, whilst Swinley Forest fell a bit short with only 22 species! Gravel pits such as Moor Green Lakes and Hosehill Lake are well visited, but we get very few records from the river or lakes in the Loddon Valley. West Berkshire is not so well recorded, and sites like Greenham Common could produce some interesting records, although some water bodies have sensitive ground nesting birds and access for survey is restricted in the breeding season.





Image credits: Hairy Dragonfly emerging at Moor Green Lakes Nature and Emperor Dragonfly in Swinley Forest by Alan Holmes, Black Darter in Swinley Fores, Brilliant Emerald at Bucklers Forest, Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly pair at Bucklers Forest, Golden-ringed Dragonfly at Swinley, Emerald damselfly at Bucklers Forest, Swinley Forest - Field Trip by the Hants, Surrey, Berks Dragonfly Group, Easily watchable & excellent pond habitat at Bucklers Forest by Steve Harley.

Oxfordshire VC23

by Stephen Burch

This report covers the ceremonial county of Oxfordshire, including VC23 and the adjacent section of VC22 that used to be in Berkshire. It also strays into VC24 in the north-east. This year there was fine weather in May and early June, which gave way to a generally disappointing July and August, with fine sunny days at a premium. At least there were no issues with sites drying out this year! For VC23 only, there were about 1230 records which is another all-time high.

The early season was notable for **Common Clubtail** sightings, with 39 records between 4 May and 15 June, including an unprecedented report of 27 adults and 11 exuviae along a short stretch of the Thames downstream from Clifton Hampden! There were also reports from well upstream at Rushey Lock, Tadpole Bridge and Chimney Meadows, where this species is only rarely encountered.

Another early season speciality of national conservation concern, the **Variable Damselfly**, is hanging on in the county with just two records from the Barton Fields/Radley Lakes area.

Now that we have an active recorder in the north of the county, there were again good numbers (12+) of **Downy Emerald** seen at Rousham Lake, with smaller numbers seen at just four other sites.

Unlike in 2022, regrettably there were no further sightings of **Scarce Chasers** along the River Thames north of Shillingford, or elsewhere, so this species remains very rare in the county.

Following their discovery in 2020, **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselflies** were again reported from stormwater ponds at Longford Park, Banbury and Didcot, but in smaller numbers than previously. These sites are becoming increasingly overgrown and may well soon become unsuitable for this species. However, with large numbers of stormwater ponds appearing all over the county there is a good chance of the species relocating to more suitable habitat. Whether or not they can be located is another matter!

Emerald Damselfly is becoming an increasingly scarce species in the county with reports of small numbers from just nine sites scattered across the county.

One of the main highlights of the season was the highest number of **Southern Migrant Hawker** sightings since the discovery of the species in 2020. Last year there were only two records of mature adults but this year there were 20 reports both from Otmoor and a nearby new site – Whitecross Green Wood, which is just in VC24. At this latter site, sightings were far more reliable than on Otmoor and a potential breeding pool was located with males holding territory.

The Cothill BBOWT transect surveys for **Southern Damselflies** and **Keeled Skimmer** showed smaller daily counts than the record numbers seen last year,

probably due to the poorer weather. It was of some concern that there no transect survey reports of **Small Red Damselfly**, with only two records from the adjacent Cothill Fen NNR.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly continued its recent range expansion but with reduced numbers, probably due to the mixed weather. A late-season highlight was the continued spread of **Willow Emerald Damselfly**, although the rate of increase appears to have slowed following its dramatic expansion in 2022.

The last records were of **Common Darters** near Wantage and Lockinge on 23 November. Over the year, 29 species were recorded in the ceremonial county of Oxfordshire.

Further details on sightings for the year can be found at <https://oxondragonflies.blogspot.com/>.





Image credits: Four Spotted Chaser, Red Eyed Damselfly, Southern Hawker, Willow Emerald and Emperor Dragonfly by Stephen Burch.

Suffolk VC25-26

by Adrian Parr

Dragonfly recording in the county during 2023 was at an all time high, with some 5200 records received so far. Several nature reserves and 'rewilding' project areas were also monitored in detail. Guided walks for the public were held at West Stow in west Suffolk, and it is hoped to expand similar activities elsewhere in years to come.

Many of the highlights during the year relate to species that have only colonised Suffolk in relatively recent times. **Scarce Emerald Damselfly** was first noted in 2007, and 2023 saw records from four different areas including Market Weston Fen, where the species was first discovered in the county but where reports had not been received for some years. It now seems possible that this apparent hiatus might simply reflect low levels of coverage rather than the species having truly disappeared. Records were not, however, forthcoming from the well-watched coastal site at Landguard Bird Observatory, where **Scarce Emerald Damselflies** had been seen in 2021 and 2022.

Although only a few years ago **Lesser Emperor** was only a very scarce migrant to Suffolk, it too has apparently now colonised the county, and during 2023 individuals were confirmed from at least 10 sites, including several such as Carlton Marshes and Loompit Lake where breeding is considered highly likely, if not yet formally proven. Sightings also included a male seen at Lackford Lakes in west Suffolk on 15 August. This is only the second record for VC26, the first having been from the same site the year before. It is thus possible that a small breeding colony is now also present in this area. **Southern Migrant Hawker** has a similar status to **Lesser Emperor** in Suffolk, and it too continued its local range expansion. A teneral was photographed at Landseer Park in Ipswich on 17 June, and there were several records from the coastal marshes in the east of the county, including those at Trimley and Walberswick where breeding has previously been noted. Importantly, several records were also made from new sites in the west of Suffolk, with July sightings near Ampton and at Worlington now representing the most inland records for the county.

As for more traditional migrants, **Red-veined Darter** had a quiet year by modern standards, with just two singletons reported from the Lowestoft area (Gunton and Carlton Marshes) during the first week of July.

A number of the county's longer-standing residents also produced interesting records- **White-legged Damselfly** has a very restricted distribution in Suffolk, being largely confined to the River Stour along the border with Essex and a few nearby still-water sites. These areas are often somewhat under-recorded, and records of the species can thus be a little erratic. During 2023, an intensive survey by Nick Mason in the south-east of the county produced numerous records along the lower Stour, with a count of well over a hundred at Boxsted Mill on 9 July.

There were also some interesting sightings from Polestead Pond near the River Box and on the River Brett at Shelley. Clearly the species is currently doing well in this general area.

Variable Damselfly is also only very patchily distributed in Suffolk, and a few decades ago had been showing signs of a possible decline. On 8 June 2023, the species was noted at Flatford on the River Stour, a sighting that complements a report from the same general area back in June 2019. It now seems likely that a new (or previously overlooked?) colony is present here, which must be good news.

Norfolk VC27-C28

by Pam Taylor

2023 was another fairly uneventful year in Norfolk, although there was both good and bad news for some of our resident species. On the plus side, after ten consecutive years of sightings, the first conclusive proof of breeding of **Lesser Emperors** at the Trinity Broads was obtained. First the exuvia of a male was found next to the Filby Bridge boardwalk on the 21 June, then a female exuvia was collected from the edge of Filby Broad itself on 30 July. A third exuvia, again a female, was reported in October, but as yet this hasn't been confirmed. It would represent a rather late date for the species if shown to be correct.

Lesser Emperors were also reported during last summer from Selbrigg Pond, Horsey Mere where eleven were seen together in July, Strumpshaw Fen which was another site with numbers in double figures, Winterton Dunes and various other locations scattered around the county.

On the downside, there were no observations at all of **Small Red Damselfly** from Scarning Fen, its main, and for many years only, breeding site in Norfolk. Several recorders checked the site hoping to locate a few individuals, but all searches returned negative for the species. It is believed the extreme heat and drought of July and August 2022 caused Scarning Fen to become desiccated, thereby killing any larvae derived from egg-laying in 2021. This species has a two year life cycle, so it is hoped eggs laid in summer 2022, just before the drought started, might have survived better than any larvae, if still protected within the plant material. At the species' other site in Norfolk, adults were only observed on three occasions between 18 July and 9 August, with a maximum of just two males and one female seen together. We await further news from both sites this summer and sincerely hope for better results.

A further species possibly only just hanging on in the county is **Common Hawker**. Sightings often come in from dune pools on the east coast and sometimes from the eastern broads, but as with many other years, there were no received records for 2023. This species is very similar to **Migrant Hawker** and although rare in the county, could be over-looked.

One species that certainly can't be over-looked is **Southern Migrant Hawker**. The bright blue males with their solid green-blue sides to the thorax are hard to mistake if seen clearly. Observers must however be aware that bright blue male **Migrant Hawkers** do exist, but of course they carry two yellow stripes on the side of the thorax. There were 21 records of **Southern Migrant Hawker** last summer from both previous inland sites such as Redgrave and Lopham Fen, and East Winch Common, and from coastal sites such as Holme, Winterton and Burnham Norton.

On the migrant/possibly colonising front, there were no records at all of **Vagrant Emperor** last year and only three of **Red-veined Darter**. One of the latter was seen at Watermill Broad, Cranwich, on 11 June, a site that first produced emergent Red-veined Darters as far back as 2002. A male was then seen three days later at Beeston Regis Common and a female photographed near Kelling Quag (Kelling Water Meadows) on 2 October. Again, Kelling is a long-standing site for this species, so this individual could have been locally bred. Equally, Kelling is close to the coast, so she could have arrived from elsewhere.

Southern Emerald Damselflies were seen at three sites during 2023, although only four males were observed at Weybourne Camp and just a single female in a garden near the coast at Caister. At Winterton Dunes however, up to 3 pairs, plus five singles, were recorded on 24 August, with the first male reported from the site on 29 July and other sightings spanning the intervening month. We received 66 records of **Scarce Emerald Damselfly** and 158 records of (common) **Emerald Damselfly**. Once again however, there were far more reports of **Willow Emerald Damselfly** with 263 reports coming in for 2023. Records for all four emeralds were up on the previous year.

One site in West Norfolk generated numerous records of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**, but with peak counts of 44 on 19 June and 43 on 5 July, numbers were well down on previous years. Few other species merit mention for Norfolk these days, especially with the continued expansion nationally of **Norfolk Hawker**. Quite how and why this species suddenly starting spreading and colonising new counties from 2011 onwards remains a mystery, although climate change must be a major driver of this expansion.

Our sincere thanks to everyone contributing records for Norfolk in 2023. The overall number of sightings was well in excess of 8,000 records. You can either enter your sightings directly into iRecord or, if you record regularly at one or more sites, you can email pam.taylor@british-dragonflies.org.uk for a spreadsheet that contains all the required data entry columns in the correct order necessary for easy upload to the national database.

Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire VC 29 & 31

by Val Perrin

The 2023 dragonfly season for our two vice counties had some notable records, which I will highlight below but, as usual, the first species on the wing was a **Large Red Damselfly** in Cambridge on 20 April. In total I received and verified over 1600 Odonata records in iRecord last year and I would like to thank everyone who contributed – your records really do matter in furthering our understanding of these insects in our two vice counties.

Good numbers (6-20) of **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** were seen at Northstowe and Eddington Lakes. These are both relatively new water bodies associated with new developments to the north and west of Cambridge, respectively. One was also seen in a private Cambridge garden.

Never a common species, with a patchy distribution and limited numbers where it occurs, is **White-legged Damselfly**, so it was heartening to learn of a colony estimated to be of the order of 21-100 individuals at a fishery at Pidley Fen, near Warboys.

Even more mesmerising was a report of **Southern Emerald Damselfly** from Fulbourn Fen, a local Wildlife Trust Reserve just east of Cambridge, in June. This would be a potential new species for our area. The accompanying photo certainly appeared to support the identification, but on visiting the site I was unable to confirm the presence of the species; there was also hardly any free-standing water on the site at that time.

For the dragonflies, **Norfolk Hawker** continued to be found at further new locations, as well as its established breeding sites at Little Paxton and Fen Drayton. These included: Papworth, Kings Dyke NR, Ouse Fen, Stretham, Sutton Meadlands, Sutton Gault, RSPB Hope Farm at Knapwell, Little Wilbraham, Offord Cluny, and Hinchingsbrooke Country Park near Huntingdon. There was even a record from a garden habitat at Easton.

Southern Migrant Hawker has records going back continuously several years now at Quy Fen and Ditton Meadows, Cambridge, so is almost certainly breeding there. Last year I also had additional records of the species from: Little Wilbraham Fen, Teversham Fen, Ouse Fen and Wicken Fen, as well as from Paxton Pits. If we manage to get further records for these new sites, or ideally proof of breeding, it would mean that **Southern Migrant Hawker** is consolidating its presence here.

Until last summer the only known site for **Downy Emerald** in the county was at a private lake surrounded by mature woodland south of Cambridge. However, in early June I was alerted by two reliable local recorders, with photographic evidence, of one or two Downy Emeralds being seen at Fowlmere – both at an

ancient site within the village and at the nearby RSPB reserve, both barely a couple of miles from the original site. I am hoping that these records will be repeated this coming season, and more information obtained as to the likely exact locations if the species is breeding, so that any necessary conservation management work to the habitat can be directed.

The rare migrant dragonfly **Lesser Emperor** was seen as individuals at Longstanton Lagoons/ Northstowe Lakes, Fen Drayton lakes RSPB and lastly at Dernford Reservoir, Stapleford in September. The first county record, and what was believed to be only the third national sighting, also occurred in Cambridge in 1998.



Image credit: White-legged Damselfly, Small Red-eyed Damselfly and Southern Migrant Hawker by Val Perrin

Bedfordshire VC30

by Rory Morrissey

Large Red Damselfly was the first to be seen on 20 April, and the latest flying odonate was the Common Darter on 24 November. Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly was added to the county list of breeding species; an emergent was at Sundon Quarry for the first time in over twenty years. This brought the total breeding species in Bedfordshire to 25. The total number of species observed in 2023 was 30, a record high for the county.

Lesser Emperor appeared at several sites.

Norfolk Hawker (or Green-eyed Hawker) was seen at multiple locations and was observed ovipositing at Felmersham GP.

Beautiful Demoiselle only appeared at Cranfield University but was seen ovipositing and is very likely to be breeding in the Chicheley Brook.

Several Scarce Emerald Damselfly were found at Milton Bryan; these were the first sightings of this species in Bedfordshire since 1971. In contrast, the “common” Emerald Damselfly seems to be becoming scarcer while Willow Emerald Damselfly is now widespread and consolidated in the county.

Very few records of Downy Emerald were received, and all that were, were from the Heath and Reach area. A late sighting was reported from Rushmere CP in mid-July.

Keeled Skimmer was again seen at Sundon Quarry, but this is the only site where it is known in Bedfordshire.

A single visiting Red-veined Darter was identified at Rookery North (Stewartby) Pit on 19 June.

Common Darter had a very good year, having the greatest number of observations of any species. Black-tailed Skimmer also had a very good year, increasing its range and number of observations considerably.

The “Nationally Important” Dragonfly species noted by the BDS that are regularly seen in the county are Norfolk Hawker (Endangered) and Scarce Chaser (Near Threatened). These two species have been expanding their ranges in Bedfordshire.

The “Nationally Important” Damselfly species noted by the BDS that have been seen in the county are Scarce Emerald Damselfly, Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly and Variable Damselfly, which are all classed as Near Threatened. The first two have just returned to single sites and the last has been present at a few locations in recent years.

Gloucestershire VC33-34

by Richard Mundy

A total of 887 records of 28 species were received and accepted from 161 observers in Gloucestershire in 2023.

As usual, the first species recorded in the spring was a **Large Red Damselfly**, on 23 April at Bristol. There was an early record of **Banded Demoiselle** on 29 April at Barton; this species was also recorded until quite late in the year, the last being on 15 September at Kempsford. The mild autumn weather resulted in a large number of October records of **Migrant Hawker** and **Common Darter**, and a few **Southern Hawkers**. A few **Common Darters** remained into November, the last being at Oxenhall and Hartpury on 11 November to end the season's observations in Gloucestershire.

Also flying in October was a **Willow Emerald Damselfly** photographed at Coombe Hill Meadows on 8th October, perhaps one of the three that were present there on 28 August when copulation was observed. This was the second record of 2023, with one also photographed at Severn Beach in June, following the first county record at Lechlade in 2022. The three couldn't be much more widely spread across the county.

The Severn Beach record was part of an extraordinary run of mid-June records of rare species from that area which also included: the county's only **Red-veined Darters** of the year, with at least five present from the 15th; a **Lesser Emperor** on the 16th; the first **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** records since 2016, photographed on the 19th and the county's first **Keeled Skimmer** since 2021 (and the first outside the Forest of Dean since 2008) also photographed on the 19th.

Lesser Emperor appears to be becoming established as a resident species in Cotswold Water Park where there were records from four different Gloucestershire locations between 22 June and 7 August.

Southern Migrant Hawker was recorded at a site near Gloucester for the sixth consecutive year. Up to five males and at least one female were seen between the 23rd of July and the 16th of August with copulation observed on the 29th of July.

It was good year for spring post-emergence records of **Common Clubtail**. On the River Severn, eleven were seen at The Mythe on 27 May; on the River Wye, in early June, singles were at Whitebrook, Highbury Wood and Llandogo, with at least four seen and photographed at Cadora Woods on the 4th.

Only a single record of **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** was received, from Ruardean in the Forest of Dean on 6 August. The paucity of records probably reflects the poor weather through much of July and August when this species is typically seen.

Records of **Downy Emerald** came from the usual parts of the county on typical dates. At Cotswold Water Park, six were at Lower Moor on 14 May; at least two were

at Whelford Pools on 16 May and one was seen close to there on 30 May. In the Forest of Dean, one was at Nagshead on 4 June and at least two were at Steam Mills Lake on 8 June.

A large number of records of **Scarce Chaser** were received from typical locations on the Rivers Severn and Avon in the north of the county, including 15 at The Mythe on 27 May. They were also seen further downstream on the Severn, around Slimbridge and Frampton on Severn, and, unusually, one was sighted at Purton on 10 June. The species was again recorded in 2023 from the relatively new locations of the River Frome at Stonehouse on 7 June and Pittville Park in Cheltenham on 11 June. No records were received this year from the Bristol Avon.

Many thanks to everyone who submitted records in 2023 and to all the people working so hard to protect Gloucestershire's wetlands.



Image credit: Common Clubtail by Richard Mundy

Worcestershire VC37

by Mike Averill

In 2023 3007 records were received for 27 species from 186 recorders. It was the first year since 2019 that no new species were recorded. However, 2023 saw a continued increase in the number of records submitted using iRecord.

All species appear to have done well with the exception of the **Brown Hawker**. The **White-legged Damselfly** was also down this year but numbers do seem to fluctuate annually; this species appears, more often, to be using still water sites such as fishing pools for breeding. Interestingly, a species suffering nationally, the **Emerald Damselfly**, did reasonably well.

The **Common Clubtail** is one of Britain's scarcer species; however, based on the data from the long running larval count at Bewdley, the species had its best year in 11 years, which was a welcome upturn. This gives hope for the River Severn's condition and water quality, at a time when there is a lot of concern about the state of our rivers. We are still unable to explain the Clubtail's complete disappearance from the River Avon but, whatever that reason is, it isn't affecting the **Scarce Chaser** on the river. The latter species had the highest number of records ever from the River Avon, River Severn and Croome River; records also came from five other sites around Kidderminster.

The **Red-veined Darter**, a migrant species, made a welcome return in 2023 after a two year gap; it was seen emerging in August and September at Ryall by Andy Warr.

Another regular migrant, the **Lesser Emperor**, was seen at its usual place at Ripple Gravel pit, Kemerton in the north, at Harvington Hall near Kidderminster.

The **Hairy Dragonfly**, although not strictly new to the county, having had a few records in the 1980's, is becoming a very successful coloniser as records have increased over the last four years. Andy Warr found a larval case at Ripple which is so vital in assessing whether the species is breeding in the county.

Two new species that have done well, and have increased year by year since their first sightings, are the **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** and **Willow Emerald Damselfly**. The **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** is doing increasingly well, mainly in the Upton/Severn Stoke area where ideal breeding habitat has been provided by the gravel extraction activity there.

There were two outlier records in 2023 as well at Feckenham Wyld Moor Reserve and Lea Castle housing development at Kidderminster. The Upton area is undoubtedly providing a good source population, its habitat provides lots of breeding opportunities. The population appears to be over spilling on to the new storm water storage ponds created at the new Upton-upon-Severn road works

and roundabout. The species was also seen again at its historic site of Ashmoor Common: Andy Warr recorded a beautiful orange immature female (aurantiaca form).

It is worth mentioning the new water bodies appearing in the county in association with housing or industrial development schemes. Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes (SUDS) attempt to control the increased runoff speed of storm water created by building projects by storing water in a reservoir or pool which holds the water temporarily only allowing small quantities to escape over an extended period of time. This, naturally, provides aquatic habitat for dragonflies and other aquatic invertebrates. The Lea Castle site at Kidderminster is a good example; only two years old, it has already attracted a surprise visitor: the **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**. All through August there was recorded activity with up to 20 individuals and several pairs egg laying. Surprisingly, larval cases were also found in early August so the species must have found the site the previous year. Another SUDS site at Warndon, near Worcester has already had 17 species recorded, including the **Willow Emerald Damselfly**. A number of the other species recorded are known as early colonists of new wetlands, such as the **Emperor**, **Broad-bodied Chaser** and **Ruddy Darter**.

The **Willow Emerald Damselfly** is the county's other success story; despite 2023 being only the second year that we have seen adults, the species has spread significantly across the county, reaching as far west as Kyre Park, Tenbury. At time of writing, this is the second most westerly record in the UK. Other sites range from Birmingham to Feckenham, Croome, Worcester and the woods around Grafton. They have also been seen at Throckmorton, where a female was observed egg laying in willow leaves, which is unusual.





Image Credits: Freshly emerged Red-veined Darter, Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly female form *aurantiaca* by Andy Warr, Lea Castle stormwater storage area in Kidderminster. Mike Averill, Willow Emerald, male, at Kyre Park, Sept 2023 by Mike Averill

Warwickshire VC38

by Mick Schilling

VC 38, Warwickshire, continues to be served by an encouraging number of keen enthusiasts who submit regular sightings around the county. These contributions are greatly valued, and my thanks are extended to those individuals.

Some notable points from the 2023 season in Warwickshire:

Banded Demoiselle remains plentiful in many areas and is often the most dominant species by far along the slower moving rivers, where they can often be seen in abundance. As well as being the earliest species for many recorders, they are also becoming one of the latest; a sighting from Brandon Marsh was reported in October 2023.

Beautiful Demoiselles continues to extend its range with individuals being seen along a number of rivers and streams in the county.

White-legged Damselfly remains locally common along many of the county's rivers as well as some still waterbodies too. Often they are the most common species of 'little blue damselfly' along the rivers, although this isn't always reflected in the recorder reports received.

Willow Emerald Damselfly sightings again showed that the species had increased in range. It is worth local enthusiasts bearing in mind that this species is on the wing well into October and November, so it is important to keep looking out for them later in the season to ensure their presence is recorded.

Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly remains absent since 2016 following the loss of its lone site near Alcester. It can be surprising to many that what is primarily environmental damage can create the perfect environment for a locally rare Damselfly. In this case a Cemex aggregate excavation facility created perfect barren, sandy and shallow pools for the species.

Scarce Chaser numbers remain steady, in fact they have probably become the most prolific early summer Dragonfly on the Warwickshire Avon, with reliable annual numbers in many areas along the river.

Common Clubtail are still absent after having been recorded emerging on the River Avon near Marlcliff a number of years back. Bearing in mind their habit of mass emergence over a short period of time, they can be easy to miss, so please keep looking if you're in the area from mid to late May. They are also prone to moving away from the river into more wooded areas after emergence, so adults can be found some distance from their emergence site.

There was another report of a lone **Southern Migrant Hawker** received this year, following a lone sighting in 2022 near Rugby. The 2023 individual was seen near Napton Reservoir which is, again, in the eastern reaches of the county.

Notable sites in the county that returned good numbers of records include: the Heart of England Forest, WWT sites such as Hampton Wood, Snitterfield Bushes and Brandon Marsh, Marsh Lane NNR, Middleton Lakes, Kingsbury Water Park, Alvecote Wood, Ladywalk Nature Reserve, Earlswood Lakes, Bidford and Saxon Mill.

A request to all members reporting sightings – please try to include a photo, where possible, an approximation of the abundance of species seen when making a report, and also please try to make the location grid reference as accurate as possible.



Image credits: Female Broad-bodied Chaser at Snitterfield Bushes, Male Migrant Hawker at HoEF Dorothy's Wood. By Mick Schilling.

Staffordshire VC39

by Dave Jackson

Several new sites have seen records of colonisation by **Beautiful Demoiselles**.

White-legged Damselflies have been recorded forming two colonies at Middleton and along the Fazeley Canal at Drayton Basset.

An orange teneral female **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** was photographed at a new site.

A **Willow Emerald Damselfly** was photographed within the old VC39 boundary (West Midlands) near Dudley.

Shropshire VC40

by Sue Rees Evans

In Shropshire we had a relatively slow start to the flight season until mid-May when a sustained dry and hot spell, which extended into early June, triggered much activity. **Demoiselles** and **Four-spotted Chasers** were seen in particularly high numbers and many species which are known to emerge later in the summer were recorded early.

There were a number of early **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** recorded in May, including on the 16th, the earliest ever Shropshire sighting. **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** also broke the records; previous sightings have all been in late July and mostly in August, but 2023 produced a number of June sightings, the earliest on 15 June at a new location of Prees Heath.

Black-tailed Skimmer and **Ruddy Darter**, equalled their earliest ever sightings and **Emperor Dragonfly**, **Migrant Hawker**, **Common Hawker**, **Keeled Skimmer** and **Black Darter** all had notably early sightings.

In total, 28 species were recorded with the welcome return of **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly**, which had been unrecorded since 2016. This species was recorded at its usual site on Titterstone Clee Hill, but also at a site 1km further down the slopes of Clee Hill. **Keeled Skimmer** was also recorded on Titterstone Clee Hill for the second time and four adults were seen at a flush on the Wild Moor area of the Long Mynd for the first time. **Downy Emerald** also had a good year with an unexpected repeat record at Mousecroft Pool near Shrewsbury and 10 males recorded at a known private site north east of Shrewsbury. There was also an unconfirmed sighting at Whixall Moss. The **Willow Emerald Damselfly** however still eludes us and we await our first Shropshire record.

Looking forward to 2024 there are real opportunities to get involved in our [Upland Dragonflies Project in the Shropshire Hills](#). We are looking for all levels of experience to help with investigating new areas and monitoring well known sites. On the website you will also find a much more detailed account of the 2023 flight season in the [Shropshire Dragonflies Newsletter](#).

Grateful thanks to all of you who sent in records and photographs for the flight season blog during 2023. Here's to a sunny 2024 and I look forward to hearing from those of you who would like to help our upland dragonflies project.

North Lincolnshire VC54

by Fiona McKenna

The dragonfly season in our vice county started in late April with my own record of **Large Red Damselfly** kicking things off. I was out on a site visit with work at a very unassuming little drainage channel near Southrey when I spotted the unmistakable shimmer of some new wings fluttering in the grass! A flurry of **Large Red Damselfly** records then came in from across the vice county from regular contributors Brian Hedley and Richard Doan.

As May arrived so did a few more species: **Four-spotted Chaser**, **Blue-tailed Damselfly**, **Common Blue Damselfly**, **Azure Damselfly** and **Hairy Dragonfly** were all recorded in the first week of the month. Later in May Mr Miller recorded the first **Emerald Damselfly** on the coast. **Red-eyed Damselfly** made an appearance at Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust's Far Ings reserve around the same time too. **Broad-bodied Chaser** was recorded on 20 May at Monk's Wood north of Lincoln. On the same date **Red-eyed Damselflies** were recorded at Conningsby Pits.

The Lincolnshire Naturalist Union visited Wrendale Rewilding Estate in North Lincolnshire on 21 May and recorded six species including **Black-tailed Skimmer** which was the first record of the year for our vice county. Beavers were introduced to an enclosure at the site in 2023 so it will be interesting to see if the Odonata species count increases once the site has wetted up.

Banded Demoiselles appeared on 27 May, **Emperors** were seen on 9 June and a **Lesser Emperor** was spotted on the 14 June at Burwell by Kev Graham. There had been a fleeting glimpse of one at Whisby Nature Reserve near Lincoln in June also, just outside our vice county! June brought **Norfolk Hawker** sightings in North Lincs too, at Far Ings. Darren Wozencroft managed to get a photo and shared his sighting so that others could enjoy this unusual visitor too. Hopefully this species will settle in our area as it gradually spreads northwards.

The usual species made an appearance throughout June and July and then another **Lesser Emperor** sighting came in during August. Graham Catley spotted this one in Searby and managed to get a photo of this speedy species too; top work!

Willow Emerald Damselflies and **Migrant Hawkers** hung on throughout October with only the hardy **Common Darter** making it into November. The last records of the year came in on 7 November from Nige Lound at Gibraltar Point and Brian Hedley at Marton.

A huge thank you to all recorders who contributed records throughout 2023! Wishing you all a long summer full of many dragonfly days!

Leicestershire with Rutland VC55

by Ian Merrill

For many dragonfly enthusiasts the initial Odonata excitement of the year has to wait until late April or early May, when the first **Large Red Damselflies** begin to emerge, but that doesn't have to be the case! The range of **Willow Emerald Damselfly** is best mapped in the winter months, when its distinctive oviposition scars are most easy to find, and this process continued in earnest in VC 55, almost from 1 January 2023. Of particular note was the full mapping of **Willow Emerald Damselfly's** range on the Ashby Canal and Grand Union Canal (credit to Graham Handsley for the latter site), both of which are now almost totally populated for their full VC 55 lengths. Various other new sites were also discovered in far-flung corners of our recording area.

Good weather in the earlier portion of the flight season allowed for some concerted efforts in tracing the slowly expanding ranges of our new arrival, the **Beautiful Demoiselle**, in the southern reaches of Leicestershire, notably the River Avon (credit to Mark Piper) and various new sites south of Leicester (credit to Matthew Billings). It was also interesting to note that one site with a significant population, newly discovered in 2022 at Ullesthorpe, produced no records in 2023; this seems to be reflective of the species two-year life cycle. This cyclical trait in recently established populations is currently shared with the **Scarce Chasers** on the lower River Soar.

On the subject of **Scarce Chaser**, another new arrival with a very limited range in VC 55, a notable record for this species was a single male seen on the Grand Union Canal at Glen Hills, just south of Leicester City, on 6 July. As the distribution map below illustrates, this record is totally remote from the two existing VC 55 populations (the green star is the 2023 individual). This occurrence illustrates what a great opportunistic coloniser this species can be and perhaps goes some way towards explaining how the lower River Soar colony was first established in the far north of our recording area.

Favourable weather in the spring and early summer months also meant that **Hairy Dragonfly** records were up, with several new sites being identified and some good counts being received from sites with existing populations. This coincidence of good weather during the limited flight season of **Hairy Dragonfly** also permitted time for study and photography at the stronghold site of the River Trent grazing marshes close to the River Soar confluence (see image below).

Unprecedented in VC 55 was the appearance of two **Lesser Emperors** in a single year, constituting only the 5th and 6th records for our recording area. The first was particularly intriguing: a recently deceased male being consumed by a Hornet at Rutland Water on 26 June; the cause of death is unknown (see image below). Another male, at Watermead Country Park on 16 August, coincided with further observations of this species across the East Midlands during the summer. As this

is another species currently expanding its range in the UK, perhaps this multiple occurrence could herald a welcome increase in records for VC55 in the future?

Although still incomplete at the time of writing this summary, drafting of a new document entitled 'Where to Watch Dragonflies and Damselflies in Leicestershire and Rutland' is now well advanced. The work, which is intended to further stimulate observer interest in VC 55, has been compiled with the invaluable help of a small group of local enthusiasts and should be published ahead of the 2024 flight season. It will be uploaded onto the [Leicestershire and Rutland Dragonfly Facebook Group](#) when complete.

As ever, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank all those who went to the trouble of submitting Odonata records for 2023, which are invaluable in plotting the evolution of our changing populations in the face of climate change and habitat developments. Finally, I will conclude with my usual plug for the [Leicestershire and Rutland Dragonfly Facebook Group](#), which has continued to serve as a focal point for dragonfly interest in the counties and increases in popularity.

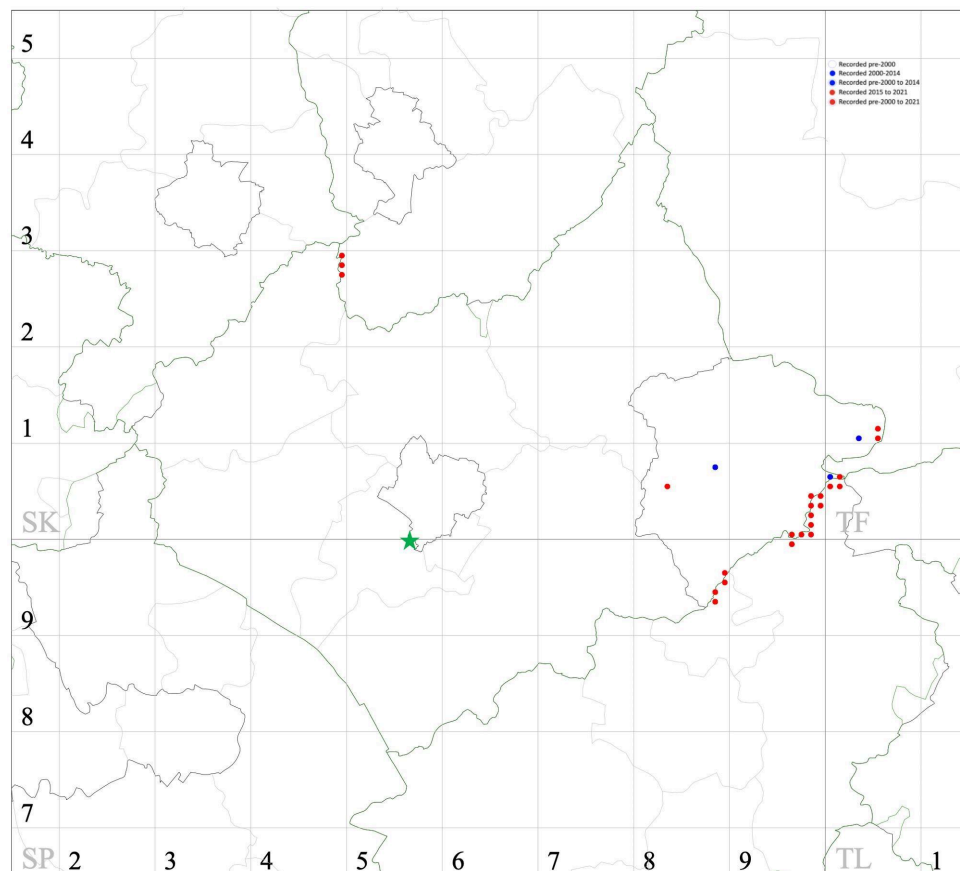




Image credits: Scarce Chaser range in VC 55. The eastern population is found on the River Welland, the northern population on the lower River Soar, and the outlying 2023 record is the green star, Hairy Dragonfly, male, River Soar grazing marshes, June 2023 by Ian Merrill, Lesser Emperor, dead male being eaten by Hornet. Rutland Water, June 2023 by Tony Clarke.

Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire VC 56-57

by Chris Bradbury

In both counties, all their regular breeding species of Odonata were recorded in 2023. It seemed like a quiet year for dragonflies, but this report is a summary of almost 3000 accepted records.

The highlight of the year was a male **Beautiful Demoiselle** photographed on July 26th at Erewash Meadows which was a very significant record for both Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire as the river is the county border. There followed two reports of this species from the Idle Valley which seemed absurd, but I have been advised that it is spreading eastward in more southerly counties. There is a record from a reliable observer in Notts taken 22 August 2001 at Rufford CP. There have been three ancient claims of the species in Derbyshire from 1863 and c1900 up until 1954/5.

The chronological narrative:

Recording commenced with reports of **Willow Emerald Damselfly** ovipositing scars from Newstead on 2 January, followed by larvae of **Southern Hawker** on 19 February and larvae of **Broad-bodied Chaser** on 18 April from Ashford in the Water.

The flight season began with **Large Red Damselfly** on 24 April in Papplewick followed by widespread reports in the following week.

Next to emerge were **Hairy Dragonfly** and **Common Blue Damselfly** at Lound on 3 May.

Azure Damselfly was found on 9 May at Papplewick.

Blue-tailed Damselfly and **Red-eyed Damselfly** were seen also on 9 May at Netherfield.

Banded Demoiselles were flying at Neatholme Fen on the same day, 9 May.

Four-spotted Chaser made its debut on 10 May at Papplewick.

Black-tailed Skimmer was first seen at Attenborough on 16 May.

The first **Broad-bodied Chaser** was seen at Ashford in the Water on 17 May.

After a few further reports in Notts, **Hairy Dragonfly** made the Derbyshire year list on 19 May at Markham Vale. This species continues to gain footholds in both counties with Ticknall Quarries and other sites also scoring. The species' flight season lasted 3 May to 12 July.

Variable Damselfly joined the party on 14 May when it was seen at Skylarks. Our stronghold for this species continues to be Skylarks reserve at Holme Pierrepont,

and other gravel pits by the Trent to the east of Lady Bay Bridge. There are no known populations in Derbyshire.

Emperor Dragonfly was first observed at Idle Valley Nature Reserve on 26 May with **Hairy Dragonfly** seen nearby on the same day.

Common Darter was recorded as a larva on 3 June at Newark-on-Trent, and adults soon followed on 6 June in Elvaston.

Our first **Southern Hawker** of the year was recorded on 3 June at Long Eaton.

Emerald Damselfly first appeared on 10 June at Attenborough.

Brown Hawker joined us on 15 June at Beeston Sidings.

The first **Migrant Hawker** appeared on 21 June at Bennerley.

Also on 21 June a slightly early **Ruddy Darter** was reported at Bennerley. Another **Ruddy Darter** was seen on 23 June at Erewash Meadows, and another the following day was seen at Pleasley Pit.

The first **Common Hawker** appeared on 16 June near Ramsley Reservoir. It was not recorded in Nottinghamshire in 2023. I would appreciate photo-records for Notts please.

Golden-ringed Dragonfly was first observed on 24 June at Bar Brook. This species has a limited distribution on the Derbyshire moors, favouring moorland brooks with silt beds. The final sighting was on 30 August.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly was next, appearing on 23 June at Netherfield.

Willow Emerald Damselfly was first seen on 29 June at Papplewick.

Black Darter kept us waiting until 7 August until one was seen at Woodhead reservoir. This species was not recorded in Nottinghamshire in 2023; it is not a breeding species in the VC.

Scarce Chaser was not recorded at the Nottinghamshire/Leicestershire border site in 2023, but it has only been recorded on even numbered years since first being discovered in 2016. Watch out this year!

Keeled Skimmer was searched for on the Derbyshire moors without success in 2023, but I think we've more to find in future years.

Many thanks to the nature groups and individual contributors who made this report possible.

Cheshire and Wirral VC58

by John Roberts

2023 was a record year in respect of logged sightings, 2456 in total, which were well above the five year average of 2137. Causes of the increase in sightings are probably down to a) the ease with which users of BTO's BirdTrack can submit Odonata sightings and b) use of WhatsApp. The first recorded sighting of a **Large Red Damselfly** was on 18 April which is comparable with the previous five years. However, in common with 2022, the extended warm weather in the autumn resulted in very late sightings of **Common Darter** the last being on 26 November.

The use of WhatsApp by local recorders has proved to be highly successful as there are now 32 members of the group. It's highly likely that the ease of using WhatsApp to submit sightings with images has contributed to its popularity and, in consequence, the number of recorders using email has dropped away to almost nothing.

Willow Emerald Damselfly has appeared for the second year in succession in Cheshire. The sighting was made by Steve Orrige on the 7 September at Hare Hill. This site is over 20 miles from last year's site (near Crewe) and so it's unlikely that the sites could be connected. Most likely, the individuals from both years have taken advantage of southerly winds to increase their species' range.

2023 marked the 10-year anniversary of the first controlled release of **White-faced Darter** nymphs into one of the many pools within Delamere Forest, Cheshire. Since 2013, there have been three further annual releases of nymphs into the same pool and from 2014, there has been a spring monitoring programme in place recording numbers of exuviae and adults. Interestingly, while numbers of both exuviae and adults at this pool have declined steadily over time, numbers in a nearby pool have gradually increased. This pool is roughly 0.5 km away and clearly is preferred by the WFD for breeding suitability. There was a record number of WFD adults both male and female sighted at this second pool in 2023. While the number is relatively small (26) it does appear as if this species has established a small but self-generating population.

South-east Yorkshire VC61 by Martin Roberts

Overall, 2023 was an unremarkable year for the VC. The season started on 1 May with **Large Red Damselfly** and ended on 11 November with **Common Darter**. A single **Red-veined Darter** was recorded at Filey on 25 June and a single female **Southern Migrant Hawker** was recorded at Spurn on 9 August, followed by a single male on 15 August. **Willow Emerald Damselfly** continued to be recorded at additional locations across the VC with slightly larger numbers seen at those sites where it was first recorded in the previous two years.

In total, just over 1300 records were received in 2023, but about 500 have been 'parked' as 'plausible' due to vague or extremely vague grid references. Thank you to everyone who submitted records this year.



Image credit: Male Willow Emerald Damselfly by S. Orridge

North-east and North-west Yorkshire

VC 62 & 65

by Keith Gittens

In contrast to 2022, good weather in May and June meant early emerging species were much in evidence with good numbers of **Four-spotted Chaser** and **Black-tailed Skimmer**. The warm conditions accelerated the development of some of our later damselfly species with early records of both **Willow Emerald Damselfly** and **Small Red-eyed Damselfly**. Unfortunately, as we got into July the weather deteriorated, so the remainder of the year proved difficult for recording as well as for our Odonata. Despite this there were some good records and VC65 continues to add new species to its list.

Hairy Dragonfly benefitted from the good spring resulting in records for a second year for VC65 at Nosterfield. In VC62 there was a sighting at a new site in the Howardian Hills to add to those which now annually have records.

Following the influx of **Lesser Emperors** in 2022 there were again records in July-August 2023: a single record from Wykeham Lakes in VC62 and two records from Nosterfield in VC65.

A wandering **Norfolk Hawker** was also seen briefly near Redcar, on 13 June; a second record for VC62, the other dating to July 2021.

There was only one record of **Red-veined Darter** from the very edge of VC62 near Filey on 25 June; amazingly, on the same date as the last record in 2020!

Willow Emerald Damselfly again produced widespread records though mainly from VC62. The first record was of two emergents in the Howardian Hills in VC62 on 17 July, two weeks earlier than in 2022.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly also had early records in both vice-counties: 22 June near Catterick in VC65 (exactly four weeks earlier than the previous earliest record for VC65 of 19 July) and the earliest ever record across both my VCs by one week, and 26 June at Strensall Common in VC62, three days earlier than the previous earliest record for this VC.

Red-eyed Damselfly is another new addition to the VC65 species list, discovered on 26 May at the Nosterfield reedbed; the species was seen regularly through June. The species was also recorded for the first time at the recently created ponds at Forest of Flowers in the Vale of York, in VC62.

The established Nosterfield Reserve and recently created wetlands at Nosterfield Quarry recorded a total of 22 species in 2023, a real hot spot for VC65. At Forest of Flowers, a rewilding project in the Vale of York that consists of a series of 17 ponds created since 2019, a total of 18 species were recorded in 2023.

Both projects are true testaments to what can be achieved in a relatively short space of time.

In conjunction with Freshwater Habitats Trust and Butterfly Conservation, scrub control continued at Yorkshire Water's Boltby reservoir to maintain habitat for both dragonflies and butterflies.

Several events were attended throughout the summer including wildlife days, identification training and walks.

Many thanks to all who contributed records.

South-west Yorkshire VC63

by Alistair McLean

The highlight for 2023 has been the change in distribution of the Hairy Dragonfly. For years, Potteric Carr (SE6000) produced the most westerly records in South-west Yorkshire. In the last few years, it has expanded its range further South and West, reaching Old Moor RSPB Reserve (SE4202) in 2020. In 2023, the species was spotted on the River Torne (SK5997), taking advantage of the promising wetland habitat around the iPort, just South of Potteric Carr. This newly created site is naturally under-recorded for Odonata; if permissions can be obtained, it will be featuring as a field meeting in 2024. However, the sighting of a Hairy Dragonfly at Treeton Dyke (SK4386) by A. Deighton, on the Rotherham/Sheffield border, is well beyond the previous range of the species, and is approximately halfway between the iPort site and the closest Derbyshire records in Stovely (SK4574). This is worthy of further investigation in 2024 to determine whether it is established at Treeton, and whether the species is using the River Rother for transit.



Image credit: Male Ruddy Darter by Alistair McLean

Mid-West Yorkshire VC64

by Simon Joseph

Nine Damselfly species and 13 Dragonfly species were recorded in mid-west Yorkshire in 2023; the species seen were the same as the previous year.

In addition a Lesser Emperor was recorded at Rippon City Wetlands in July by an experienced recorder, but this could not be verified as no photograph was submitted.

Damselflies :

The earliest recorded Damselflies were of **Large Red Damselflies** on 23 April. They were the only species recorded in April. May added five more species: **Azure Damselfly**, **Common Blue Damselfly**, **Blue-tailed Damselfly**, **Red-eyed Damselfly** and **Banded Demoiselles**. **Small Red-eyed Damselflies** were added in July and **Emerald Damselflies** in August. The last Damselflies on the wing were the **Willow Emerald Damselfly** from July to September.

Azure Damselfly, *Coenagrion puella*, 9 May – 3 September. Common and widespread.

Banded Demoiselle, *Calopteryx splendens*, 20 May – 6 August. Locally common along the rivers Aire, Ouse, Ribble, Ure, Wharfe, and nearby wetlands.

Blue-tailed Damselfly, *Ischnura elegans*, 19 May – 6 September. Common and widespread.

Common Blue Damselfly, *Enallagma cyathigerum*, 14 May – 5 September. Common and widespread.

Emerald Damselfly, *Lestes sponsa*, 9 July – 6 September. Common and widespread.

Large Red Damselfly, *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*, 23 April – 29 July. Common and widespread.

Red-eyed Damselfly, *Erythromma najas*, 22 May – 13 August. Small number at the eastern end of the vice county for Ripon, Plumpton Rocks, St Aidans, Ripon canal, Harewood Within and Staveley.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly, *Erythromma viridulum*, 4 July – 29 August. Found in a small number of sites in the South-east of the vice county, at St Aidans, Rodley and Staveley nature reserves. Singletons were also seen at Fairburn Ings and Askham Bogs.

Willow Emerald Damselfly, *Chalcolestes viridis*, 29 July – 9 September. They are now well established along the Selby Canal; large numbers were seen and

photographed and there was extensive evidence of oviposition scars. Small numbers were recorded at the Dragonfly Hotspot Rodley Nature Reserve, on six separate days; it seems likely that they are breeding there. There were several records from the oxbow lake at St Aidans and there were also single records for Bramley near Leeds, RSPB Fairburn Ings and Staveley Nature Reserve.

Dragonflies:

Black Darter, *Sympetrum danae*, 24 July – 23 September. Recorded at Timble, Fairburn Ings, and Malham Tarn. Likely to be more common and widespread than this but under recorded due to their habitat preference making them less accessible. They are also common on Grindleton Fell, but this site was not surveyed in 2023.

Black-tailed Skimmer, *Orthetrum cancellatum*, 29 May – 6 September. Widespread in small numbers. Locally common at Rodley NR, St Aidans and Staveley.

Broad-bodied Chaser, *Libellula depressa*, 22 May – 10 August. Common and widespread.

Brown Hawker, *Aeshna grandis*, 16 June – 5 September. Common and widespread in the Eastern half of the vice county, but records are largely absent from the western half.

Common Darter, *Sympetrum striolatum*, 27 June – 11 November. Common and widespread.

Common Hawker, *Aeshna juncea*, 16 June – 29 September. Small numbers seen at: St Aidans, Fanghorn Woods, Timble Ings, Grassington, Malham and Austwick Moss.

Emperor Dragonfly, *Anax imperator*, 10 June – 7 September. Common and widespread.

Four-spotted Chaser, *Libellula quadrimaculata*, 15 May – 13 July. Common and widespread.

Golden-ringed Dragonfly, *Cordulegaster boltonii*, 6 June – 29 July. Reliably found at Timble Ings and the Forest of Bowland, with occasional sightings in other places.

Hairy Dragonfly, *Brachytron pratense*, 19 May – 12 June. They have a stable population at Staveley NR. Unusually a single female was seen at Fairburn Ings 24 May, confirmed with a photo. There were also reports from Ripon City Wetlands, Rodley (the town not the NR) and St Aidans. These did not have photos to confirm but did come from experienced recorders.

Migrant Hawker, *Aeshna mixta*, 17 July – 5 November. Common and widespread.

Ruddy Darter, *Sympetrum sanguineum*, 7 July – 8 September. Locally common towards the east of the VC, particularly: St Aidans, Fairburn Ings, Sherburn-in-Elmet, Staveley NR and around Leeds.

Southern Hawker, *Aeshna cyanea*, 24 June – 23 September. Common and widespread.

The earliest dragonfly was a **Four-spotted Chaser** at Fairburn Ings on 15 May. Also recorded in May were **Black-tailed Skimmer**, **Broad-bodied Chaser** and **Hairy Dragonfly**. The last records were for **Common Darter** and **Migrant Hawker** in November.

In 2023 we had stands at the Leeds Bird Fair at Rodley Nature Reserve, Denso Marton Nature Reserve and at a wildlife forum in Grassington organised by the Craven Badger Group. We also met with the Yorkshire Peat partnership to help them with surveying and identification.

County Durham VC66 by Michael Coates

The full County Durham can be found in a separate document [here](#).

TO ADD

Cumbria VC69-70

by David Clarke

2023 was a mixed year for weather, with only late May through June being fine and stable. The wet July and only slightly better August were not good for most late-season species. Despite this, some 2159 records were received - itself a record! Almost half of these came direct to me as county recorder, the remainder via online recording on iRecord and iNaturalist. The good total has been enabled by some useful recruits to recorders, and the geographic range they cover.

An analysis of the frequency of the 24 species recorded in 2023 is interesting and not entirely predictable. The colonising **Broad-bodied Chaser** ranked fourth overall in total records and was more often reported than its commoner relative, the **Four-spotted Chaser**. Although now declining in southern England, **Common Hawker** was third highest in the Cumbria records.

Genuine vagrants were scarce. **Lesser Emperor** produced two records, both males, presumed to be different individuals. The first was at Flookburgh (SD37) on 8 July (MN); the second at North Walney (SD17) on 16 August (CT). These counted towards the widespread occurrence of this European species in 2023. It increasingly breeds in England but has only been recorded once before in Cumbria in 2006. A male **Norfolk Hawker** at Foulshaw Moss on 7 July (LW) was the first Cumbria record of this rapidly spreading species, once a rarity. It could well have come from the Lancashire population, rather than being a true migrant.

Banded Demoiselle are still actively colonising areas of the lowlands throughout the county wherever suitable stretches of rivers occur. It continues to increase at the Skelwith Bridge (NY30) **Beautiful Demoiselle** site, where it was first found in 2019.

Beautiful Demoiselle: records from NY22 and 32 east of Keswick, on the R. Greta, Naddle Beck and St John's Beck, seem to indicate a recent expansion in this part of the county. Other streams in this general area may be worth checking. A male east of Carlisle near Warwick Mill (NY45) in early July (QC) was very unusual, with no obvious nearby source population.

Variable Damselfly: there were no known recording visits to the single site in West Cumbria during 2023; some monitoring is planned for 2024.

Moderate numbers of **Migrant Hawker** were found for a second year running at Wilkins pool, Longtown (NY36), by PH and AM. The August date gives some confidence that local breeding occurs, and again mating pairs were noted. While there is no proof yet that the life cycle completes there (or anywhere in the county), this could be a source of some of the records elsewhere in the Solway area. Records around the county were mainly from coastal sites, though a single occurrence at RSPB Geltsdale (NY65) was a notable exception and, interestingly, in early August.

Downy Emerald was once again recorded at the North-east end of Derwent Water (JR), where it has yet to be shown to be breeding. It was otherwise noted quite

widely at its known Lakeland sites, and at Foulshaw Moss. Possible sites further north on Bassenthwaite Lake may now be worth checking.

Broad-bodied Chaser was recorded in over 50 tetrads in 2023, the most ever recorded. It is clearly establishing a presence throughout the county. An emergence of over 20 individuals at a pool at Drigg (SD09) began in late April (CA). Sites across the county have varied enormously from muddy scrapes to large ponds in old quarries and gardens.

Black-tailed Skimmer is still mainly a coastal species. The Lyth Valley west of Kendal has the most regular inland sites, of which Park End Moss (SD59) is one.

Keeled Skimmer is increasingly recorded. The iRecord map now shows hectads for much of the southern half of the area post 2015, in contrast to the eastern side of the country at this latitude.

Ruddy Darter was once again found only at its single site on the Solway plain. It might spread again, as it did in the 1990s, in a fine summer (MA; DC).

White-faced Darter: all three populations fared well, aided by good weather in June. The Drumburgh Moss introduction project, monitored by the Cumbria Wildlife Trust team, produced close to 700 emerging adults after only three years of stock translocations, as reported in DN84. The species also provided other interesting sightings: two records were well beyond Foulshaw Moss, which is presumed the origin of the single males concerned. These were at Duddon Mosses (SD28) on 1 June (ML) and High Man Tarn, Grizedale (SD39) on 16 June (MR). The sites are respectively 25 and 18 km from Foulshaw.

Recorders acknowledged above: MA: Mike Abbs, CA: Chris Arthur, DC: David Clapperton, QC: Quentin Cox, PH: Pete Howard, ML: Marc McLoughlin, MN: Michael McNaghten, AM: Adam Moan, JR: John Reinecke, MR: Mo Richards, CT: Chris Turner, LW: Liz Weeks.

An account of the recent range changes of **Broad-bodied Chaser** and **Banded Demoiselle** in Cumbria appears in the *Journal of the British Dragonfly Society*, vol 40, no. 1, Spring 2024. Details of the White-faced Darter 'extra-limital' sightings in 2023 were published in *Lakeland Naturalist*, vol 11.2 [Autumn 2023]. A pdf of the article is available from the author: davidclarke6970@gmail.com

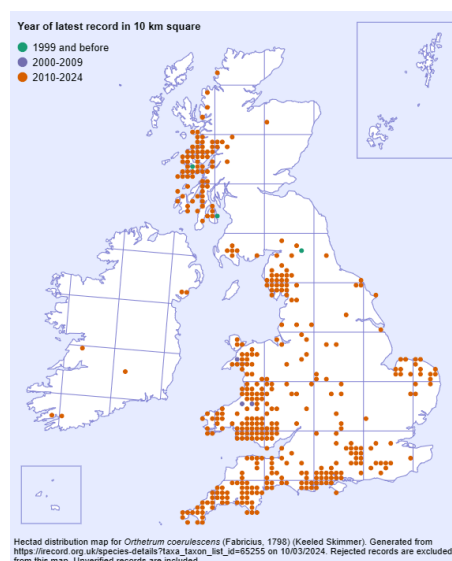




Image credits: Broad-bodied Chaser emerging at Drigg (SD09), 28 April 2023 (another emerger in background) by Chris Artur, Downy Emerald, male. North-east side of Derwentwater, opposite Great Wood, 3rd June 2023 by John Reinecke, Migrant Hawker, female, Howard's Pond, RSPB Geltsdale (NY65), 8 August 2023. By Adam Moan, Norfolk Hawker, male, at Foulshaw Moss, 7 July 2023 by Liz Weeks, White-faced Darter, male. Duddon Mosses by unknown

Isle of Man VC71

by Pete Hadfield

Our Dragonfly season started quite late this year with the first record being one **Large Red Damselfly** on the 1 May at Laxey.

The early part of the summer had all the excitement with three **Black-tailed Skimmers** seen at two sites on 13 June, Point of Ayre NR and Ballanette. This was the second and third record of **Black-tailed Skimmers** for the island. A visit to the POA NR on the 15th yielded the two **Black-tailed Skimmers** but also a **Red-veined Darter**, the fourth record for the island. The two species at POA NR were both recorded from the newly dug dragonfly ponds at the Manx Bird Life Reserve.

These were really good records in 2023, but the greatest excitement came on 10 June with a visit to Ballaugh Plantation to check a pond that had dried up in last year's drought. There we discovered that, not only was the pond back with Odonata, but also it had a small population of **Azure Damselflies**. **Azure Damselflies** were considered extinct on the island after 2015 when the only known pond for them was lost. 10 days later there was another record of an **Azure Damselfly** at a farm pond 9km away from Ballaugh. There will be a concerted effort to try and find more **Azure Damselfly** sites in 2024.

Outside of the migrant records, news from the POA NR was mixed. **Emperor** numbers were up from last year with a maximum of 13 across the site but our latest coloniser, the **Brown Hawker**, which only occurs at the MBL POA Reserve, was not recorded.

Migrant Hawker and **Emperor** colonisation continued with more new sites found, although the highest **Migrant Hawker** count was only 12 at Ballanette- a big drop from last year's 21 at the same site.

Ballanette also saw the highest ever count of **Common Blue Damselflies** with 135 on 4 June; on the same day, at Kionslieu farm cottages, the highest count of **Blue-tailed Damselflies** for the year was only 60 compared with 105 from the Calf of Man in 2022. **Black Darter** totals were also down with only a maximum of 10 being seen on 8 September compared to 52 in 2022.

It seems there was a pattern with the later emerging species having low total counts, or none in the case of **Brown Hawker** this year. The possible cause of this was the dreadful weather in July with a lot of rain and breezy winds. A positive side of the bad weather, and a buck to the trend of the last few years, we didn't lose any ponds to drought this year.



Image credits: Male Red-veined Darter and Male Black-tailed Skimmer by Pete Hadfield

County Dragonfly Recorder Contact Details

Local Group Details Can be found on the BDS website under the 'About' drop down menu.

www.british-dragonflies.org.uk

