

British
Dragonfly
Society



2023 Scotland
County Dragonfly
Record Reports

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Scotland Overview

by Pat Batty

After a wet winter, late May-early June was exceptionally dry and hot in Scotland, particularly in the west. However, the summer was wet, so while early flying species did well, numbers were down for species that emerged later in the season.

Large Red Damselfly was first recorded on 5 April, **Four-spotted Chaser** on 8 April and the **Common Blue Damselfly** on 12 May.

Hairy Dragonfly had very few sightings this year, down half compared to previous years; however, there was an early sighting on 25 April. Most sightings were from Argyll but three new breeding sites were found in Dumfries and Galloway.

The **Keeled Skimmer** continues to increase in the west of Scotland with a new site discovered in the north-west; records were received from Argyll and the Islands, Ardnamurchan and Mull.

Beautiful Demoiselle was first seen on 29 May; there were three times as many records compared to 2022 reflecting the sunny weather during its flight period, and all were from the west. A male was seen at the most westerly point of the Scottish mainland at Ardnamurchan lighthouse.

The **Banded Demoiselle** also had many more sightings, compared to 2022, in the south and east, expanding its range in the Borders and Edinburgh area and along the Solway coast. The species was seen from 11 May to 28 July.

There were very few sightings of the **Brilliant Emerald** this year. It was seen from 5 June, with most records from Loch Bran where ovipositing was seen on 20 June. Its flight season, though early compared to recent years, overlapped with the **Downy Emerald** in Scotland. It was also seen in Argyll, the last sighting recorded on 24 June.

The **Azure Damselfly** was seen 10 May-16 August and is now more widespread south of the Great Glen. There were only six records for the **Variable Damselfly** from Argyll and South-west Scotland. The **Emerald Damselfly** had fewer records than usual reflecting the poor summer.

The **Black Darter** also had fewer records in 2023 and was first seen on 8 July. In contrast, the **Common Darter** was widespread, flying from an exceptionally early date of 30 April until 11 November. The **Southern Hawker** also had more sightings in 2023, ranging from the Borders to as far north as Dunrobin Castle in East Sutherland; this species was seen 18 June-14 October.

Adult **Common Hawker** were recorded very early again, flying 10 June-15 October.

Rare Bog Species

by Pat Batty

After a wet winter many bog pools refilled and were in good condition early in the spring. However, from mid-May the hot, dry weather caused large areas of pools to dry out again with sphagnum crisp under foot. Thankfully the drought was shorter than in 2021 and the pools were full again in July.

In the north-west small **Azure Hawker** larvae were found in April and early May, but unfortunately, these pools dried out and larvae were not found again later in the year. There were, however, similar numbers of **Azure Hawker** records as last year; nearly half of these were for larvae. Adults were seen 3 June-11 August, and one exuvia was found in Sutherland, a rare occurrence. Records were mostly from the main known areas in the west with a sighting from Skye.

The pools creation project at Corroul was very successful; these pools retained water when neighbouring ones dried out. In September, 14 **Azure Hawker** larvae were found in seven of the 12 new pools. Interestingly, over 70% were mature larvae, greater than 29mm in length, with well-developed wing buds. This is a much higher percentage of mature larvae than is usually found in pools. Most of the pools had been deepened to enhance water retention or had sphagnum carefully transferred into them to create the species' preferred habitat. Two mature larvae, found in a new pool, were believed to possibly have travelled overland from nearby dried pools.

The **Northern Emerald** and **White-faced Darter** seemed to have survived the dry spell much better than the **Azure Hawker**. Graham Rennie carried out extensive survey work in the north-west and found new breeding pools for all these species. The **Northern Emerald** had over 70 sightings, over half of which were for larvae; adults were seen 30 May-18 July. Emergence was seen at a new site in the Trossachs on 31 May and 3 June. Females were egg laying on Flanders Moss; bog restoration work here has improved the habitat and the species is now seen more regularly.

The **White-faced Darter** had over a hundred sightings recorded from scattered pools (mainly through survey work); over half were for larvae; adults were seen 12 May-2 July. Records were mostly from the main known area although some came from novel sites in the west and there was also a record from Ben Wyvis. Larvae were found in hill pools as high as 520m a.s.l.

The **Northern Damselfly** was recorded in flight 30 April-7 July in known areas in the Cairngorms and on Deeside. There continues to be a strong population at the outlying site near Tain. Survey work continued at Castle Fraser in 2023, thanks to the efforts of Toni Watt, and the species continues to breed in both pools. The project to create and manage pools for the damselfly in the Cairngorms National Park has been very successful; Stephen Corcoran found over half of the newly created pools had been colonised.

A bid was submitted to the Nature Restoration Fund to finance further work for the rare bog species, but unfortunately it was unsuccessful.

Southern Species Update

by Pat Batty

With high temperatures in 2023, southern species of Dragonfly flourished and some continued expanding their range north.

The **Emperor Dragonfly** had a bumper year, with records received from throughout the Borders and South-west Scotland. It was first seen on 6 June and ovipositing was seen 15 June-4 September. Larvae were also found confirming the species is now well established here.

The **Migrant Hawker** too has had increased sightings over the past two years. In 2023 it was seen in three main areas along the Solway coast including at a new site; it was also recorded from the eastern Borders to near Edinburgh.

The **Red-veined Darter** had a good year at a number of restricted sites in South-east Scotland.

The **Black-tailed Skimmer** had a record year for sightings; most records came from known sites and egg-laying was witnessed at Newmains and Seton.

The **Broad-bodied Chaser** continues to expand its range, mainly in South-east Scotland. There was one record from a garden near Forres in Moray - larvae may have been introduced with garden plants.

The **Vagrant Emperor** was photographed in Berwickshire, floating on the surface of a river.

There was only one record for the **Brown Hawker** this year from a new garden pond in Edinburgh.

Partnership Projects and Other Updates

by Pat Batty

A partnership agreement was signed with Forestry and Land Scotland, and the Scottish Officer visited all their main areas giving training and management advice. In the south a network of ponds has been created as a result. In the west, advice was given on the management of sites for **White-faced Darter**, in particular; here there are pools that have dried up and urgent management is needed to maintain the species.

An extensive survey for dragonflies was carried out at Coire Glas above Loch Lochy, Lochaber. The area is to be developed as part of a huge pump storage scheme by Scottish Southern Energy Renewables SSE. **White-faced Darter**, **Azure Hawker** and **Northern Emerald** all breed here. Despite the dry weather, these species were found at several sites. Major reconstruction work will be taking place in the area but identified pools will be conserved and, in addition, pool creation will take place as part of the environmental plan and bog restoration work.

During 2023, advice was given to several land owners and surveys were carried out by volunteers. We are also working closely with: the National Trust for Scotland, the Woodland Trust, Nature Scot, the Scottish Wildlife Trust, and the Butterfly Conservation Society.

Many thanks to the large number of volunteers that have sent in over 7,000 records which are very important for monitoring the situation here.

The BDS is recruiting for a new full time Scottish Officer to help continue the work in Scotland.

Orkney VC111

by Graeme Walker

In 2023, following another cool spring, we had a warm summer with plenty of consecutively sunny days; perhaps not as hot as mainland Scotland, and nowhere near as sweltering as England, but certainly better than we have experienced in recent years.

The flight season in Orkney was, overall, a little over four months, bookended by a **Large Red Damselfly** found on 21 May near Berriedale in Hoy, and a **Black Darter** seen on 23 September in the Birsay Moors of West Mainland. Between those dates, there were several notable moments. . .

On 9 July, the Orkney Field Club held a Bioblitz at the old Stromness reservoir site in West Mainland. The day was overcast and windy, not ideal “odo-ing” weather; however, when a reporter from BBC Radio Scotland appeared, there was a bit of pressure to find something colourful and charismatic to talk about. The group was keeping well away from the water’s edge as there was a brood of recently-fledged Tufted Duck chicks present, which if spooked would have been an easy lunch for the local gull population. Thankfully, a **Blue-tailed Damselfly** was found in a runnel on the nearby moorland, and the resulting conversation was broadcast on “Out of Doors” a few Saturdays later.

A **Lesser Emperor** was found, sadly deceased, in Toab, East Mainland, on 10 July - only the third Orkney record for this species.

An **Emerald Damselfly** was reported on 28 July near Brinkies Brae in Stromness. Whilst the species has been recorded in Orkney since it was discovered at Hoy in 2010, this was the first sighting in West Mainland, despite being less than three miles from the nearest known site: a quarry pool on the island of Graemsay.

Nationally, Dragonfly Week had been moved to a much earlier date in 2023, and the beginning of July is not the optimum period for species in Orkney. Due to a combination of factors, the local event did not actually take place until 12 August, when a private site was visited for the first time. A recce the previous week had identified the probable source of most of the records being generated in Stromness: a large pool amongst natural vegetation in the garden of Brinkies Brae Guest House. The owner kindly allowed a dragonfly event to be held here and we were astounded at the site’s abundance of **Black Darters** and **Emerald Damselflies**. Both the recce and the event were blessed with sunny warmth and little in the way of a breeze, which delighted both insects and humans alike.

On the afternoon of 20 August 20, whilst trying (and failing) to photograph a butterfly on Black Craig, the coastal hill to the north of Stromness, my mobile phone chirped an incoming message. The butterfly was my one and only sighting of a Painted Lady Butterfly all year and, as it flew off, I indignantly looked at my

phone and then stared at it in astonishment. A **Migrant Hawker** had been reported foraging near the Loch of Burness in Westray. Not just the first Dragonfly sighting for that particular island, but the first of that species for the whole Orkney archipelago, and likely, at that time, the most northern land-based sighting in the UK.

Between June and August, both **Large Red Damselfly** and **Blue-tailed Damselfly** were recorded from Arcadia Park, a new green space in Kirkwall, which is located near the new Balfour Hospital. Significantly, a pair of **Blue-tailed Damselflies** were seen mating at the site, meaning that in 2024 it should be possible to prove successful breeding of the species in the public park!

[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

