

# Dragonfly and Damselfly Larvae

When larvae hatch they are tiny, only a few millimetres long, but grow to become top underwater predators. The Emperor Dragonfly has the largest larvae, which can grow up to 56mm long. As they develop, larvae undergo 10-14 moults, shedding their outer exoskeleton allowing them to grow in size. A few days before emergence, mature larvae move close to the water's surface as they transition to breathing air.

Dragonfly and Damselfly larvae both have six legs, wing sheaths and a hinged jaw called a labium used to catch prey. Their colour varies from green to brown. Some Dragonfly species that live on the waterbed are covered in hairs which trap sediment camouflaging them from predators and prey. While the larvae of some Dragonfly species have large eyes for hunting prey, others have small eyes but longer legs and antennae allowing them to hunt by touch.

**The larvae of Dragonfly and Damselfly have distinct differences in anatomy which make it easy to tell them apart.**



Emerald Damselfly © Christophe Brochard

**Damselfly** larvae all have an elongated body-shape. They also have three fin-like caudal lamellae which absorb oxygen from the water and assist with swimming. Caudal lamellae vary in size, shape and patterning between species.

**Dragonfly** larvae are either torpedo-shaped or have a more spider-like body-shape. Some species have spines along their abdomen, some are covered in hairs and some have patterning on their body. They breathe by drawing water into their rectum where they have internal gills. To escape predators they can shoot water out of their rectum, propelling them through the water.



Scarse Chaser © Christophe Brochard