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DRAGONFLY NEWS

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE FOR DRAGONFLY ENTHUSIASTS, SUPPORTERS AND CONSERVATIONISTS.



British Dragonfly Society



HELP DRAGONFLIES THRIVE

We have launched our most ambitious fundraiser - help us reach £50,000 to ensure dragonflies can survive and thrive!

As a BDS member, you already play a vital part in protecting Britain's dragonflies and the wetlands they depend on. Your membership helps fund our conservation, recording, education and engagement work – and we're incredibly grateful for your support.

Like many charities, the British Dragonfly Society is facing rising costs and increasing financial pressures. We've had to make difficult decisions and our staff team is now much smaller. Yet our ambition for dragonflies has never been bigger.

There is so much more we want to achieve: restoring precious wetlands, protecting threatened species, supporting the volunteers who make dragonfly recording possible, creating opportunities for young people and helping more people discover these extraordinary insects.

That's why we've launched our Help Dragonflies Thrive campaign, with a target of raising £50,000.

If you can make an additional donation, your support could help turn our plans into action. Every donation, whatever the size, can help us continue vital work for dragonflies across Britain.

And if you're not able to donate, you can still make a difference. Please share our campaign with friends, family, colleagues and fellow wildlife lovers. You might introduce us to someone who can help take our work further.

Together, our members have achieved so much. Together, we can do even more.



DRAGONFLY NEWS
Published twice a year, in April and October, Dragonfly News dives into the fascinating lives of dragonflies and damselflies (known as Odonata to the experts). Each edition features the work that the British Dragonfly Society, including its staff team and fantastic army of volunteers, is doing to monitor, record, research and conserve and raise awareness of these enchanting insects.

WEBSITE
Visit british-dragonflies.org.uk for much more!

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WELCOME



There's plenty to enjoy in this issue, from an impressive season of sightings to inspiring conservation work happening across the UK. We also celebrate some of the people and projects helping dragonflies thrive, as well as the enthusiasm and creativity of our members.

It's been another busy year for the British Dragonfly Society. Despite the challenges we've faced, our ambition for dragonflies and wetlands remains as strong as ever. From Dragonfly Hotspots and habitat restoration to training, recording and our Youth Panel, there is lots happening – and lots more we want to do.

You'll also find details of our **Help Dragonflies Thrive** fundraising campaign. Your support helps us continue our work for dragonflies and the wetlands they depend on, so thank you to everyone who has donated or shared the campaign.

There's also a little change to our team. Ellie has now started her maternity leave, and we wish her and her family all the very best. Ellie will be returning to BDS in autumn 2027, and we look forward to welcoming her back then.

Thank you, as always, for supporting the Society, sharing your sightings, attending events and volunteering your time. It's your enthusiasm that makes the dragonfly community so special.

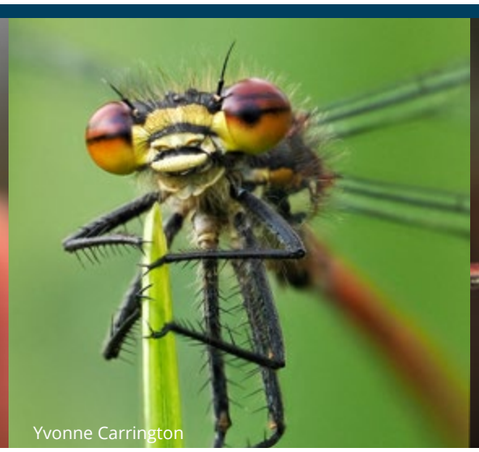
Lauren Kennedy
Editor-in-Chief

Front cover image: Celebrating our conservation efforts in Scotland - Northern Damselfly photographed this summer at Tombane by Tim Coleshaw

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DRAGONFLIES AND YOU

You never know when you might catch a glimpse of the blue and green patterns of a hawker, witness bizarre dragonfly behaviour or the dark dash of a Black Darter. But who better to capture a photo of a Beautiful Demoiselle or a mighty Emperor than you, our **dedicated members** and **supporters**?
These are just a few of the incredible photos you sent to us recently.



THE EMPEROR STRIKES BACK

Lyndon Currie waited over an hour for an Emperor or Lesser Emperor to land at Leybourne Lakes. To be surprised by an Emperor crashing into the grass with a substantial lunch - a Four-spotted Chaser.



SCOTLAND DRAGON SPOTTING

Gordon Baxter has been recording species in Scotland. On 10 May, a female Blue-tailed Damselfly (*rufescens* form) at North Haugh pond, St Andrews, became his first dragonfly sighting of the year. In the summer, he spotted an Emerald Damselfly at Cairnfield Muir in Fife. Initially perched with its wings spread, as expected, the wind soon had it spinning like a weather vane! It eventually pulled its wings in, creating a more streamlined shape to weather the breeze.





CROCHET CHAMPION

The winning entry from the Nature over Natter Dragonfly Week art competition – a wonderfully crocheted Emperor Dragonfly by CowCatCrochet. Find out more about the competition and see the winning entry on page 26.

GOLDEN-RINGED ROMANCE

A lucky find for David Turrell – a pair of Golden-ringed Dragonflies caught in cop at Lee Moor, Dartmoor. A beautiful moment to capture!



GARDEN VISITOR

Youth Panel member Sam captured this Southern Hawker laying eggs on the edge of their garden pond. Proof that you don't need a huge space to attract dragonflies – adding a pond to your garden can create valuable habitat for these amazing insects!



If you would like your special sighting to feature in the next issue of Dragonfly News, then **tag us on social media** or send your submissions to **lauren.kennedy@british-dragonflies.org.uk**

DRAGONFLY HQ

Read the latest news and project updates from Team Dragonfly.

CHAIR UPDATE



The team with Patron Megan McCubbin at Global Birdfair

KEEPING BDS MOVING FORWARD

At the time of writing, the BDS is operating without a Chair of Trustees, so I am writing this on behalf of my fellow board members. Tim Coleshaw stepped down from the role of Chair, as planned, in February, but has continued helping with ongoing projects behind the scenes. Our sincere thanks go to Tim not only for his years as Chair, but also as Trustee from 2021. Prior to that Tim was our link in the Natural England Office in Telford, where he oversaw and supported our BDS Officers for many years before his retirement from NE.

Richard Greene and Josh Younespour have also stepped down as Trustees this year, but we have been joined by Michael Coates. Michael is County Dragonfly Recorder (CDR) for County Durham and South Northumberland. The Trustee board currently stands at nine.

Major achievements since the spring magazine have been the conclusion of the highly successful Dragonflies on the Bog (DotB) project restoring habitats in north-west Scotland for five rare species; further funding for our 100 Ponds project for Northern Damselfly; and the early stages of work for a Southern Damselfly project in England and Wales.

While this practical conservation work, together with dragonfly recording, public engagement and many other BDS activities continues to promote and safeguard dragonflies, we need your help to continue this vital work. I'm sure you are all aware of rising costs and these are also creating challenges for the BDS. If you can support our work beyond the support you already kindly give as a member, please dig a little deeper to help us. That way we can continue to protect, conserve and enjoy our wonderful dragonflies long into the future.

BDS Trustees usually meet online, but once a year we try to get Trustees and staff together at a Dragonfly Hotspot. This spring the chosen location was Whisby Nature Park, Lincolnshire. After the morning business meeting and lunch we were shown around part of the nature reserve by former BDS Engagement Officer, Fiona McKenna. The Nature Park is formed from a series of former gravel pits, now flooded. It attracts birds, dragonflies and visitors alike. We were delighted to see several dragonfly species on the wing including Hairy Dragonfly, Broad-bodied Chaser and Large Red Damselfly. Thrilling the birders among us, we also had excellent views of a Cuckoo.

On staff matters, Lauren Kennedy has rejoined the active team after her maternity leave concluded in April, and Ellie Winnett will have started her own maternity leave by the time you read this. Emma Stevens-Veitch finished her time as DotB project officer in April, but promptly moved across to manage the 100 Ponds project. You can read more about our Scottish work elsewhere in this issue. Since the 100 Ponds work in Cairngorms National Park is part-time, Emma has also agreed to take on a covering role for Ellie's maternity leave. Daniele Muir, our part-time Scottish Scientific Officer, continues her grant-funded work on Northern Damselfly and other Scottish dragonflies, funded by NatureScot, and Forestry and Land Scotland. All of our work is supported by volunteers too numerous to name, but you know who you are, so THANK YOU!

Pam Taylor (Acting Chair of Trustees)

EVENTS

GLOBAL BIRDFAIR

BDS was once again present at the annual Global Birdfair at Rutland Water from 10th to 12th July.

Ellie Winnett and I set up the double stand on 9th July, and boy was it hot! With temperatures over 30°C we were pleased to find we were next to a marquee entrance, so at least we had a little breeze every now and again.

The Friday was also over 30°C and visitor numbers seemed down on previous years. Even so, our team of four chatted to almost 300 people on that first day. Most of them appeared before lunchtime. Things became really quiet in the afternoon, with many event visitors making the most of cool drinks in the shade. Thankfully the Saturday and Sunday were noticeably cooler and we spoke to nearly 400 people on the Saturday. They were a good mix of old friends, BDS members and total beginners to the world of dragonflies and garden ponds. Our barrel pond on the stand provided a good talking point, as did the exuviae and dragonfly wings under the microscopes.

The BDS shop did brisk business, with dragonfly cards and identification guides being the obvious favourites. We also had activities for children on the stand, including model dragonflies made from lolly sticks, plus paper wings that they could colour themselves. We see more and more children and young people at



Crafting activities at Birdfair

the Birdfair each year, which is fantastic.

Among this year's visitors to the BDS stand were our Patron, Megan McCubbin, and President, Mike Dilger, along with his son Zachary. Our thanks go to the other BDS volunteers who helped over the weekend - Nicole Barnes, Tony Clarke and David Goddard. Special thanks go to the award-winning ecology and eco-acoustics consultancy Baker Consultants for sponsoring us this year, and to Global Birdfair for its financial support.

Pam Taylor

NEWS FROM SCOTLAND

NATURE CHAMPION

For the past few years, Lorna Slater MSP has been our Nature Champion for Northern Damselfly. Although her championship ended in spring, we were delighted when she asked to take on the role again. In July, Lorna and her husband Gordon spent a working holiday at Tombane, a beautiful Northern Damselfly site near Aberfeldy. Surrounded by non-native forestry, the site is increasingly threatened by Sitka spruce regeneration. Lorna and Gordon spent their time removing young Sitka spruce and marking young Scots pine to protect them from grazing deer. We joined them on a warm afternoon and saw the difference their work had already made. With dragonflies zipping around the ponds, we found several adult Northern Damselflies on the wing, as well as larvae. Lorna also enjoyed some ID training and is now feeling more confident identifying her favourite damselfly!

Daniele Muir





Willow Emerald Damselfly by Keith Marston

COLONIST AND MIGRANT NEWS

Written by Adrian Parr

With spring and summer 2026 having been even hotter and drier than the extremes experienced in 2025, at least in many parts of England and Wales, it will come as no surprise that some spectacular events took place in the dragonfly world between late May and late July. This makes 2026 one of the most dramatic years ever for migrant dragonflies, ranking alongside the heady days of 2006 and 2019.

In many ways the highlight of the year was an impressive invasion of **Red-veined Darter** and, when all records are in, this may prove to have been Britain's largest ever. The first sighting was on 21 May, when an individual was noted on Lundy Island, Devon, and by the beginning of August some 800+ sightings had been reported. Records came from much of England, though records in Wales were more restricted, being largely from the south coast. There were also several reports from southern Scotland, with a male seen on the Isle of Tiree on 22 July perhaps being the most notable. Nationally, the peak count was a staggering 115 at Siblyback Lake in Cornwall in early July, but counts of 40 or more were made at four further sites. Many individuals stayed around to breed, with mating and/or oviposition reported from large numbers of sites as far north as Lancashire and one also in the Scottish Borders. Since Red-veined Darter can have two generations in a year, substantial local emergences of a second generation are anticipated this autumn and, at the time of writing (early August), they had indeed begun at a few sites. Such emergences of Red-veined Darter may continue into early November if conditions remain favourable.

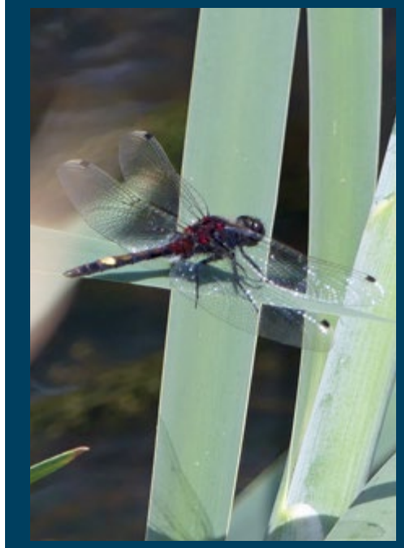
Although **Lesser Emperor** is now an increasingly common and widespread resident in Britain, very large numbers of migrants also clearly accompanied this year's Red-veined Darter influx, and the two species indeed often appeared together. Some of the more dramatic records of presumed migrants include large numbers present along the Pembrokeshire coast of Wales during late May, with, for example, six present at Ivor's Pond, St Davids, on 27 May. Elsewhere, one or two were present at Talkin Tarn in Cumbria during mid-July, with one also seen on Walney Island earlier in the month. Other northerly sightings included records from at least two sites in Northumberland, and one record on the Isle of Tiree in the Inner Hebrides on 22 July. Further south, the status of specific individuals becomes increasingly difficult to determine, but the very large number of new site records is certainly consistent with many migrants being about. It will be intriguing to see what a detailed analysis at the end of the season will reveal; there are already a staggering 700+ records to hand.

After a quiet year in 2025, **Southern Migrant Hawker** has also been recorded in numbers in southern England and coastal south Wales. Although some individuals will clearly be locally bred, here too it seems significant immigration has taken place. The most unexpected record so far is a male seen on the northern shores of Morecambe Bay on 30 July, but there have also been several reports from north Lincolnshire and Yorkshire. Again, it will be intriguing to see what an end-of-year analysis will reveal.

News of other species is also dramatic. Another of the year's major highlights was the discovery of a male **Large White-faced Darter** (*Leucorrhinia pectoralis*) at Earlswood in Surrey on 1 June - see image on the right. This represents the fourth modern British record, the other three having been from sites on the Suffolk coast during 2012 and 2018. The species is expanding on the near Continent, and with four British records in the last decade and a half, it is conceivable that it is a potential colonist. Unlike its more familiar relative, the White-faced Darter, it is not restricted to bogs instead typically frequenting ponds and lakes with rich emergent and floating vegetation. Finally, Britain's resident population of **Scarlet Darter** had a good season at its key site in Dorset, and there were signs that the species may now be starting to spread, with occasional sightings up to 4km from the main colony. A few potential immigrant Scarlet Darters were also claimed during the Red-veined Darter invasions, but as yet none of these records can be confirmed.

Well, what a year so far! It will be fascinating to see what the autumn has in store.

A WHITE-FACED SURPRISE IN SURREY




A **Large White-faced Darter** (*Leucorrhinia pectoralis*) provided a remarkable surprise for Lin Cork at Royal Earlswood Park, Surrey, on 1 June. A regular visitor to the site, Lin was photographing a Broad-bodied Chaser when a small, dark dragonfly caught her eye. Initially puzzled by its size and appearance, she managed to capture a single photograph as it attempted to displace the Chaser in increasingly windy conditions. The photograph subsequently revealed an extraordinary discovery – only the fourth modern British record of this continental species.

FIRST DATES

Few people will need reminding that spring and summer 2026 were remarkable for their periods of elevated temperature, with daily averages sometimes 5°C, or even 10°C, above the long-term norm. As a consequence, a number of very early emergences were reported.
Large Red Damselfly had been recorded at a minimum of six sites in south-west England by the end of March, and while a report of Common Blue Damselfly from the Walthamstow area on 22 March is currently unconfirmed, this part of Middlesex/Essex is known to have produced a number of very early sightings this year, perhaps due to some sort of urban heat-island effect.
Elsewhere, a Variable Damselfly seen at Ham Wall on 6 April is a particularly good record, while Norfolk Hawker was seen as early as 29 April as the species continues to establish breeding colonies away from its old stronghold in Norfolk.
Small Red-eyed Damselflies seen in Somerset as early as 4 June, with fully mature individuals seen in Essex the following day, are also of note. Although relatively few specific 'first date' records were broken – the glorious spring of 2011 still being noteworthy in this regard – by the end of April no fewer than 20 species had been reported on the wing. This is itself a new record; only two decades ago, more typical values were less than ten.


Large Red Damselfly - Roger Vercoe


Common Blue Damselfly - Roger Vercoe

Early emergences continued into late spring and summer, and the last species to be reported was, as usual, Migrant Hawker, with the first photographically documented record on 28 June, and with plausible sight records a few days earlier. All 'first date' information currently to hand is summarised here:

FIRST DATE	SPECIES	PLACE	OBSERVER
22-Mar-26	Large Red Damselfly	Dorset	per A. Brown
01-Apr-26	Common Blue Damselfly	Bedfordshire	T. Robson
01-Apr-26	Hairy Dragonfly	Bedfordshire	T. Robson
02-Apr-26	Broad-bodied Chaser	Pembrokeshire	A. Collens
06-Apr-26	Banded Demoiselle	Middlesex/Kent	M. Miklas/Anon.
06-Apr-26	Variable Damselfly	Somerset	B. Evans
08-Apr-26	Beautiful Demoiselle	Devon	G. Foale
12-Apr-26	Blue-tailed Damselfly	Middlesex	M. Miklas
16-Apr-26	Four-spotted Chaser	Warwickshire	A. Smith
18-Apr-26	Red-eyed Damselfly	Middlesex	M. Miklas
19-Apr-26	Azure Damselfly	Hampshire/Somerset	S. King/J. Russell
19-Apr-26	Downy Emerald	Wiltshire	H. England
24-Apr-26	White-faced Darter	Shropshire	H. Beaman
27-Apr-26	Scarce Chaser	Somerset/Wiltshire	M. Webb/K. Mantle
28-Apr-26	Scarce Blue-tailed Damsel.	Kent	Sandwich Bay Bird Obs.
28-Apr-26	White-legged Damselfly	Worcs.–Warks. border	J. Orme
29-Apr-26	Norfolk Hawker	Somerset	B. Watts
29-Apr-26	Common Clubtail	Oxon–Berks. border	G. Wyatt
30-Apr-26	Emperor Dragonfly	Hampshire	P. Winter
30-Apr-26	Black-tailed Skimmer	Somerset	R. Martin
07-May-26	Dainty Damselfly	Kent	A. Lipczyński
17-May-26	Scarce Emerald Damsel.	Essex	W. Langdon
17-May-26	Keeled Skimmer	Hampshire	S. Stone
21-May-26	Lesser Emperor	Kent	I. Stewart
23-May-26	Golden-ringed Dragonfly	Dorset/Somerset	E. Stubbs/P. Anslow/J. Syred
23-May-26	Brilliant Emerald	West Sussex	G. Trew
24-May-26	Small Red Damselfly	Norfolk/Cornwall/Cardigan	S. Rowland/S. Jones/H. Thomas
24-May-26	Common Darter	Worcestershire	A. Warr
25-May-26	Southern Hawker	Hertfordshire	D. Pausey
26-May-26	Ruddy Darter	Kent	C. Gould
29-May-26	Southern Emerald Damsel.	Cornwall	M. Wallace
29-May-26	Emerald Damselfly	Leicestershire	L. Rathbone
03-Jun-26	Common Hawker	Moray	M. Robinson
04-Jun-26	Small Red-eyed Damselfly	Somerset	J. Russell
06-Jun-26	Brown Hawker	Leicestershire	L. Rathbone
10-Jun-26	Southern Migrant Hawker	East Sussex	V. Rogers
16-Jun-26	Willow Emerald Damselfly	Essex/Kent	R. Vaughan/M. Tarrant/K. McGuinness
22-Jun-26	Black Darter	Norfolk/Lancashire	S. Rowland/P. Speake
28-Jun-26	Migrant Hawker	West Sussex	Anon.

A NEW LOOK AT BRITAIN'S DRAGONFLIES



Dainty Damselfly - Dave Smallshire

The latest Review of the Status of Odonata of Great Britain 2026 gives us a fascinating snapshot of how Britain's dragonflies and damselflies are faring. And while there are plenty of reasons to be concerned, there are also some encouraging stories tucked among the data.

The review assessed all 57 species on the British Odonata list, using more than 1.3 million records collected over a 20-year period. That's a huge amount of information, much of it generated by the dedicated network of dragonfly recorders and volunteers who submit their sightings to the BDS Recording Scheme.

Not every species was assessed. Eleven species are considered vagrants because they have not bred, or have not bred consistently, in Britain. The remaining 46 species with evidence of established breeding were assessed against the internationally recognised IUCN Red List criteria.

So, what did we discover?

MORE SPECIES IN TROUBLE

Perhaps the most striking finding is the increase in the number of species classed as **Endangered**. Eight species now fall into this category, compared with just four in the previous assessment in 2008.

Among them are some of Britain's most treasured and distinctive dragonflies and damselflies, including **Northern Damselfly, Southern Damselfly, White-faced Darter, Azure Hawker, Northern Emerald, and Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly.**

For some species, this represents a worrying change in status. **Azure Hawker** and **Brilliant Emerald** have moved from Vulnerable to Endangered, while **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** and **Northern Emerald** have moved from Near Threatened to Endangered.

There are currently no species classed as Vulnerable. Three are Near Threatened: **Small Red Damselfly, Common Hawker** and **Common Clubtail.**

BUT IT'S NOT ALL BAD NEWS...

One of the most encouraging stories is the return of **Dainty Damselfly**. In the previous assessment, it was considered Regionally Extinct in Britain, but the species has since reappeared and successfully bred in Kent. It is now classed as Endangered.

The British list itself has also grown since the previous review, with **Large White-faced Darter, Yellow-spotted Emerald and Winter Damselfly** now included.

Meanwhile, **Variable Damselfly, Scarce Emerald Damselfly, and Norfolk Hawker** are all currently classed as Least Concern.

These changes remind us that the fortunes of dragonflies can shift – sometimes dramatically – and that monitoring their populations is essential if we are to understand what is happening and respond effectively.

WHY DOES THE RED LIST MATTER?

Behind every category is a story about a species, its habitat and the pressures it faces.

For dragonflies, those pressures can include habitat loss and degradation, changes in water levels, pollution, and the impacts of a changing climate. Species with very specific habitat requirements can be particularly vulnerable when their breeding sites are damaged or become unsuitable.

The new assessment gives us an important baseline for the future. It highlights the species that need particular attention, while also showing where conservation action can make a difference.

And perhaps most importantly, it demonstrates the value of the thousands of people who record dragonflies across Britain. Every carefully identified sighting helps build the picture. From a rare damselfly spotted during a survey to a familiar dragonfly patrolling a garden pond, **your records really do matter.**

The full Review of the Status of Odonata in Great Britain 2026 provides the complete assessment and details behind these classifications.

Click here to read the full report.



SCOTLAND: FROM BOG POOLS TO 100 PONDS

An update on our latest conservation work for some of Scotland's rarest dragonflies, from the Highlands to the Cairngorms.
Written by Emma Stevens-Veitch

Bog Pools at Glen Shieldaig

DRAGONFLIES ON THE BOG

This project, funded by the Scottish Government's Nature Restoration Fund, was completed in late spring, with work at our final sites finishing in March. We were delighted that so much was achieved over the term of the project. This project set out to carry out some habitat management and restoration on bogs in the north-west Highlands. Bogs are not everyone's favourite place to hang out, but for me they are magical and for some of the UK's rarer dragonfly species they are home. Dragonflies on the Bog (for those of you new to the BDS) was focused on protecting habitat for three rare species - Azure Hawker, Northern Emerald and the White-faced Darter, which are all now recognised as endangered status on the hot off the press UK red list. These species, along with Common Hawker and Black Darter, are also recognised collectively as "Dragonfly Bog Species Assemblage" on the Scottish Government's Scottish Biodiversity List. The north-west Highlands are considered the last stronghold for these species, and it is vital to protect their habitat, especially in the face of very dry summer conditions, which have caused many bog pools to dry out. Thus we sought to create drought-resilient bog pool habitat by deepening pools and holding water back with the use of peatland restoration techniques.
The project ran from November 2024 to March 2026 and we are grateful to our eight landowner and manager partners including: National Trust Scotland, The Woodland Trust, Jahama Highland Estates, Kinloch Woodlands, Corrour Estate, Trees for Life, Corrimony Farm and Alex Grigg, for their support to improve the resilience of dragonfly bog pool habitat. Here is a quick look at the headlines of what was delivered in that time:

- 350 bog pools and pool complexes restored.
- 42 hectares of pools directly restored with benefits for 116 hectares of wider landscape.
- 554 bunds and dams created, helping to hold more water in pools and on bogs.
- 578 sumps and deepened sections of pools created, ensuring they are more resilient to drying events as well as providing refuge for bog pool invertebrates.
- Four volunteer training courses delivered, with 35 attendees to support ongoing surveying and monitoring.

Summer update:
We have now moved into the project's monitoring phase, our volunteers have been out and about on the bogs revisiting the project sites all through the summer months, and every site has been visited at least once. We are really pleased with the results, particularly given the very dry summer and testing conditions.
We are seeing good resilience, with bog pools continuing to hold water, and survey results are already showing evidence of our rare species using the pools. Not only that, but we are seeing a mix of age classes in the bog pools showing that the species are resilient to the management processes and that our actions to preserve the species during the work have been successful.

100 PONDS

Moving across the country to the stunning Cairngorms National Park, we have our 100 Ponds project, which is funded by the Cairngorms National Park Authority. If you have been a member for a while, you will know we have been working on this project over the last year, creating and managing connected habitat for the Northern Damselfly. The Cairngorms and this north-east corner of Scotland, including parts of wider Aberdeenshire, Morayshire and down into Perthshire, is the last remaining area in the UK for this endangered species, and it is a priority for the BDS to support habitat creation and management there. This project focuses on ponds and supports the creation and management of an extensive pond network for the Northern Damselfly. I am pleased to report the project is well on track to reach 40+ ponds by the end of this financial year, and our longer-term goal is to keep going above and beyond the 100!

The summer months have mainly been about preparation for the next phase of delivery, working with our Deeside and Strathspey land manager partners, selecting sites, writing planning applications and selecting contractors. We can't wait to see the diggers out on site this autumn. Watch this space for more details and pictures.

Mark Tasker and I also had lots of fun revisiting some ponds that had been created or managed for Northern Damselfly back in 2022 across the region. They were mostly hanging on through our very dry summer and many were in fine condition with Northern Damselfly alongside other Odonata species. A few others were not doing as well, and we will take on board lessons learned for future work, but some of these are just a reflection of the very dry summer conditions and lack of water in the surrounding landscape. A few others had seen high disturbance from dogs, which hadn't helped. It felt good to be going back and reflecting on past work, and we were pleased we could fit this into the project.



Digger in action at Glen Shieldaig



Stag Infrastructure team, Graham Rennie (volunteer) and Emma at Glen Shieldaig



Northern Damselfly this summer at Tombane - Tim Coleshaw



THE SOUTHERN DAMSELFLY GROUP REUNITES IN DEVON

Ellie Winnett

Southern Damselfly male - Giles San Martin

The scientific name of the Southern Damselfly is *Coenagrion mercuriale*, named after the black marking on segment two of the male's abdomen which resembles the planetary symbol for Mercury. Those into astrology will tell you that Mercury is all about information and communication, which is exactly the point of the Southern Damselfly Steering Group - to gain, gather and share information about Southern Damselfly conservation. Initially set up in the 1990s, the group collaborated to preserve and restore many important Southern Damselfly sites in Britain, before disbanding.

You might be wondering why such a nondescript species warrants so much enthusiasm. However, this is one of the few species of Odonata in the UK that is classified as Endangered, and the species and its breeding sites are legally protected from disturbance and destruction. Its classification is partly a result of its restricted range in Britain, which is limited to areas of southern England, south-west Wales, and Anglesey. The species' fussiness over habitat requirements and lazy attitude (adults rarely disperse far from their wetland of origin) mean there are limited wetland areas suitable for the species, and it struggles to colonise new suitable sites that aren't connected to existing ones. Adults select shallow, slow-flowing flushes and streams, with lush aquatic plant life for them to lay their eggs in. These wetlands also need to have water that is permanent, unpolluted, non-acidic, and well-oxygenated. The habitat should be sheltered, but unshaded and have a bed of fine silt. Southern Damselfly breeding sites are often home to other rare and threatened plants and animals, including the scarce Small Red Damselfly (*Ceriagrion tenellum*), adding to their conservation value.

Encouragingly, there is evidence that some populations in Hampshire are expanding; survey work carried out by professional ecologists and dedicated BDS volunteers, such as David Murdoch, has discovered a number of new sites along the chalk rivers, Test and Itchen. As a species associated with sheltered, unshaded wetland sites, the milder winters and warmer summers provided by climate change might be giving these little insects a helping hand. This has not diminished concerns for the species along these waterways, however, as the combined effects of summer droughts and increasing water abstraction threaten water supplies to breeding sites.

Over in Devon, Southern Damselflies are found at very different sites. Instead of chalk streams and water meadows, the species is found breeding on spring and seepage-fed heathland streams and valley mires of low acidity. The health of Devon's Southern Damselfly population is monitored closely by County Recorder Dave Smallshire with the help of local recorders like Lesley Kerry, who has noted an apparent decline at a number of known breeding sites.

It had become apparent over the past few years that the species was undergoing some significant changes in Britain, and the BDS was keen to investigate further. Coincidentally, Tim Sykes at the Environment Agency suggested reforming the Steering Group, and that is exactly what happened in 2025. The group includes the BDS, Southern Damselfly specialists, and representatives from the Environment Agency and Natural England. Together we hope to develop a better understanding of the species' British population, its health and distribution, and its major threats, and provide support to the many different organisations and landowners who are responsible for ensuring sites are monitored and maintained for the species. With a bit of luck, we will also help to secure some funding to support monitoring and habitat management activities.



Round-leaved Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*), a small carnivorous plant, that was in flower at a number of sites visited. Hopefully they don't catch too many Southern Damselflies.

The Southern Damselfly's future is precarious, but there's hope!



The group at Colaton Raleigh Common where the scrub growth could be contributing to the current decline of its Southern Damselfly population.

This July the group met up with Southern Damselfly site managers and volunteers in Devon over two days. Maintaining the special breeding requirements of Southern Damselflies is a bit of a headache for site managers, as it doesn't gel with the less-invasive, rewilding approach of modern

conservation. Management plans for Southern Damselflies in Devon generally revolve around grazing with native cattle breeds or the popular Dartmoor ponies, to stop runnels and streams from becoming overgrown and shaded by vegetation. No-fence grazing enables site managers to focus on particular patches that have become overgrown, clearing the areas and allowing open channels to reform; the grazier uses GPS-enabled solar-powered collars to contain livestock within set areas using audio warnings and mild electric pulses.

Over the two days, we visited a number of locations in Pebblebed Heaths National Nature Reserve and Dartmoor National Park, discussing and planning habitat management and restoration. Dave Smallshire had a particular memorable encounter during our site visits: "Several Golden-ringed Dragonfly males were zooming around in the heatwave, but then a female arrived and started jabbing her long ovipositor into the small runnel we were standing next to while discussing the water quality. I videoed her from within a few inches, and she didn't bat a metaphorical eyelid. I was just explaining to the others how one had once landed on my knee when she flew up and landed on my wrist. Perhaps she was attracted to my gold ring (Andy Swash made a joke about that in his best man's speech at my wedding, as he did about Broad-bodied Chaser and Hairy Dragonfly). I guess some people from the east of England would give their right arm for such an experience, but I'm left-handed, so of course she chose my left arm!"

While the heatwave threatened sunburn and emboldened the horseflies (Dartmoor is home to our largest species, the 2.5cm long Dark Giant Horsefly, *Tabanus sudeticus*), attendees were delighted at the opportunity to visit such special wetlands and meet their insect inhabitants, including Southern Damselfly - hooray! The Southern Damselfly's future in Devon is precarious; the enthusiasm of the attendees gave real hope that, by working together, the collaboration could make a real difference.

If you would like to get involved in monitoring Southern Damselflies, please contact your County Dragonfly Recorder. If you can provide assistance with funding the group's activities please contact the BDS Treasurer.

You can also learn more from our - Southern Damselflies Management Handbook



Golden-ringed Dragonfly perched on Dave Smallshire's hand

RSPB CAMPFIELD MARSH

It has been a full year since RSPB Campfield Marsh was designated a Dragonfly Hotspot, so what better time to reflect on what's been taking place on the reserve?
Written by Dan Cropper and images by Callum McGuire



Freshly emerged Common Hawker



Black Darter

ANNIVERSARY WALK

To celebrate the first anniversary of the Hotspot designation, local experts and BDS members Mike and Anne Abbs led a well-attended guided walk, sharing their knowledge of dragonfly ecology and identification. Ideal weather helped the group spot 10 species, including Emperors, freshly emerged Common and Southern Hawkers, and obliging Common Darters posing for photos.

SIGHTINGS

As with much of the country, the hot, dry and still conditions have been very common across spring and summer, meaning dragonflies have been out in force. 12 species have made an appearance so far this year, with Migrant Hawker yet to be spotted at the time of writing but likely to become the 13th very soon. Early in the season, there were good numbers of Large Red Damselfly, Azure Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly and Blue-tailed Damselfly along the main lonning (north Cumbrian for lane) in and around the rough vegetation and ditches. There were excellent numbers of Four-spotted Chaser over the peatland pools, whilst Emperors hawking over the many ponds and pools around the reserve were an almost-guaranteed sight. As the season has progressed, the early emergers have made way for Common Darters – easily spotted on the lonning and peat bog boardwalk; Common Hawkers hunting over the bog pools; Southern Hawkers patrolling any rides with a bit of tree cover; and – more recently – Black Darters and Emerald Damselflies on the peat bog.



First year White-faced Darter larva

MANAGEMENT

To maintain this fantastic assemblage of species, we leave as much rough vegetation as possible, cutting only paths and key areas, and hold water on the reserve into summer to provide breeding and feeding habitat. Over the past year, volunteers have also cleared trees, scrub and bullrushes from one pond, while another was scraped to increase open water and encourage pond vegetation.

WHITE-FACED DARTER

The eagle-eyed reader may have only counted 11 species named in the sightings paragraph. The 12th species spotted on the reserve this year is the White-faced Darter, one of the rarest dragonflies in the UK. The sightings are owing to us being in year two of a five-year project to translocate the bog pool-loving species from a local population to Campfield Marsh. Each year, we are taking 100 mature larvae, ready to emerge and become adults the same year, in early spring and a handful of buckets of egg and larva-rich sphagnum moss in late summer and releasing them in bog pools on site. Last year one exuvia and one adult were spotted, whilst this year we saw a whopping 100% increase in both, with two exuviae and two adults seen during project monitoring. The larval stage for this species tends to last two years so there is optimism that the eggs and larvae released in summer of year one will be emerging as adults next year and numbers will start to increase more rapidly. Watch this space!

DRAGONS AND DAMSELS



Whether you've recently joined the Society or are simply beginning to discover the world of dragonflies and damselflies, this introduction is a great place to start. BDS member Yvonne Carrington shares her stunning photography while exploring some of the key features that distinguish dragonflies from damselflies

Emperor Dragonfly

DRAGONFLY OR DAMSELFLY

Dragonflies and damselflies are fascinating to study. The speed and agility of these insects in flight, along with their iridescent wings and vivid colours, are captivating. Through a selection of my extreme macro and action images, I hope to illustrate the differences between dragonflies and damselflies, while revealing some of the hidden moments that often go unnoticed.

The photographs also highlight some interesting facts about their physical characteristics, including the shape and size of their wings, bodies and eyes.

Dragonflies and damselflies belong to the order Odonata. This is derived from the Greek word for "tooth", a reference to their serrated jaws. Dragonflies are among the oldest insects on Earth, with ancestors dating back more than 300 million years. While modern dragonflies have wingspans of between 2–5 inches, fossils show that they had wingspans of up to 2 feet. I am rather relieved that they are not this size today!

There is also a difference between the wing shapes of damselflies and dragonflies. Dragonflies have hindwings that are broader than the forewings, whereas damselflies' wings are of similar shape and size. Regarding their bodies, dragonflies are generally larger, with broader, stronger-looking bodies, while damselflies are mainly smaller with thinner bodies.

The images of the male Banded Demoiselle and Emperor Dragonfly show these characteristics.



Banded Demoiselle

EYES BUILT FOR HUNTING

Dragonflies have very large compound eyes which extend over most of their head. This gives them almost 360-degree vision and enables them to have a very large field of view.

According to the BDS website, these eyes contain several thousand individual facets, each containing a tiny lens. Each individual lens has a low resolution but, by combining the images from all of them, dragonflies can achieve a level of resolution that is better than most other insects, making their sight particularly good.

Damselflies, with their rather smaller eyes, have less visual acuity but still have very good sight. Their eyes are set apart on each side of the head, as seen in the images of the Large Red Damselfly and Azure Damselfly.

HUNTING MASTERS OF THE AIR

Dragonflies are incredibly fast. They can hover like a helicopter, fly straight up and down and even mate in mid-air. Unlike many insects, dragonflies control each wing separately, giving them extraordinary agility. Some species can reach speeds between 17–38 mph.

They are also efficient and terrifying predators, catching prey such as smaller insects during flight without needing to land first. Their large jaws look fierce when viewed closely, as can be seen in the image of the Brown Hawker. Apparently, they can open them as wide as their entire heads.

I witnessed the speed at which a poor butterfly was grabbed in mid-air and gulped down!

WORTH PROTECTING

These remarkable insects are facing many challenges due to climate change and habitat loss. Conservation of freshwater ecosystems is very important if their populations and ecological roles as predators of pest insects are to be maintained.

Hopefully, these images and observations will inspire readers to take action, reminding us that these fragile wonders of nature are worth protecting.



Large Red Damselfly



Azure Damselfly



Brown Hawker

Minibeast EXPLORERS

Where do dragonflies go in the winter?

They don't just disappear! All the eggs laid this summer are now underwater. Dragonflies spend a large part of their lives underwater as larvae, hunting tiny creatures and growing before eventually emerging as adults.
Meet the Dragonfly Larva - nature's underwater ninja!

Huge eyes - Their big eyes help them spot prey swimming nearby.

Extendable lower jaw - Their bottom jaw, called a labium, can shoot forwards to grab prey. It's like having a built-in underwater grabber!

Breathing bottom - Dragonfly larvae breathe underwater using structures inside their abdomen. Some can even use their bottoms to help them move through the water!

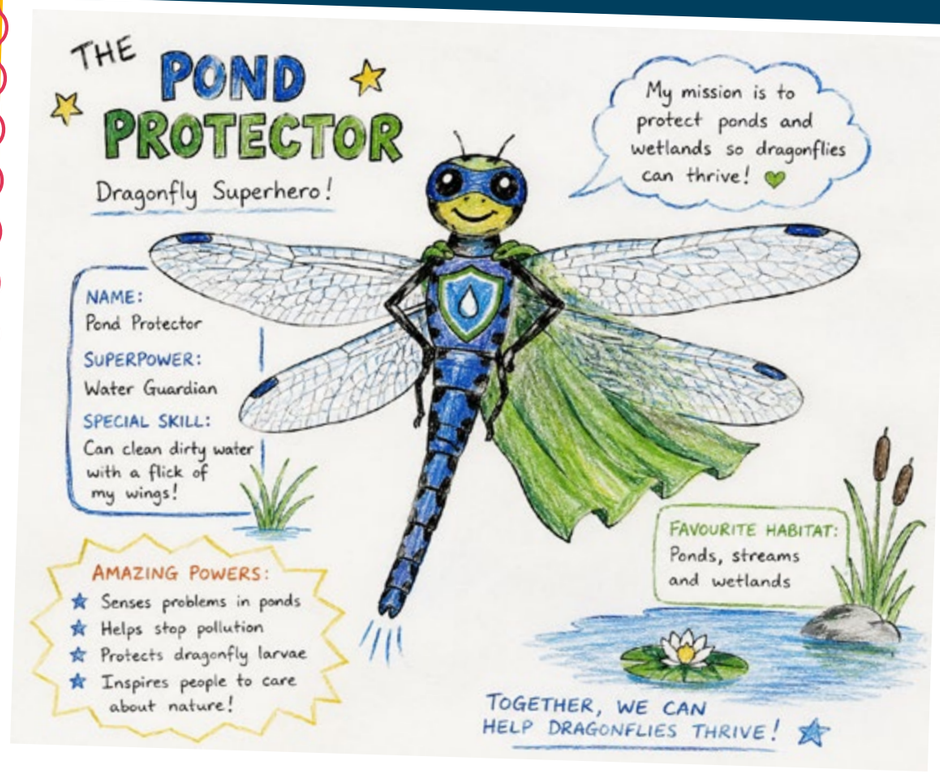


Emperor Larva - Steve Hewitt

Design a Dragonfly Superhero!

British Dragonfly Society

Dragonflies are wetland superheroes, keeping a wetland in balance! But can you design your own dragonfly superhero?



Example created by Engagement Officer, Lauren

Click here to download the worksheet and make your own dragonfly superhero

Become a Business Supporter

Make your business a force for nature!
Dragonflies are powerful indicators of healthy freshwater habitats, but wetlands are among the UK's most threatened ecosystems.

We're inviting businesses across the UK to join us in protecting dragonflies, restoring wetland habitats and inspiring more people to take action for nature.

Why join?
- Demonstrate your commitment to nature recovery and biodiversity
- Support practical conservation across the UK
- Engage your staff with wildlife and the natural world
- Align with your sustainability and ESG goals
- Receive recognition as a valued supporter of the British Dragonfly Society

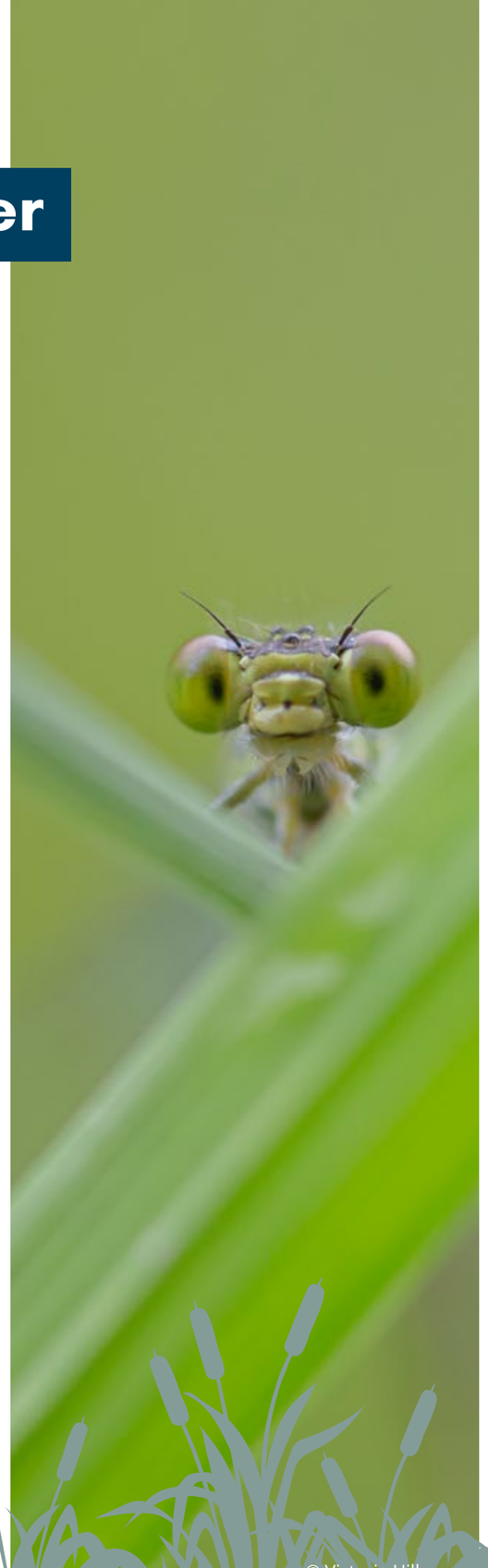
Business Supporter Levels
Bronze – £375
Silver – £750
Gold – £1,500
Platinum Conservation Partner – £15,000

Whether you're a small local business, environmental consultancy, or national organisation, there's a level to suit you.

Know a business that would like to support dragonflies? Please spread the word.

Together, we can create healthier wetlands for wildlife and people.

Click here to find out more or email:
lauren.kennedy@british-dragonflies.org.uk



© Victoria Hillman

VOLUNTEERING AND PROJECTS SPOTLIGHT

LIGHTS, CAMERA, DRAGONFLIES

We're looking for short video clips that showcase the beauty and fascinating behaviour of dragonflies and damselflies – from hunting and perching to emerging, mating, and egg-laying. Your footage could feature in our engagement materials, helping us inspire more people to discover, appreciate and take action for dragonflies and their wetland habitats. Whether you're filming on a camera or a smartphone, we'd love to see your dragonfly moments!

Contact: lauren.kennedy@british-dragonflies.org.uk


Ken Cartside

FUNDRAISING EXPERTS WANTED

We're looking for members with fundraising experience to share their expertise and advise us on how we can strengthen our fundraising.
Whether your experience is in trusts and foundations, major donors, corporate partnerships, community fundraising or campaigns, your advice could make a real difference.
No regular commitment required – just a willingness to share your knowledge and ideas.

Contact: lauren.kennedy@british-dragonflies.org.uk


Danielle Muir

COUNTY DRAGONFLY RECORDER VACANCY - CARDIGANSHIRE VC46, WEST WALES

Join the team and become a CDR! You will play a vital role in verifying incoming records on "iRecord" so they can be added to the National Recording Scheme Database. The database is used for conservation, research, and policy making.

Contact: David Hepper (Records Officer) for a chat about the role.
records@british-dragonflies.org.uk


Lauren Kennedy

DRAGONFLY WEEK * 2026 ART COMPETITION

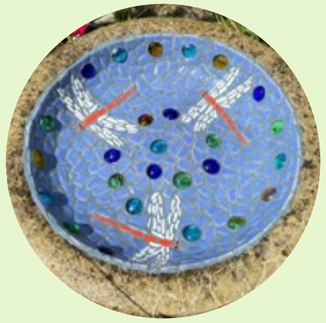
A huge thank you to everyone who helped make Dragonfly Week such a success! Whether you shared your wonderful dragonfly photographs, submitted valuable records, attended one of the many events taking place across the UK, or joined us as a member, your support helps us celebrate and conserve these incredible insects.

As part of this year's celebrations, our friends at Nature over Natter ran a Dragonfly Week Art Competition via Instagram, inviting people of all ages to get creative in support of dragonfly conservation. The response was fantastic, with so many beautiful and imaginative entries making it incredibly difficult to choose the winners.

Congratulations to the overall winner, @cowcatcrochet, whose stunning Emperor Dragonfly creation captured the judges' attention. As a thank you for their creativity and support, the top five entries will each receive a year's membership to the British Dragonfly Society. Thank you to everyone who took part and helped give dragonflies a voice through art!



RUNNERS-UP



ART.BY.OL



DERRICK.ARMITAGE



GEMMOSSILLUSTRATION



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One of the clearest messages from our recent membership survey was that you'd like more opportunities to learn about dragonflies from the comfort of your own home. Many of you also told us you're new to dragonflies and would love more introductory content to help you get started.

We are excited to announce our brand-new series Dragonflies Live – an exclusive series of talks, training and Q&As for British Dragonfly Society members, will be coming very soon.
Whether you're taking your very first steps into the wonderful world of dragonflies or looking to build your knowledge, these friendly and informal sessions will help you develop your skills, discover new topics and feel even more connected to our dragonfly community. Initially we will focus on introductory content, building up to a more detailed programme in 2027.
Our first three talks will cover an introduction to dragonflies and damselflies, how to get started with ID, and where to find them. The sessions will be 40 minutes long, with 30 minutes for the talk and ten minutes for questions and discussion.
When the sessions have been scheduled and are ready to book, members will receive an email with links to book your place.

And this is just the beginning...
This new series has been shaped by your feedback, and we will continue to seek your input to decide what comes next.

Future talks could include:
- Dragonfly identification
- How to record dragonflies and contribute to conservation
- Behind the scenes of BDS conservation projects
- Photography tips
- Ask the expert Q&A sessions
- Species spotlights and seasonal talks
- Dragonflies by Region
- Identifying Exuviae

Thank you to everyone who completed our membership survey. Your feedback is helping us build an even stronger membership experience, and we hope this new talk series is just the beginning of many opportunities to learn, connect and celebrate dragonflies together.
We look forward to seeing you online!

You can still complete our members questionnaire; click here to leave your feedback!



SPURN – DRAGONS BY THE SEA

By Harry Appleyard (Spurn Bird Observatory Assistant Warden) with thanks to Daniel Branch (Spurn Bird Observatory Odonata Recorder)

Male Red-veined Darter - 3rd July 2026

At the tip of the East Yorkshire coast, Spurn has been celebrated for its ever-changing landscape and array of wildlife for centuries, most notably birds, boasting over 400 species from common residents, annually breeding migrants to some of the UK's rarest vagrants. 2026 marks 80 years since the founding of Spurn Bird Observatory, which while continuing to gather data on the area's avifauna, also collates data on several other taxonomic groups. Since the early 1990s this recording has included Odonata, and interest in these insects at Spurn has only been increasing since then!

Spurn Bird Observatory's recording area spans the length of the Spurn peninsula and encompasses the neighbouring villages of Kilnsea and Easington, with a wide variety of coastal habitats, gardens, and waterways. 2025 was the best year on record for Odonata, with 21 species recorded, but 2026 has already beaten this, with 23 species recorded as of early August. In total, 30 Odonata species have been recorded at Spurn, with all but four of these (Scarce Emerald Damselfly, Vagrant Darter, Black Darter and Downy Emerald) having been recorded since the turn of the decade.

On 30th May, Variable Damselfly became the latest new species for Spurn in the form of a male photographed at Corner Field, one of several plots of land maintained for wildlife by Spurn Bird Observatory. This scarce and thinly distributed species in Yorkshire was certainly a surprise addition to the Spurn list, though easy to overlook among the much more locally common Azure Damselfly. The first Large Red Damselfly since 2022 was also a surprise find in the nearby Sykes' Field on 24th May, marking



Variable Damselfly, Corner Field - 30th May 2026

only the fifth Spurn record of the species, aside from several believed to have been introduced via transferred pondweed in a local garden pond in 2022.

After just two records between 2020 and 2024, 2025 saw a notable uptick in Red-veined Darters across the Observatory's recording area, mainly in single figures and small numbers of tandem or ovipositing pairs from 28th May to 28th July. In the wake of a significant influx across the nation, 2026 has brought many more, frequenting the pools of Canal Scrape and Kilnsea Wetlands, where at the latter area, double-figure congregations reached 50+ individuals in June. With historical records of their breeding here, hopefully this may be the start of a local resurgence for the species after a several-year lull.

Coinciding with the influxes of Red-veined Darters, Lesser Emperors have also had an upsurge here. After only three previous records from 2000 to 2022, there were four records in 2025, all involving lone males between 16th June and 23rd July. So far 2026 has produced several new records of single individuals, the first of which was hunting Painted Lady butterflies near Beacon Ponds on 30th May.

Vagrant Emperor had its best year since 2019 with four records in 2025, the first featuring a single hunting around the Warren Watch Point on 22nd June, another around Clubleys on 29th July, one at the south end of the peninsula (The Point) on 25th September and the last near the north end of the peninsula on 8th November. So far 2026 has followed up with just a single Vagrant Emperor, photographed flying past the Canal Scrape hide on 29th June.

One of Spurn's more nomadic species, the Keeled Skimmer, has also generated its second, third, fourth and fifth records. A few weeks shy of 12 years after the first was released from the Heligoland trap at The Warren cottage, a male was released from the Church Field Heligoland on 9th July 2025 and on 28th July, another male showed well at the adjacent North Field. On 8th July this year, a male was found along the Canal path just south of Kilnsea and on 8th August, another male was photographed in the dunes at The Point. A female Southern Migrant Hawker photographed on the move in Corner Field marked the 12th Spurn record of the species since 2018, also being the first since 2023.

Almost needless to say, it's been a fantastic year for Spurn's Odonata, with still potential for more yet! Should you be visiting the area while they are still on the wing this year, please submit your sightings to Spurn Bird Observatory.



Large Red Damselfly, Sykes Field - 24th May 2026



Male Keeled Skimmer, The Point - 8th August 2026 (Jack Pettit)

Click here to find out more about Spurn Bird Observatory, their work and the wildlife they help protect.

37 YEARS LIVING WITH SOUTHERN HAWKERS



Dave Smallshire (author and County Dragonfly Recorder) explores the life of a familiar visitor to his garden pond.

Image: Territorial male Southern Hawker showing his 'headlights on full beam' – large pale markings on the front of the thorax.

I installed my 5m x 3m garden pond in 1990 and have played host to Southern Hawkers every year since. It's one of my favourite dragonflies: very colourful and often easy to observe. Southern Hawkers have a particular fondness for garden ponds, which can offer us good opportunities for close study. From observing the egg-laying 'chocolate and mint' females on strategically placed rotting wood to being challenged by a territorial male when I approach 'his' pond, they are a delight to have around. This article was prompted by my observations and images from spring and summer 2026.

DISTRIBUTION

Southern Hawkers are widespread over most of England and Wales. It is more scattered in Scotland, where it has colonised mainly coastal, lowland areas. 'Southern' may not be such a useful name these days – Blue Hawker may be a better alternative, reflecting its scientific name *cyanea*?



A larval exuvia, shed a few weeks before emergence; this can be sexed as a female by the dark marking under segment 9 that will become an ovipositor.



A recently-emerged larva (note the pale eyes) had up to six tiny flies walking over it, including a mating pair! I shouldn't have been too surprised, therefore, to discover it was dead.

LARVAE

Pond dipping or clearance will often reveal larvae that move around in the net and can be thrown back in. (Simply piling up debris on the bank can result in larvae crawling 'inland' as well as back to the water, so I like to give them a hand.) After moulting, larval skins may be seen floating on the surface. In April, I was amazed to see no fewer than 16 such skins (which technically are exuviae, but best recorded as evidence of larval presence) in my neighbour's tiny pond (less than one square metre).

EMERGENCE

Most adults emerge at night in June-July, with my earliest on 25 May and latest on 3 August. A total of 36 exuviae in 2008 is the most I've had in a season. Some adults can be found in the mornings, perhaps awaiting better weather conditions. As with other dragonflies, rain and wind can cause havoc during emergence.



The wing buds on the exuvia have an imprint of the adult's wing veins; the adult's wings show the wonderfully-evolved structure that gives them amazing strength and flexibility.



Wings can be stuck together by rain, preventing them from opening.







[Left] Wings glistening with haemolymph and pale wing spots are characteristic of a pre-flight emergent dragonfly. [Right] Dark elements of body patterning are evident before flight, but mature colours will take some days to appear.

FLIGHT PERIOD

Adults seem to disappear for several weeks after emergence, presumably feeding up and maturing in wooded areas. Back at the water, most territorial males occur during August-September. An exceptionally early male was on territory on 30 June 2018 and the first for 2026 is patrolling as I write this on 15 July, while my latest observation was on 5 October 2018.

OVIPOSITION

Like other hawkers and damselflies, they have bulky egg-laying apparatus under the tip of the abdomen with a sickle-shaped ovipositor to inject eggs into rotten wood and moss. I've found females egg-laying between 15 July and 13 October, usually around the margin. However, some have tried to lay into wood, brick or concrete up to four metres away from the pond, though always in damp, mossy situations.



A good view will reveal not just 'headlights' but the diagnostic 'tail light' bands of continuous colour across the tip of the abdomen.

The sickle-shaped ovipositor probes for a suitable substrate.

PREDATION

Cats have killed at least two: both were females that I dissected out of curiosity. The first contained about 200 eggs in her abdomen, while the second revealed a thorax chock full of powerful flight muscles. But it's not only cats that take newly-emerged dragonflies ....

POSTSCRIPT

The 28th Southern Hawker emerged from my pond on 25 July, almost two months after the first.

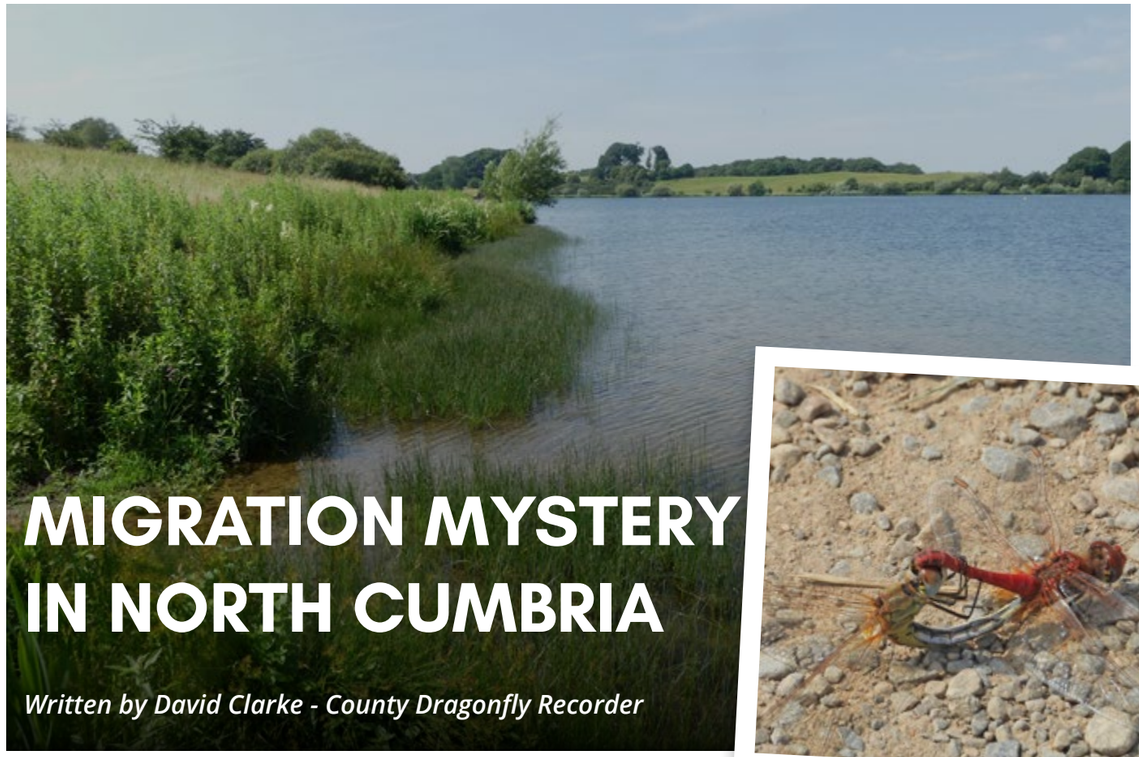
Predation update: one killed this morning, presumably by a cat, was attacked by a wasp. More than five hours later, the wasp was still dismembering the hawker.



This unlucky newly-emerged Southern Hawker was grabbed by a House Sparrow, which bashed off its wings and legs and gave her brood a feast.



[Left] Southern Hawker female attacked by a wasp at 11:42am. [Right] That same female at 5:45 pm, six hours later: the head and end of abdomen and probably the contents of the abdomen and thorax had been removed.



MIGRATION MYSTERY IN NORTH CUMBRIA

Written by David Clarke - County Dragonfly Recorder

Red-veined Darters. 17 July 2026, Talkin Tarn. Adam Moan

The discovery of a male Red-veined Darter at Talkin Tarn Country Park, some 15km east-north-east of Carlisle, on 6 July was the start of some unusual observations of dragonfly migrants in northern Cumbria. Two days later, around 15 males were present at intervals along the sandy path close to the east side of the tarn, in 'Wildlife Bay', pictured above. Several male Black-tailed Skimmers were behaving similarly. Females of both species were hard to find, but an instance of mating in each confirmed their presence. Oviposition had been noted too. On 10 July (at 30ºC) two male Lesser Emperors were patrolling close to the shore at the same part of the tarn but had certainly been present at least a day before. By then, numbers of the darters already seemed lower. All three species were still present on 17 July, when mating darters were again observed. On 24 July, the last of the really warm days, a few darters and skimmers were still present, but not the Lesser Emperors. None were seen on the cooler, breezier 31 July. The Tarn normally supports only three widespread damselfly species, and a few Common Darters, which were not present on the above dates.



Lesser Emperor. 13 July 2026, Talkin Tarn. Adam Moan

In the same period, a few Red-veined Darters (from 30 June) and a Lesser Emperor (on 10 July) were at North Walney, near Barrow-in-Furness. Black-tailed Skimmers are not unusual there, but 38 on 10 July was a high number. One or two Red-veined Darters were also recorded at RSPB Hodbarrow (from 26 June), a little further up the coast. However, these sites are on the opposite side of the Lake District, and at least 100km from Talkin.

The migratory 'fall' at Talkin echoes an episode in the hot July of 2006. On that occasion, Red-veined Darters, Black-tailed Skimmers and a Ruddy Darter were recorded at Tindale Tarn, some 5km east of Talkin. Numbers were lower on that occasion. Red-veined Darter was then new to the county. In the same period, Lesser Emperor was also a 'first-time' species, at a quarry pond some 11km south-west of Talkin. Surprisingly, only a single Black-tailed Skimmer was reported from Tindale in 2026. Red-veined Darters have since been recorded in Cumbria in 2017, 2019 and 2023 (including one at Talkin in 2019). The Lesser Emperors at Talkin are the first instance of multiple numbers in Cumbria and 2026 is only the third year of county sightings of this species. All signs point to a single arrival 'event' in 2026.

Given the inland locations of Talkin and Tindale (near the Pennines) and the lack of other inland records in the periods concerned, the question arises as to the most likely route of arrival of the migrants. There is no direct evidence on this matter, so speculation that they came from the east, perhaps through the so-called Tyne Gap is just that - speculation. But it makes at least as much sense as any alternative theory! An intriguing and unresolved question is whether the Black-tailed Skimmers derive from the same area as the two European species or somehow joined en route.

I am grateful to Chris Turner and Rachelle Regan for the south Cumbria information and to Peter Wilson and Adam Moan for their finds, and excellent species photos.

TWO ADDITIONAL SPECIES ADDED TO THE CUMBRIA LIST IN 2026

Photos taken by Chris Turner on 16 July confirmed the first records of Small Red-eyed Damselfly for Cumbria (in VC69). Following reports by Heysham Bird Observatory (Lancs), he was on the lookout for this species. There had been an extended period of hot sunny weather with predominantly easterly winds, which had brought migrant species such as Lesser Emperor and Red-veined Darter. His notes of the find read: *'At least 8 Small Red-eyed Damselflies at North Walney this afternoon (SD16937133). 6 males and 2 females including 2 mating and ovipositing pairs. Resting on small lilypads and algal mats. Eating some sort of large fly. Still present at 4pm.*' A more thorough search of North Walney NNR on 19 July revealed the damselflies were present at several areas on a larger pond at SD16827176 and still at the original site. A total of 15 adults were recorded. This was the first damselfly species new to the county this century, and for many years before that. It has spread northwards dramatically in recent years, but whether it is yet a permanent resident in the county is another matter.

A male Southern Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna affinis*) was recorded as new to Cumbria on the coastal fringe of the Leven estuary near Bardsea (SD27) on 30 July 2026 by John Harrison. He was fortunate to capture a fine image of this active insect in a moment of rest. Although the species is being increasingly recorded in the UK, this appears to have been the only west coast record north of Pembrokeshire in 2026. Interestingly, several Ruddy Darters were present at the same locality - presumably part of the same migratory movement. Ruddy Darter and Southern Migrant Hawker have been noted to have similar habitat preferences. Both were exploring the narrow ditches above the shoreline. This was also the first Cumbria record of the Ruddy Darter beyond its Solway breeding site for over a decade.



Small Red-eyed Damselfly: Chris Arthur



Southern Migrant Hawker: John Harrison/iRecord



A BLACK-TAILED SKIMMER MYSTERY

The summer warden at Hodbarrow RSPB Reserve near Millom in South Cumbria alerted us in 2025 to the remarkable emergence behaviour of Black-tailed Skimmers – behaviour we were able to witness ourselves in both 2025 and 2026.

The site has a breeze-block hide (as seen on the right in the above image) which overlooks a freshwater lagoon (on the left), where several hundred gulls and terns nest on islands and around its edge. The hide is at least 30 metres from the edge of the water, at the top of a rough, steep slope.

Despite this, Black-tailed Skimmers regularly emerge inside the hide, as the attached photographs show. Astonishingly, the larvae are able to make this journey, navigating the terrain and avoiding many hungry beaks.

It raises many questions, such as: how do they know the hide is there? What percentage of larvae fail to make it? And how do they get into the hide? The front wall is solid, with window slots, which implies they either climb up the front and descend into the hide, or go around the back and come in through the door.

Mike and Anne Abbs





A SENSE OF A SWARM

Back in August, whilst holidaying in Suffolk, I stopped at RSPB North Warren near Aldeburgh in search of dragonflies. It was a mild, overcast day, and I had only logged a handful of Common Darters along the main track. However, turning onto a path leading toward a viewpoint, the woodland gave way to open fields, revealing a sheltered half-glade. Here, I was amazed to find around 25 male Migrant Hawkers feeding together primarily in an area no larger than five metres square. I had never witnessed such a remarkable density of hawkers in such a compact space. Wanting to record the phenomenon, I set my phone on the ground pointing skyward to capture a video of the 'swarm'. Whilst the video clips were clear, I felt they failed to capture the sheer density of dragonflies visible to the naked eye due to the camera's limited field of view and resolution. To compensate for this loss of spatial depth, I decided to experiment with the temporal element by stacking and blending the frames together into a single composite image for each video. I think the resulting images really capture the dynamic energy of the swarm, bringing that fleeting August encounter back to life!

Toby Hill



Technical information: Videos recorded at 1080p 30fps on an iPhone 17 Pro in the native camera app using the 24mm and 13mm lenses. Video frames blended into a single composite image using a custom Python script run in Google Colab utilising the ImageIO and NumPy libraries. Darken or lighten blend modes were selected based on frame lighting conditions.

NOT YOUR COMMON DARTER

In early July, we had a few red darters show up at Kilminning Pond, near Crail, Fife, Scotland. I assumed they were Common Darters, since they are usually the only red darters we get in Fife. When I submitted the sighting to iRecord, however, the County Recorder, Pat Batty, got in touch to say that she thought they were Red-veined Darters, but that she would get this confirmed by others at BDS.

It turns out they were Red-veined Darters, the first ones recorded in Fife since 2016 and, more generally, an uncommon sighting for Scotland, with only 64 sightings recorded in iRecord.

Gordon Baxter





A DRAGONFLY TUSSLE?

A lucky photograph captured the moment an Emperor Dragonfly briefly tapped a Golden-ringed Dragonfly with the tip of its abdomen in Corfe Mullen, Dorset.

Both individuals were spotted resting close together as seen in the image above. Focusing in on the Golden-ringed Dragonfly, the Emperor suddenly flew towards it, briefly touching it before flying off and leaving the Golden-ringed still at rest.

The encounter was completely unexpected, but interestingly, a few days earlier an acquaintance had witnessed individuals of the same species hawking very close to each other, very near the location of these photographs. Could this behaviour be more common than we realise?

Alan Williams





A CASE OF MISTAKEN MATES

This summer has brought several reports of some rather unusual dragonfly pairings.

At Wicken Fen Dragonfly Hotspot, Professor Alan Fersht photographed a young male Scarce Chaser in tandem with a female Four-spotted Chaser. Several similar pairings have reportedly been observed in the area this season.

Meanwhile, David Turrell captured two equally unusual encounters in Devon. At Parke, he photographed a male Emperor attempting to mate with a Southern Hawker, while at Great Plantation he spotted another male Emperor attempting to mate with a female Golden-ringed Dragonfly.

Quite why these unusual pairings occur remains a fascinating question – perhaps dragonflies don't always get the memo!

Photographs: Professor Alan Fersht and David Turrell



Young male Scarce Chaser and female Four-spotted Chaser - Professor Alan Fersht





[Left] Male Emperor and female Southern Hawker. [Right] Male Emperor and female Golden-ringed Dragonfly - David Turrell

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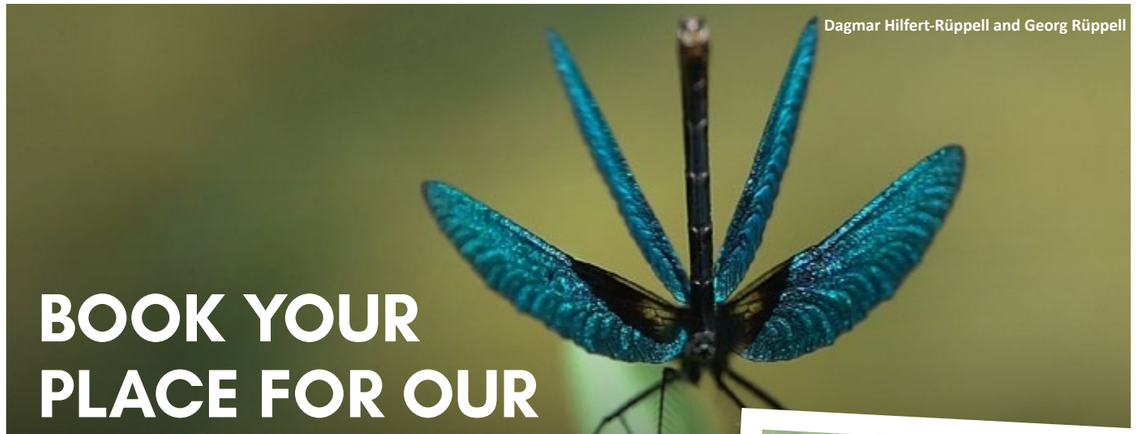
TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Time to test your dragonfly knowledge! From these zoomed-in snippets can you guess what dragonfly species this is?



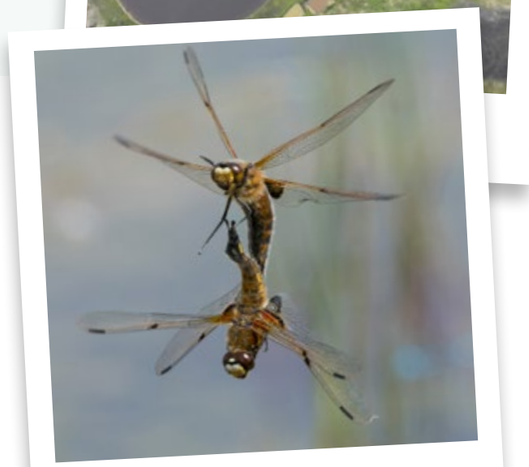
Have you taken a guess? Click here to find out the answer!

Photo credit: David Clapperton



BOOK YOUR PLACE FOR OUR ANNUAL MEETING





Join us for the British Dragonfly Society's Annual General Meeting for a day of inspiration, discovery and celebration of dragonflies and their wetland habitats. Alongside the Society's AGM, you'll enjoy a fascinating programme of talks from leading experts, exploring everything from wetland restoration and the return of dragonflies to cutting-edge photography and the remarkable behaviour of these incredible insects.

DATE: Saturday 14th November

TIME: 10:00am - 4:30pm

LOCATION: Whaddonway Church, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, MK3 7JS

WHATS ON THE PROGRAMME?

Dragonflies of Milton Keynes – Alan Nelson introduces the dragonflies and key sites of the surrounding area.

Great Fen – Dragonflies on the up – Henry Stanier explores the exciting changes taking place at the Great Fen and what they mean for dragonflies.

BDS: the year in review – Hear about our highlights from the past year and our plans for the future, followed by the BDS Annual General Meeting.

Odonatography: discovering the wonders of dragonfly flight – Steve Cham takes us into the world of dragonfly photography and flight.

Restoring meadows to our floodplains – Professor David Gowing explores the restoration of floodplain meadows and their importance for wetland wildlife.

Film premiere – Dagmar Hilfert-Rüppell and Georg Rüppell present a new film exploring the behaviour of Beautiful and Banded Demoiselles when co-habiting a confined space.

Tea and coffee will be available throughout the day. Please bring a packed lunch or take advantage of the cafés and shops within walking distance.

The BDS Shop will also be there, giving you the chance to pick up ID guides, books and BDS goodies while supporting the Society

We would love to see you there! Booking is essential, **click here to book your place today.**



Make your love of dragonflies last

A gift to the British Dragonfly Society in your will can make a lasting difference to the future of dragonflies and damselflies. Your legacy could support the protection and restoration of their wetland homes, help us understand changing populations through recording and research, and give future generations the opportunity to experience these remarkable insects for themselves.

Remember someone special

A gift in memory is a beautiful way to celebrate the life of someone you love while helping protect dragonflies and the places they depend on. Every donation, whatever the size, can make a lasting difference.

Interested in finding out more?
For more information about leaving a legacy or making a gift in memory, please contact membership@british-dragonflies.org.uk.

FUTURE CONTRIBUTION GUIDELINES

All magazine contributions should be sent via email to the magazine editor, Lauren Kennedy. If you would like to discuss a potential article please email and you will be provided with advice on content, presentation and format.

Deadlines for contributions:
Spring edition: 31st January
Autumn edition: 31st July

By contributing to Dragonfly News you give permission for the work to be used in other formats with the same attribution including reproduction on the BDS website. Articles on any aspect of UK dragonfly fauna are encouraged and contributions on European and other global species are also considered. We also welcome stories of volunteering, community work and engaging people with dragonflies and wetlands.

Please send all enquiries and contributions via email. Articles should be sent in a word document format with accompanying images sent separately, rather than embedded within the document. Images should be jpeg or png files and as high quality as possible. If files are too large to send via email please use a file sharing service such as WeTransfer, GDrive or DropBox. It is recommended to get in touch to discuss word limits. The editor reserves the right to make changes to text, and will endeavor to contact the author if extensive editing is required.

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