



SUSSEX DRAGONFLY GROUP

## NEWSLETTER

July 2025

After a quiescent few years, we're trying to reinvigorate the Sussex Dragonfly Group (SDG) and produce occasional newsletters to provide information about damselflies and dragonflies in Sussex and let you know of events and surveys.

### **Black Darter (*Sympetrum danae*) – at risk of extinction in Sussex?**

The Black Darter is one of two species (the other being Emerald Damselfly) at some risk of being lost to Sussex where it is very much a species of heathland, though of course, in common with all dragonfly species, wandering is always possible. Although probably always scarce in Sussex (its main distribution in the British Isles is more northern and western), the Black Darter has declined in much of south-eastern England. In 2022, the only official Sussex record was of a male at Old Lodge on Ashdown Forest. There was then, a late-submitted record of a female from there in 2023 and, rather more encouragingly, records from both Iping Common and heathland at RSPB Pulborough Brooks in 2024. This is one of the later species on the wing so there could be opportunities to find them from now through to September. If you do find one, please take a photo of it and let the Recorder know (email address on last page). If possible, please enter your sighting on iRecord.

A distribution map of Black Darter can be found on the SDG website at:

[https://sussexdragonflies.org.uk/speciesAccount.php?species=Sympetrum\\_danae](https://sussexdragonflies.org.uk/speciesAccount.php?species=Sympetrum_danae)



Adult males are easy to identify as they are the only small, predominantly black, dragonfly. Females and young males require a bit more care as they might be confused with those of commoner Darters that may also occur on heathland. A key combination of features are black legs (as Ruddy Darter), significant black along the sides of the abdomen and, on the thorax, a black panel on each side with three yellow dots and a dark triangle on top (photo opposite).

## Red-veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*) influx into England in 2025

Another species for you to keep your eyes open for! It has been a good year for this species in southern England but so far, we're only aware of two reports from Rye Harbour. For what to look out for see:

[https://sussexdragonflies.org.uk/speciesAccount.php?species=Sympetrum\\_fonscolombii](https://sussexdragonflies.org.uk/speciesAccount.php?species=Sympetrum_fonscolombii)

One distinct characteristic of both sexes is the pale blue lower half of their eyes.

### Challenging your damselfly identification skills!

These two damselfly photos taken by the Recorder led to him scratching his head. See whether you can figure out the identifications. Photo 1 was taken on 20 June not far from Hastings and Photo 2 was taken on 3 July at Sheffield Park NT gardens. The identifications and reasoning are on the final page. You may need to magnify the images on your computer screen.





## Amazing numbers of exuvia at ponds in a Staplecross garden but where are the adults?

We all know that small garden ponds attract a number of Odonata species, but little is known about their productivity. This year, I started counting the number of chaser and other dragonfly exuvia found on my two small ponds each day for two months from 19 April to 20 June, and they were removed daily to avoid double-counts. In total, the exuvia of 35 chasers were collected, the majority of which were Broad-bodied but also included some Four-spotted, and 59 other dragonflies of which all were thought to be Emperors with the exception of four Southern Hawkers. The highest number in one day was eight Emperors and seven chasers on 3 May. As the number of flying adults of both species combined around the ponds seldom exceeded four to six even on a good day, the majority of the teneral dragonflies were immediately dispersing, so it is easy to underestimate the value of such small ponds. We need more simple studies like this!

*Alan Martin, Staplecross*

Identifying and collecting exuvia is not always easy! Seeing the recently emerged adult nearby helps identification. From left to right:

Emperor, Broad-bodied Chaser & Southern Hawker



## Challenging identifications from the second page

**Photo 1.** With its outstretched wings, this is one of the Emerald Damselflies. The two most likely species in Sussex are (Common) Emerald and Willow Emerald. In late June, both are just about possible. Its narrow abdomen suggests that it is a male but a (Common) Emerald might be expected to have powdery blue pruinescence at the top and tip of the abdomen plus blue eyes. (Common) Emerald has dark wing-spots (pterostigmas) bordered pale on either side whereas Willow Emerald has pale brown wing-spots which this appears to have. But closer inspection indicates that the former pattern may be starting to emerge. The clinching feature is the shape of the appendages at the tip of the abdomen. The inferior (lower) appendages are quite long and thin as in (Common) Emerald. In Willow Emerald, they are relatively short. So this is a young male (Common) Emerald that has yet to acquire its blue pruinescence or blue eyes.

**Photo 2.** This damselfly lacks coloured spots behind the eyes. This immediately rules out Azure, Common Blue, Variable or Blue-tailed Damselflies and points to it being either a Red-eyed or Small Red-eyed Damselfly. In the former, the closed wing tips reach segment 8 of the abdomen whereas in the latter, they reach to only segment 7. So this is a Small Red-eyed Damselfly but what about its sex? The greenish coloration might suggest that it is a female. Again, the shape of the appendages at the tip of the abdomen are important and they are characteristic of a male. So this is a young male Small Red-eyed Damselfly – something that seems fairly unusual to see, probably due to quick maturity in their short lifespans.

Many thanks to Geoff Gowlett and Adrian Parr for confirming these two identifications.

## The SDG Committee

This currently comprises Simon Linington (Recorder & Chairman), Alan Martin, Bob Foreman, Phil Belden and Polly Mair. Extra help is always to be welcomed, so if you might be interested in helping us raising the profile of damselflies and dragonflies in Sussex, please contact the Recorder at the address below.

## Useful addresses

Sussex Dragonfly Recorder: [countyrecorder@sussexdragonflies.org.uk](mailto:countyrecorder@sussexdragonflies.org.uk)

SDG website - sightings: <https://sussexdragonflies.org.uk/sightings.php>

British Dragonfly Society (why not join?): <https://british-dragonflies.org.uk/>

‘The Damselflies & Dragonflies of Sussex’ (for sale at Pemberley Books):

<https://www.pemberleybooks.com/product/the-damselflies-and-dragonflies-of-sussex-their-status-and-distribution/59647/>