

Dragonflies in Worcestershire 2015

Mike Averill

Experience has shown that adult dragonfly sightings are closely related to the weather at the time and shortly before the observation and this proved the case again this year. The run into spring was generally mild with good sunshine amounts and so emergence of the spring species were by and large on time. As we shall see later the year continued with dull months from May to August and it meant that the dragonfly year seemed to end rather early this year and although September was a very sunny month it was all a bit late for most species.

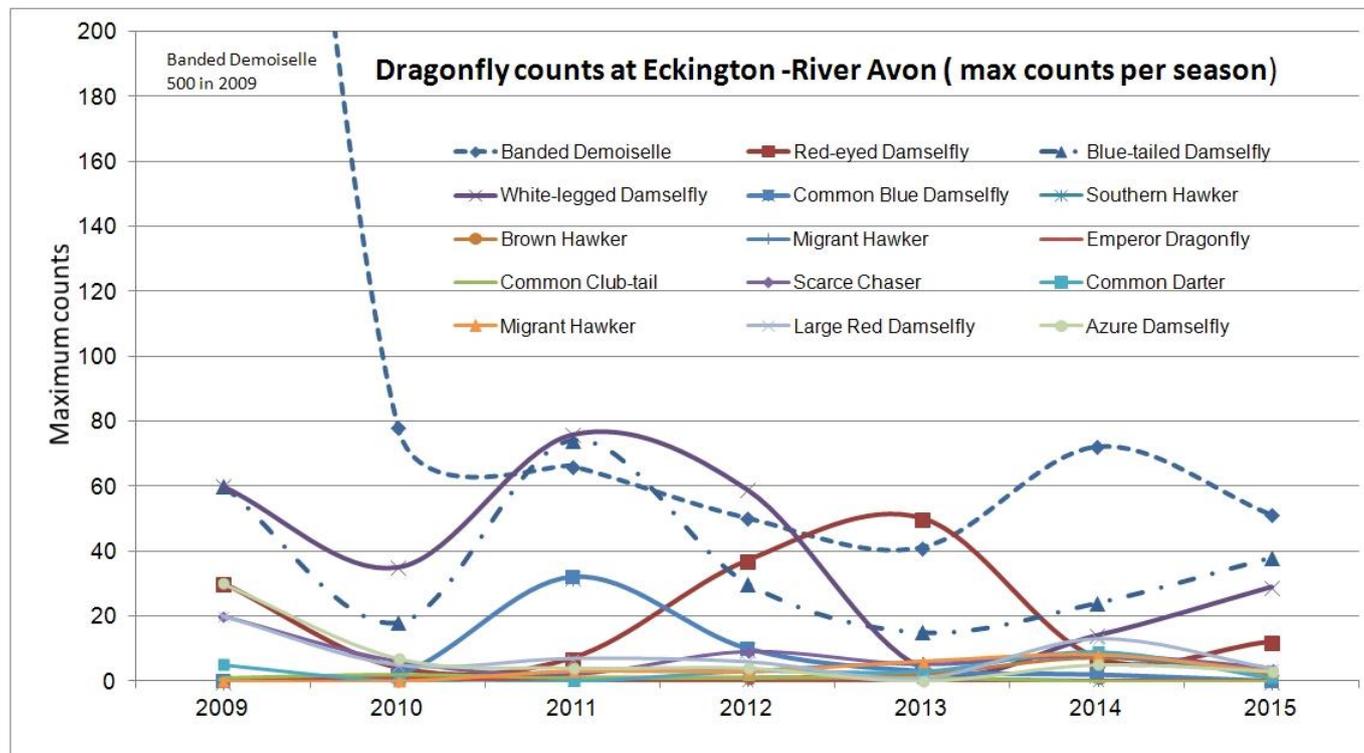
The only species with an early emergence was the late summer Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma Viridulum* which had a very good year. The other factor which particularly affects sightings is the local water level condition, and as predicted last year after three years of rainfall surplus and good conditions, a return to average rainfall in Jan and March but below average rainfall in Feb and April meant pool levels dropped quickly as soon as evapotranspiration increased in the summer. Sadly Hartlebury Bog, which had been so good for dragonflies last year, had gone dry by late July, meaning many dragonflies would not have survived to emerge later.

Overall we had 22 of the normal total of 28 species recorded but there was an exciting new addition taking the Worcestershire total to 29, when the Downy Emerald *Cordulea aenea* was seen in Grafton Wood (01). The Downy Emerald is widespread across central Europe as far as Siberia and Japan but in Britain it is concentrated in the SE of England with a few outliers in Cumbria, Cheshire and the western coast of Scotland and Ireland. The nearest to Worcestershire are the pools near Shrewsbury and the Forest of Dean in Gloucestershire. Wherever the Grafton individual came from, it was found patrolling woodland pools which it favours so let's hope we see some more in the future. The species is known to persist at sites where it has been for years, even isolated locations,

but it has shown a slight expansion in its range mainly consolidating around the edges of existing sites. The best bet for Worcestershire is that this one was a scout for the newish colonies in the water parks around Cricklade, Gloucestershire as this is a good site for the species.

The Club-tailed Dragonfly *Gomphus vulgatissimus* had a poor year and was hard to find along the Avon and even in its core area at Bewdley the counts were the lowest for eight years. It is only possible to make this sort of assessment through detailed counts or transects and this gives an opportunity to look at some of the results from other transects around the county. Comparing counts to previous years, winners from the transects at Pershore, Eckington and Croome Court are The Small red-eyed Damselfly, Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma najas*, Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum* and large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula* - is there a colour pattern emerging here! Losers were the Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*, Common Blue damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*, Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta* and Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*. Looking at the graph (02) for Eckington for example, the Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans* also had a slight upturn as well as the White-legged Damselfly *Platycnemis pennipes* and other than the Red-eyed Damselfly already mentioned, nearly all other species showed declines on last year. It was also noticeable how soon species began to decline as the year progressed reflecting the poor summer weather mentioned earlier and this probably accounted for the lack of the species that would still normally be around in numbers in to September. It is also possible that not so many Migrant Hawkers migrated in to the UK this year as usually the numbers here are boosted by arrivals from abroad. The other two late species, the Brown hawkler *Aeshna grandis* and Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* were also lacking in numbers.

Another species that did not appear to do so well this year was the Scarce Chaser *Libellula fulva* which was only seen once at Hartlebury Common and it may well be that this experiment to see if a small colony can survive in an isolated new site, has run out of steam.



The requirement for carrying out transects and good dragonfly spotting is the need for the weather to be warm and sunny, in particular to be at least 17°C with 3 hours sunshine. That doesn't

sound very hard to find in our summers but this year sunshine was often missing (see 02 below)

02. Sunshine received in South Worcestershire 2015 expressed in hours

Sunshine received in South Worcestershire - expressed in hours						
	Monthly	Monthly		Monthly		
		Hours	2015	Hours	No of Days with	Days >3 hrs
	Ann Average	in 2015	% of Ann Av	(11-17:00)	> 3 hours (11-17:00)	(11-17:00) Weekend
Apr	170.8	209	122	124.2	19	0
May	199.6	173	87	96.4	14	1
Jun	214.7	231	108	111.1	18	3
Jul	217.7	177	81	86.1	14	4
Aug	201.8	121	60	61.4	11	4
Sep	149.8	173	115	107	10	3

Strictly speaking transect counts should be made between the hours of 11:00 and 17:00 and so when you see how many days satisfied those criteria, there aren't that many to choose from. If you can only go out at the weekends then days available can be very low.

Mention has been made in previous issues of the *Worcestershire Record* about the blue coloured Southern Hawkers that are occasionally seen and there have been a number of reports from John Lane in Malvern who seems to have a garden especially attractive to these individuals. He reports a number of males and females arriving to sit on a sunny wall, many showing the blue colours along the whole abdomen instead of just the usual end segments (03 and 04). It is not sure whether these are still going through a maturing phase or whether they can be considered as a separate colour form and perhaps the only way to be sure will be to take a leg and do some DNA analysis.



03. Female Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* blue form. John Lane.



04. Male Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* blue form. John Lane

It is with sadness that the news is received that Tony Hughes from Malvern has passed away. He was an occasional contributor to the dragonfly database but his records were always interesting. This year he had the first records for both the Emperor *Anax imperator* and Southern Hawker from his pond. There were eventually 20 more Emperors from the same pond, a few of which were attacked by sparrows which are not normally quoted as being a predator of Dragonflies.



01. Downy Emerald *Cordulea aenea* . Steve Cham

Images

- 01. Downy Emerald *Cordulea aenea* . Steve Cham
- 02. Dragonfly transect counts River Avon, Eckington
- 03. Female Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* blue form. John Lane.
- 04. Male Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* blue form. John Lane.