

Worcestershire Dragonfly Roundup – 2020

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2935 records received for 2020 from 262 recorders for 27 species.
One new species for the County.

Last year (2019) the theme was migration and this year (2020) the theme continued. We had a quite a bit of migration; one new species; one old friend return and one that keeps trying to get on the county list but hasn't quite made it yet.

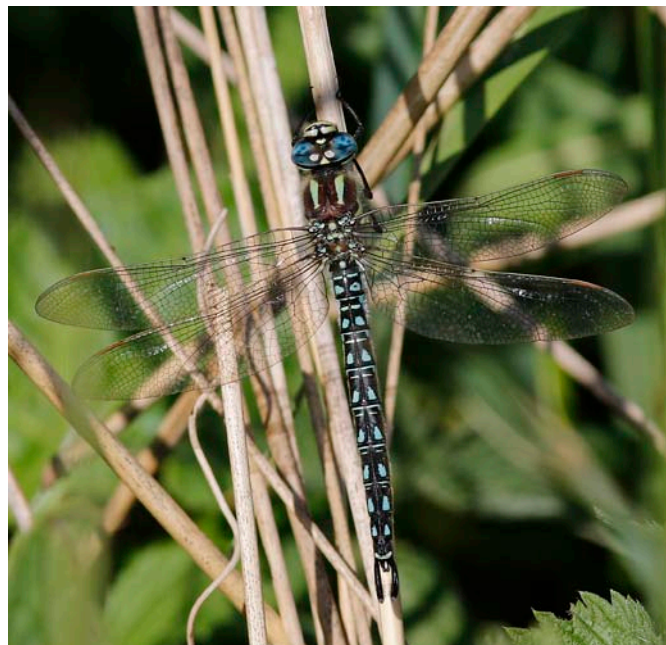
The migrant dragonflies were once again dominated by the appearance of the Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope* (01) with sightings jumping from eight in 2019 to 19 in 2020. The majority of these sightings were at Ripple, with Throckmorton and Pirton getting a few records. It is really good to get this fabulous emperor making regular appearances in the County and there was some evidence of breeding as well this time. One male was noted as patrolling for 20 days at Ripple, its distinctive markings making recognition possible. Our regular visitor the Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii* was only seen once in 2020 and that was quite early on the 25th June at Ryall by Andy Warr, leading to hopes that it had emerged there.



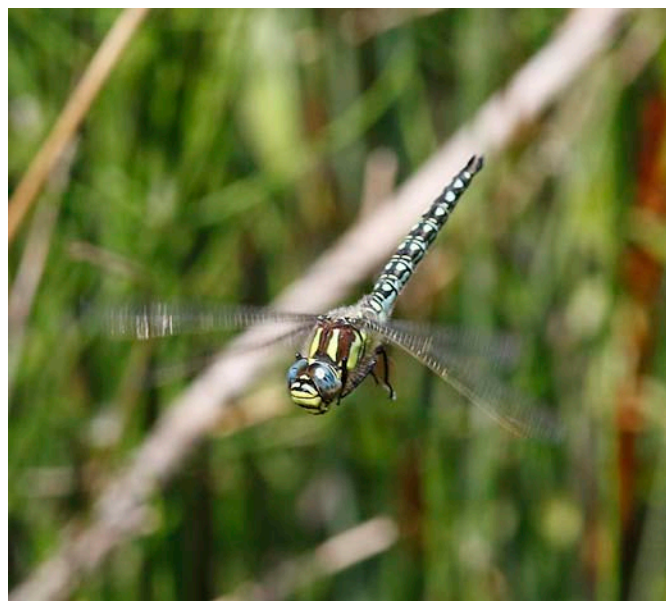
01. Lesser Emperor at Ripple north lake, 30-7-20. Andy Warr.

The old friend is the Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense*, which apart from one record in 2011 was only known in a somewhat mythical sense from two records taken by the few experts who knew them, in the late 1970s. It is a species that is found not too far away in the Somerset levels and parts of Gloucestershire but despite predictions that it might arrive one day, it had failed to choose Worcestershire. Until 2020 that is, when it showed up at several sites and was recorded 17 times between 8th May and 13th June (02 & 03). The appearance may not be such a great surprise if you have been watching the increase in records nationally over the last six

years. Nevertheless it was with huge excitement that sightings were being reported even though we were in lockdown at the time. Andy Warr, whose patch includes the Ryall and Ripple area saw one on the 8th May, for the first time, and on the same day Paul Lloyd spotted one at the south end of the Croome River. At Croome males were present for about 12 days and around Ripple they stayed for approximately three weeks and with some signs of breeding, there are hopes that we will get a regular spot for this species in the annual accounts. There was even a sighting at Nafford on the Avon by Andy Warr.



02. Hairy Dragonfly at Ripple Pits, 24-5-20. Andy Warr.



03. Hairy Dragonfly in flight at Ripple south lake, 21-5-20. Andy Warr.

This is a good point to mention the County's two outstanding sites, Ripple and Croome Park. Ripple is the new area of open water that was the gravel workings either side of the M50 motorway flyover and because of its size and the fact that dragonflies love new areas to colonise, this site has produced 24 species already. Not only that but it is easily accessible and year-round it is also a good site for bird watching as well. Croome Park has been a good site for 20 years and it just gets better, so it was great to see Hairy Dragonfly at the south end of the river as well as a lot of Scarce Chaser *Libellula fulva*. Scarce Chasers did very well in the county this year, and apart from Croome and their usual place on the Avon they were seen many times on Bredon Hill, at Westmancote, Defford, Fladbury and

near Nafford. This dragonfly is sometimes seen along the Severn towards Tewkesbury but it was good to find larval cases near Ripple this year, giving us the first proven breeding on the River Severn. Up at Hillditch Pool, Hartlebury, where there were fears that the eight-year run of breeding might be coming to an end, there was in fact a good showing of up to eight dragonflies at any time with larval cases found as well.

Regulars may remember that one of the species predicted to arrive in the county could be the Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura pumilio*. It was thought that with all the gravel workings they would appear somewhere on those, but to be honest it was not particularly expected at Feckenham Wyldes Moor Reserve, so it was good to hear that Andy Warr had found the County's 31st species there on one of his visits. You can read about that encounter in Andy's own article in this issue. Needless to say this is a very will-of-the-wisp damselfly that has very specific habitat requirements and so one to look carefully for in 2021. One big help in spotting this species is the fact that the immature female form is unique in appearing entirely orange, so look out for that in June (04).



04. Female Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura pumilio aurantiaca*. John Curd.

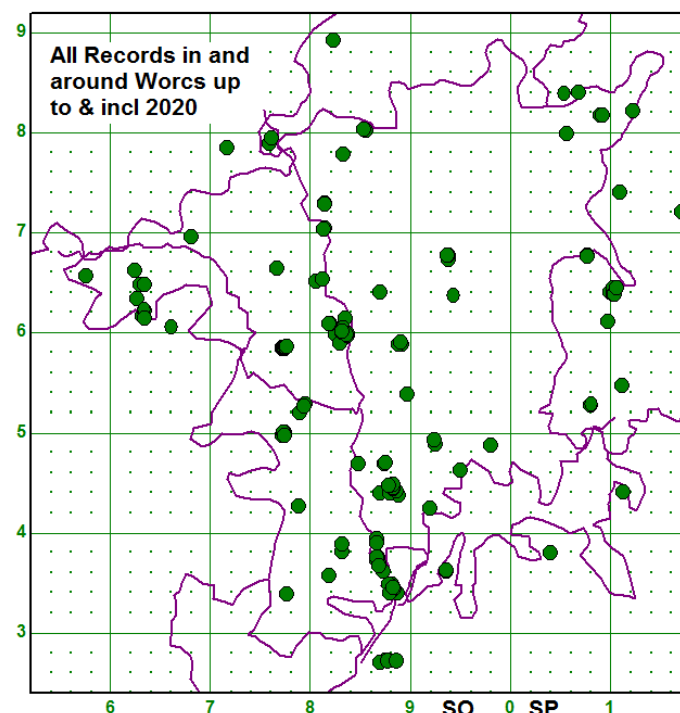
Two of the scarcer species, Golden-ringed Dragonfly *Cordulegaster boltonii*, and Common Hawker *Aeshna juncea* were recorded a few times this year and as usual these were all in the Wyre Forest.

We like to see how the Club-tailed Dragonfly fares each year at the long-running count site at Bewdley and this year it was a little above average and slightly up on the previous two years. This species is unusual amongst the dragonflies for not being very obvious around its egg laying sites - the rivers. This year there were some sightings of males at the lakes at Ripple which were interesting in that several males were seen flying out across the lakes. Not only that but some were catching insects and dropping to the ground to eat them. As we know Clubtails don't normally use lakes but perhaps they just treated the lakes as part of the river which is very close by. As usual any observations of what clubtails get up to, adds to our understanding of what makes them tick.

One other damselfly that deserves a mention is the Small Red-eyed *Erythromma viridulum*. This species was the first new damselfly to add to the County list in recent times and after a rapid sweep across the country starting in 1999, it arrived in Worcestershire in 2006. After that there was a consolidation in the sites around Croome, then Grimley but not much happened for about five years and they resisted spreading into Shropshire & Herefordshire. That was until the last two years when after some filling in around Kidderminster and a few sites towards Birmingham, they have jumped into Staffordshire and up the Teme valley into Shropshire and Herefordshire (Map1).

Finally I should mention a species that has been trying to get on the Worcestershire list for some time now: the Variable Damselfly *Coenagrion pulchellum*, and you can see if it made it this year in the separate article 'The difficulty of identifying some damselfly species'.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly



Map 1. Small Red-eyed Damselfly distribution up to and including 2020 in and around Worcestershire.

Images

- 01. Lesser Emperor at Ripple north lake, 30-7-20. Andy Warr.
- 02. Hairy Dragonfly at Ripple Pits, 24-5-20. Andy Warr.
- 03. Hairy Dragonfly in flight at Ripple south lake, 21-5-20. Andy Warr.
- 04. Female Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura pumilio aurantiaca*. John Curd.