

ODONATA, ISLE OF WIGHT, 2021

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A disappointing recording year with barely 50% of the records received in comparison to 2020. The reduction was due to a number of reasons. The changeable spring weather at the start of the reporting season resulted in species emerging later than normal, and in some cases lower numbers, while two of our small band of regular recorders had limited availability. Twenty-three species of Odonata were reported, with no records received of Four-spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*) for the first time since 2009. This is more likely to be due to a lack of coverage rather than a significant population reduction of the species.

The highlight of the year was Newchurch Moors Nature Reserve, a recent acquisition of the Hampshire & IW Wildlife Trust, being given the accreditation of Priority Site of National Importance for Odonata by the British Dragonfly Society (BDS). This is the first Priority Site for the Isle of Wight. Priority Sites are locally or nationally important areas for dragonflies that support rare and/or threatened species and/or a high diversity of species.

Newchurch Moors attained the status due to its breeding population of Scarce Chaser dragonfly, a species listed in the British Odonata Red Data list as "Near Threatened".

As in most years, Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrosoma nymphula*) was the first species reported with three teneral and one adult at Bouldnor and an adult at Brading Marshes RSPB reserve on 17th April, nine days later than in 2020.

The final record of the year was a Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*) at Shalfleet on 17th November, five days later than in 2020 and the latest sighting since 2012.

The taxonomic sequence and nomenclature follow Schorr and Paulson (2020).

Southern Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes barbarus*)

The small breeding colony at Bouldnor was again well monitored by Peter Hunt, but only seen on three dates. The first record of the year was on 9th July, which is the latest date since the species was reported on the Isle of Wight in 2017. This consisted of a single female. At least two, a male and female, were recorded on 18th July with the final record of at least one female present on 14th August. It is worth noting that all three sightings were away from the breeding ponds and found along a grassy track between the ponds. This is possibly due to the higher level of rainfall which resulted in the two breeding ponds being full of water in 2021. As the species prefers breeding ponds which have virtually dried out by mid-summer, there is a concern that this will impact upon their breeding success. As numbers were also at a record low, the future of the Southern Emerald Damselfly as a breeding species at Bouldnor is looking in doubt.

Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*)



Fig. 1: Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*)

Photo: Jim Baldwin

Nationally, this species has shown a decline in recent years. However, on the Island populations generally appear stable. At Briddlesford, Emerald Damselfly is now occupying more ponds as they mature, so the population has increased.

Banded Demoiselle (*Calopteryx splendens*)

An average year for this species, with the first report nearly three weeks later than in 2020. Banded Demoiselle prefer slow-flowing streams and are therefore widespread across the Island. The majority of the reports came from the East Yar valley where they are seen in their maximum numbers.

Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*)

Unlike the Banded Demoiselle, Beautiful Demoiselle prefer fast-flowing waters. Few reports were received from its main stronghold along Shalfleet Stream (the lower reaches of the Caul Bourne) which produced the first sighting of this species in 2021 on 19th May, another late date. Beautiful Demoiselle appears to be extending its range eastwards with confirmed sightings in the Arreton valley, an indicator of good water quality and free-flowing waterways.

Azure Damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*)

One of the most abundant species of damselfly found on the Island in a wide range of ponds, frequently in gardens. A count of 148 at Newchurch Moors on 17th July was fairly atypical for this species.

Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*)

Although fairly widespread across the Island, Common Blue Damselfly is not as abundant as the Azure Damselfly. Only 21 reports were received of this species, indicating the below-average reporting level rather than a drop in the Island's breeding population.

Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma najas*)

Most of the reports in 2021 were from the Eastern Yar and Medina valleys which reflects its known breeding

populations. Like the Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma viridulum*), this species is found in mainly larger ponds with floating vegetation, particularly water-lilies. Redway Farm pond was a new site for this species.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma viridulum*)



Fig. 2: Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma viridulum*)

Photo: Sue Sibley

Since being first reported by Dave Dana on the Isle of Wight in 2003, this species has become more widespread. First seen on 7th July at Newchurch Moors, one of the few species which was reported as being equal to the 2020 earliest dates. Two new sites were recorded, at Standen and at Godshill.

Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*)

Like the Azure Damselfly, Blue-tailed is another abundant species. This species is found in a wide range of habitats and is tolerant of polluted waters. One at Briddlesford on 12th September was the second latest record since 2008 and reflects upon their later emergence.

Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*)



Fig. 3: Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*)

Photo: Allan Jackson

As previously mentioned, this is the species normally first recorded on the Island each year. There were no reports after 1st July which is likely to indicate the lower volume of records rather than a shortened breeding season.

Southern Hawker (*Aeshna cyanea*)

First seen at Bouldnor on 9th July, this was the latest initial sighting of this species since 2012. Frequently seen at garden ponds, the final sighting of the year was at Cranmore on 7th November which was the latest date since 2018.

Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna mixta*)

Despite its name, this species predominantly breeds on the Island with only the occasional report of a possible immigrant. It was first seen at Briddlesford on 26th July, a fortnight later than in 2020. This species is well reported away from its breeding grounds while it matures. An example of larger numbers recorded was more than 20, on the logs outside the entrance to Kempfill Moor Copse on 24th September. An interesting final record of

the year was at Bembridge Down on 10th November, which might relate to a true migrant.

Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax imperator*)

The largest dragonfly in Britain, which is extremely territorial. Often reported at garden ponds, it is seen throughout the Island. First recorded at Bouldnor on 18th May, which was two days earlier than in 2020. Last seen at St Lawrence on 4th September, the latest date since 2018.

Hairy Dragonfly (*Brachytron pratense*)

After the record number of reports in 2020, 2021 was more atypical with five sightings. The later emergence was reflected in the final sighting at Sandown Meadows Nature Reserve on 13th June, the latest since 2013.

Golden-ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*)

Like the Migrant Hawker, this species is mainly reported away from water while it is maturing. Golden-ringed Dragonfly appears to have extended its range eastwards on the Island in recent years, likely as a result of better-quality acidic running water.

Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*)



Fig. 4: Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*) Photo: Monique Bracegirdle

Predominantly found in the Eastern Yar and Medina valleys, where the small population levels appear to remain constant. There was an intriguing record of a male at Wheeler's Bay on 13th June, the first report from that site since 2007. This species is not known to migrate but on both occasions, there have been records of migrating insects at the same time.

Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*)

Normally the first spring dragonfly species recorded, Broad-bodied Chaser likes standing water, ranging from small ponds to lakes. It is well-known to establish territories at new ponds. As with other species, the lower volume of records received reflects on the lower reporting levels rather than a decrease in the population. The inclement spring weather resulted in a later emergence although the final sighting at East Cowes on 12th July was atypical of recent years and may indicate a shorter breeding season.

Scarce Chaser (*Libellula fulva*)

This species is well established in the Eastern Yar valley. Only a small number of records was received but they indicate that the species was present at the usual sites in similar numbers.

Black-tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*)

Widely located across the Island, this species prefers bare margins to the waterways where it can be found perching horizontally. One at St Lawrence on 4th September was the latest record since 2012 and indicates a later emergence.

Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*)



Fig 5: Male Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*)
Photo: Andy Butler

Fewer reports of this species are more of an indication of under-recording. Keeled Skimmer is found in pools on slipped cliffs at the southern end of the Island.

Red-veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*)



Fig. 6: Red-veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*)
Photo: Andy Butler

Another disappointing year for this species with only three sightings, all from the private site in the Atherfield area. A male was seen on 5th June, two males and an immature on 16th July with the final sighting of a male on 21st July.

Ruddy Darter (*Sympetrum sanguineum*)

Less abundant than Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*), this species prefers ponds with vegetation. Well-established at a number of sites across the Island. An average year for the species.

Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*)

An abundant species seen between June to November. Normally the last dragonfly to be recorded for the year with 2021 being no exception, as previously mentioned.

References

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