

ODONATA, ISLE OF WIGHT, 2022 AND 2023

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2022: The 2022 Odonata recording season saw 24 species recorded with the third and fourth records of Southern Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna affinis*) for the Isle of Wight. No records were received of Southern Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes barbarus*) for the first time since it was discovered at Bouldnor in 2017. This is discussed in further detail in the species section.

The summer drought saw a lot of the major ponds on the Island completely dried out and concern was raised over the future populations of our resident species. Dragonflies are resilient, having lived on this planet in various guises for at least 300 million years, so it was not too surprising to see Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*) back at their breeding ponds in decent numbers following the late summer/early autumn rainfall.

Unsurprisingly, Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*) was the first species reported with a male at Polecat Rise pond, Pan County Park on 10th April. This is within the recent range for a first sighting, with four of the last six years recorded between 8 -10th April.

The final record of the year was a Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*) at Corf on 1st December, the latest ever dragonfly sighting for the Isle of Wight.

2023: A year to remember for Odonata on the Isle of Wight, with a record number of 27 species reported.

The highlights were the first vice-county record of Norfolk Hawker (*Aeshna isosceles*), the fifth and sixth confirmed records of Vagrant Emperor (*Anax ephippiger*), the first sightings of Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura pumilio*) on the Isle of Wight since 2005, and the ninth record of Lesser Emperor (*Anax parthenope*), the first reported since 2014.

The first sighting was a dragonfly seen in flight in Ventnor on 16th March. Thought to have been a Vagrant Emperor, the identification could not be confirmed as the recorder was driving at the time! Large Red Damselfly was the first confirmed species of the year, with a male at Laundry Lane on 9th April, the earliest vice-county date for this species since 2020.

The final record of the year was a Common Darter which was seen and photographed at Cranmore on 6th November. This is the earliest final sighting of the year on the Isle of Wight since 2018.

The taxonomic sequence and nomenclature follow Paulson, Schorr et. al. (2024).

Southern Emerald Damselfly *Lestes barbarus*

2022: Despite Peter Hunt making his regular visits to the breeding ponds at Bouldnor, there were no sightings in 2022. It is thought that the above-average rainfall in 2021 was to blame, with the breeding ponds maintaining a higher level of water than they prefer. With only two sightings in 2021, both away from their ponds, they appear to have failed to breed, and the small, fragile colony established in 2017 has been lost. There were similar results at other Southern Emerald Damselfly sites in southern and eastern England. It is possible that this species may re-colonise in the future, but its breeding status will remain dependent upon their ponds drying out in mid-summer.

2023: No records received.

Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa*

2022: The Island population is thought to remain stable, unlike the overall UK population which is in decline. Eight reports received, which is below the five-year mean of 18.

2023: Six records received, although as in 2022, several established sites for this species were not visited during the flight period which would have given a better understanding of the overall population.

Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens*

2022: An average year with 39 records, in line with the five-year mean. First reported at Thorncross on 21st May with the final sighting of the year at Martin's Wood, Newchurch on 6th August. The East

Yar valley, where they are recorded in their maximum numbers, appears to be the stronghold for this species.

2023: Another average year, with 30 records received. First reported at Borthwood Copse on 26th May, with the final sighting of the year at Brighstone Mill stream on 23rd August, the latest date for this species since 2017. An example of the distance covered by wandering immatures was one at Wheelers Bay revetment on 7th July.



Fig. 1: Banded demoiselle (*Calopteryx splendens*)

Photo: Sue Sibley

Beautiful Demoiselle *Calopteryx virgo*

2022: As with the Banded Demoiselle, it was an average year with 21 records received, in line with the five-year mean. The first sighting was at the Garlic Farm, Newchurch, on 29th May. This is the

latest first report on the Isle of Wight for this species since 2015, as it is normally recorded before the Banded Demoiselle. It is likely to be due to a mixture of the poor weather earlier in May and availability of recorders. The last record was at Wroxall Stream, near the Donkey Sanctuary, and at Shide on 14th August. For the first time for several years, there were no reports from Shalfleet Stream which is one of its major sites; again, likely to be due to recorder availability than a species decline.

2023: An above-average year with 48 records received, which is the highest number in a year for this species on the Island. First recorded at Martin's Wood on 15th May, with the last record at Jersey Camp on 18th August. Most of the sightings came from the East Yar valley, but there were reports of wandering immatures from as far afield as Cranmore and St Lawrence. As in 2022, Shalfleet Stream received no coverage.

Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella*

2022: One of the two commonest species of blue damselfly found in England and widespread throughout the Island, frequenting ponds and ditches. The total of 88 records received was in line with the five-year mean. First recorded at Bouldnor on 29th April, with the last record at Dickson's Copse Pond on 27th August, the latest date since 2016.

2023: Another average year for the species, with 70 records received. First recorded at Parsonage Peat Lake on 10th May, with the last record at Haseley Manor on 10th August.

Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

2022: Although not as abundant as the Azure Damselfly, it can be found throughout the Island. 45 records were received which was in line with the five-year mean. First reported at Combley Great Wood on 12th May, with the last record at Atherfield Reservoir on 18th August which was about a month earlier than normal.

2023: Only 19 records of this species were received, which was below-average. No records were received from several established sites, so it is hoped this is due to reduced coverage rather than a decrease in the population. First recorded at Briddlesford Woods NR on 20th May, with the last record at Kemphill Moor Copse on 7th August.

Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma najas*

2022: As in recent years, most of the 16 records, which represents an average year, were from the Newchurch area and Medina Valley, which reflects its main breeding populations. There was a report from Atherfield Reservoir which is a new site for this species. There is a known population of Small Red-eyed Damselfly at the site but both species favour similar habitat, so it is hoped there will be further records in the future. First recorded at St James Reservoir, Newchurch on 17th May with the last sighting of the year at Martin's Wood on 5th August.

2023: Another average year, with 12 records received. There was a record at Branstone Farm ponds which was a new site for this species. First recorded at Parsonage Peat Lake on 24th May with the last record at Stag Lane Pond on 2nd September.

Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma viridulum*)

2022: 21 records represent an average year for a species which is likely to be under-recorded on the Isle of Wight. The Lakes at Rookley was a new site for the species. First recorded at Stag Lane Pond and the nearby Dickson's Copse Pond on 22nd June, the earliest date since 2017. It was the latter site which reported the final sighting of the year on 27th August.

2023: Only 10 records received which was below average, but likely to be due to reduced coverage rather than a decrease in the population. Branstone Farm ponds was a new site for the species. First recorded at Parsonage Peat Lake on 26th June with the last record at the same site on 4th September.

Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*)

2022: It is an abundant species like the Azure Damselfly; 66 records were received which was slightly below the five-year mean of 82. First recorded at Medham on 8th May, with the last sighting at Stag Lane Pond on 27th August.

2023: Another below-average year for this species, with 46 records received, although several sites were not surveyed in 2023. First recorded at Bembridge Lagoons on 7th May with the last record at Havenbridge Farm on 11th September.

Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura pumilio*)

2022: No records received.

2023: A male was recorded at Compton Chine ponds on 27th May by a visiting dragonfly recorder, David Phillips. He returned to the site the following day and photographed two adults. There was a further sighting from the same site when Andy Butler and his son David recorded two on 7th June, possibly referring to the same individuals (Fig.2). This is the first sighting since at least 2005; the record from 2005 on the NBN Atlas requires further investigation as it may be a duplicate of a confirmed record in 1980.



Fig.2: Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura pumilio*)
Photo: David Butler

Large Red Damselfly

Pyrhosoma nymphula

2022: As mentioned at the start of the report, this species is traditionally the first seen each year, and 2022 was no different. 61 records received was in line with the five-year mean. The final sighting of the year was at Brading Marshes RSPB Reserve on 11th August, the latest date for the species since 2012.

2023: Another average year for this species with 70 records received. The first record on 9th April was typical for the species, with the final record at Hungerberry Copse on 6th July.

Southern Migrant Hawker

Aeshna affinis

2022: Two males were seen and photographed by Luke Gaskin in the "Triangle field" at Brading Marshes RSPB reserve on 2nd August (Fig.3). Subsequent sightings of 2 males on 8th and one on 11th elsewhere on the marshes are thought to relate to the same individuals. A male was recorded coming in off the sea at Wheelers Bay revetment on 5th August (AB) This is the third and fourth records of this species on the Island, after originally being recorded in 2020.

2023: No records received.

Southern Hawker

Aeshna cyanea

2022: An average year for this species; 31 records were received, in line with the five-year mean. First seen at Brook Down on 28th May with the final report at Wydcombe Manor on 23rd October, making it a longer reporting season than normal.

2023: Another average year with 30 records received. First recorded at Bouldnor on 4th June with the final record at Wheelers Bay on 21st September.

Norfolk Hawker

Aeshna isoceles

2022: No records received.

2023: A male was recorded and photographed by James Gloyn at Hill Heath, Newchurch on 8th June (Fig. 4). This is a new species for the Island. Despite its vernacular name, the distribution range for this species has spread west over the last two decades from the Broadlands of Norfolk and northeast Suffolk. It will be interesting to see if this was a wandering individual, or whether there will be further records in 2024.

Migrant Hawker

Aeshna mixta

2022: Another good year for this species with 102 records, which is above the five-year mean of 61 and the most records received since 2007. First recorded at Martin's Wood on 21st July, with an interesting final record at Monks Bay on 20th October which might relate to a genuine migrant individual. Most records came away from their breeding site, with immatures travelling distances to mature.

2023: An average year with 59 records, in line with the five-year mean. First recorded at Firestone Copse and Ventnor Botanic Gardens on 6th July, with the final record at Kempfill Moor Copse and Sandown Water Works on 3rd October, the earliest final sighting of this species since 2016.

Vagrant Emperor

Anax ephippiger

2022: No records received.

2023: It was the best year for this immigrant species from Africa, with two confirmed sightings and, as mentioned earlier, a probable sighting in March. Robin Edwards recorded one on the outskirts of Brighstone Forest on 13th April. Luckily, he was accompanied by a photographer friend visiting from Canada who managed to get an



Fig. 3: Southern Migrant Hawker (*Aeshna affinis*)
Photo: Luke Gaskin



Fig.4: Norfolk Hawker (*Aeshna isoceles*)
Photo: James Gloyn



Fig. 5: Vagrant Emperor (*Anax ephippiger*)
Photo: B. Hunt

excellent photo of it (Fig.5). Apparently, he was quite bemused at photographing a dragonfly as he spends his time photographing bears! The other sighting of was on 27th May, when a male was seen and photographed by Mark Telfer in his Ventnor garden, a great addition to the garden list. This is the fifth and sixth confirmed records for the Island.

Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator*

2022: Another of our abundant dragonfly species, with 101 records received. This is slightly above the five-year mean of 86 for the largest species of dragonfly in Britain. Recorded throughout the Island, it was first seen at Bouldnor on 18th May, the earliest date since 2007. It was a longer reporting season than normal, with the final sighting at St. Catherine's Point on 12th October, the latest date since 1996.

2023: As in 2022, an above-average year with 102 records received. First recorded at Bouldnor on 21st May with the final record at Osborne House on 8th October.

Lesser Emperor *Anax parthenope*

2022: No records received.

2023: A male was photographed by Alex Taylor at the Rocken End lower landslip pond on 20th July, which suggested a migrant (Fig.6). This is the ninth record for the Island and the first since 2014.



Fig.6: Lesser Emperor (*Anax parthenope*)
Photo: Alex Taylor

Hairy Dragonfly *Brachytron pratense*

2022: Ten records were received, which was in line with the five-year mean. It was a lengthy reporting season, with the first record at Alverstoke cycle track on 24th April, the second earliest date, and the last sighting at Sandown Meadows Nature Reserve on 16th June, the latest date since 2013.

2023: Another average year with nine records received. First recorded at Bouldnor and Laundry Lane on 7th May with the final record also at the latter site on 15th June.

Golden-ringed Dragonfly *Cordulegaster boltonii*

2022: A good year for this species with 38 records received, which is substantially higher than the five-year mean of 22. Although a lot of the records relate to individuals maturing away from water, it does provide further indication that the species is extending its breeding range on the island. Like some of the other species, it was an extended

recording season with the first report at Walter's Copse on 24th May, the earliest date since 2007. The final sighting of the year was at Mersley Farm on 23rd September, the latest since 1992. (Fig.7.)

2023: Only 13 records received which was below average. As this species can spend up to five years underwater as a nymph, numbers do fluctuate between years. First recorded at America Woods and Apse Heath on 24th June with the final record at the Donkey Sanctuary along Wroxall Stream on 12th August.



Fig. 7: Golden-ringed Dragonfly (*Cordulegaster boltonii*)
Photo: Allan Jackson

Downy Emerald *Cordulia aenea*

2022: A localised species mainly reported from the Eastern Yar and Medina Valleys. Five records were in line with the five-year mean, although there were no reports from the Medina Valley. This is likely to be a result of recorder availability rather than a decline in the small population. The first report was on 11th May and the final sighting on 4th July, both at Newchurch.

2023: Only two records were received, the first on 24th May and the final record on 7th June, both at Newchurch. As in 2022, there were no reports from the Medina Valley, again due to reduced coverage in the flight period.

Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa*

2022: Typically, this is the first spring dragonfly species to emerge, and this year was no different. 57 records were received which was in line with the five-year mean. First seen at Cranmore on 15th April, the second-earliest date for this species on the Isle of Wight, with the last sighting at Firestone Copse on 24th July.

2023: An above-average year with 75 records received. First recorded at Polecat Rise pond, Pan Country Park on 2nd May with the final record at Bouldnor on 20th July.

Scarce Chaser *Libellula fulva*

2022: A good year for Scarce Chaser with 21 reports, the most ever received for this species (the five-year mean is 13). All came from the Eastern Yar valley, and indicated a typical flight period in length, but with both an earlier start and finish. First recorded at Newchurch on 6th May, the earliest ever date by twelve days, with the final record at Brading

Marshes RSPB reserve on 9th July, around a fortnight earlier than normal.

2023: Fourteen records received, which was in line with the five-year mean. First recorded at Newchurch on 24th May with the final record also at Newchurch on 19th July.



Fig. 8: Scarce Chaser (*Libellula fulva*)

Photo: James Gloyn

Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*

2022: After receiving no reports in 2021, a total of eight records was slightly above the five-year mean for this under-recorded species. All sightings came from Brading Marshes RSPB Reserve where the species is known to breed. An immature was seen and photographed on 6th May, the earliest ever date by four days, with the final record on 1st August, the latest date, also by four days.

2023: Only three records received with none from Brading Marshes. A male was seen at Bouldnor on 28th and 30th May, with two males present on 4th June. This species is not known to breed at the site and it is thought the records refer to wandering individuals from the Hampshire population.



Fig. 9: Four-spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*)

Photo: Jim Baldwin

Black-tailed Skimmer *Orthetrum cancellatum*

2022: An average year for this species with 48 records received which is in line with the five-year mean. This species is found throughout the Island where there are bare margins to the ponds for perching. First recorded at Bembridge Lagoons and Brading Marshes RSPB reserve on 20th May with the final sighting at Kemphill Moor Copse on 27th August.

2023: A below-average year with 27 records received. First recorded at Martin's Wood on 1st June with the final record at Bembridge Lagoons on 20th August.

Keeled Skimmer *Orthetrum coerulescens*

2022: Reports of Keeled Skimmer on the Isle of Wight rely heavily on one or two recorders who visit

the challenging habitat of slipped coasts at the southern end of the Island. No records were received from Whale Chine, purely due to recorder availability. Interestingly, on the mainland, Keeled Skimmer prefer wet heathland sites.

2023: 4 males and a female were recorded at Whale Chine on 25th July. This was the only visit possible with no reports from Blackgang Terrace, due to the weather.



Fig. 10: Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*)

Photo: Andy Butler

Red-veined Darter *Sympetrum fonscolombii*

2022: Although this migrant species has previously bred on the Isle of Wight, the sightings in 2022 are likely to be wandering individuals from the continent. A male was seen on 18th June and two males on 8th July at the private site in the Atherfield area (AB & PC). There were further reports with 1-2 males in a garden, also on 8th July, at Springvale (J & S M) with the final report of a female along the revetment at Wheelers Bay on 21st July (AB) (Fig.11).

2023: For the first time in four years, the species was back to its previous maxima at the Atherfield reservoir. There was no breeding evidence seen in 2023, but 12 adults were present on 26th May, with a maximum count of 14 on 26th June (AB & PC). The final record of the year was two at the site on 15th September (AB).



Fig. 11: Red-veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*)

Photo: Andy Butler

Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum*

2022: A total of 25 records for the year was slightly below the five-year mean of 30, but is likely to be the result of recorder availability at some of the prime sites rather than a decrease in the population. First seen at Cranmore on 2nd June, with the last record at Brading Marshes RSPB reserve on 20th September.

2023: An average year, with 35 records received. First recorded at Cranmore on 12th June with the final record at Naturezones, Blackwater, on 30th September.

Common Darter *Sympetrum striolatum*

2022: The most widely reported dragonfly on the Isle of Wight with 151 records received, which was slightly above the five-year mean of 113. First recorded at Newchurch on 5th June with the final record, as mentioned earlier in the report, at Corf on 1st December (VG & EH).

2023: Another above average year with 154 records received, the most for this species since 2003. First recorded at Bouldnor on 30th May with the final record at Cranmore on 6th November.

References

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