

Dragonflies in Bracknell Forest Borough: Report 2014

This report is in two parts and replaces an interim report issued on 23 September 2014. In the first part we report on the dragonflies and damselflies seen on the wing during 2014. In the second half we take a look at a major new publication – a new atlas of British dragonflies which appeared in May 2014 - and summarise its content in relation to our local sites and species.

The 2014 Flying Season

During the 2014 flying season, 27 species (see Appendix) were recorded on the wing in the Borough, with evidence of breeding for 19 species.

The 2014 flying season followed the wettest winter (2013/4) since records began in 1766. This was followed by one of the mildest springs on record. There were long spells of warm, sunny weather during June and July, with occasional torrential thunderstorms which kept water levels topped up. The sunny weather continued into the first week of August. At the end of the week temperatures dropped by several degrees and a period of much cooler, changeable weather took over, lasting throughout the month; August 2014 was the coolest for 21 years. A warm, dry, settled period of weather re-established at the start of September and lasted into the first two days of October. The remainder of the month was changeable, but ended with the warmest Halloween on record. Overall 2014 was the warmest year since records began in 1659, every month except August being warmer than average. Also 2014 was the fourth wettest since 1910, although September was the driest ever.

During 2014, there was one addition to the list of dragonflies recorded in the Borough. On 22 June 2014, a single male **Lesser Emperor** (*Anax parthenope*), an annual migrant and irregular breeder in Britain, was recorded at Felix Farm Trout Fishery, Binfield.

Three species which have been recorded locally are classified under the British Dragonfly Society (BDS) scheme as **nationally-important**. **Brilliant Emerald** had a good year; there were records from six sites – Englemere Pond, Rapley Lake, Bush Fields, Forest Pond and Mill Pond, all in Swinley Forest, plus Butter Bottom Ponds, Crowthorne. It was generally a good year for **Small Red Damselfly** (*Ceragrion tenellum*). Several of the known sites for this species were not visited during 2014, but it was present at all its regular sites that were surveyed. During 2014 there were no reported sightings of **Scarce Chaser** (*Libellula fulva*). Although there were records of this species closeby, on the River Blackwater in Surrey, during 2014, this species has been seen in the Borough just once, in 2012.

Five local species have been classified by BDS as **locally-important**. These are: **Hairy Dragonfly** (*Brachytron pratense*), **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*), **Downy Emerald** (*Cordulia aenea*), **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** (*Cordulagaster boltonii*), and **Keeled Skimmer** (*Orthetrum coerulescens*). For the sixth successive year male **Hairy Dragonfly** (*Brachytron pratense*) has been recorded locally, with sightings at Swinley Brick Pits, Wildmoor (Mike Turton) and Chaucer Woods (Des Sussex). We still await the first local records of females and breeding activity. **Downy Emerald** had a good year and was reported at a range of sites. **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** had a good season, with records from six sites, including a female egg-laying in the ditch system close to Mill Pond, Swinley Forest. **Keeled Skimmer** was reported in good numbers from several sites. It is pleasing to report three sightings of **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*), never common locally. A female was seen at Wildmoor Heath on 16 August and Vicky Potts recorded two more adults at the same site on 22 August.

Amongst other species, for **Beautiful Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx virgo*) 2014 was an exceptionally good year, with records from the River Blackwater at Shepherd Meadows, Wildmoor Heath (Mike Turton),

Bush Fields (Michael Byrne), Crowthorne Woods and Gormoor Valley. Records of **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma viridulum*) still appear to be in decline; in 2014, as in 2013, it was only recorded at Felix Farm Trout Fishery, Binfield and Allsmoor Pond. There were no records for **White-legged Damselfly** (*Platycnemis pennipes*) in 2014 because no recorder had a permit to enter its single known local site, Butter Bottom Ponds, Crowthorne. One other record is worthy of note. At Crowthorne Wood a praenubila variant of the **Four-spotted Chaser** (*Libellula quadrimaculata*) was observed. This spectacular dragonfly had extensive black blotches over its wing.

One first flying date was equaled this year. An **Emerald Damselfly** was seen on 13 June, equaling the 2010 record. Two new late-flying records were established and three more were equaled. An **Emperor Dragonfly** at the balancing ponds at The Parks, Bracknell on 9 September equaled the late-flying record from 2007. Two **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** at Felix Farm Trout Fishery on 15 September established a new late-flying date, two days later than the previous record from 2007. A solitary male **Keeled Skimmer** on the Owlsmoor bog area of Wildmoor Heath on 22 September exceeded the 2009 record by one day. Also on 22 September, three **Banded Demoiselle** were observed on the River Blackwater at Shepherd Meadows, equaling the long-established record from 1998. Finally, at Wildmoor on 19 November, the late flying record from 2010 for **Southern Hawker** was equalled.

At Wishmoor Bottom, the Wish Stream defines the county boundary between Berkshire and Surrey. Due to the recent efforts of James Herd, Surrey Wildlife Trust, and a team of volunteers, the use of shuttering has led to significant improvements to areas of open water on both sides of the stream.

Atlas of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland, 2014

This magnificent new publication updates and expands upon the previous national atlas, produced in 1996. It is based on records obtained by volunteers over the five-year period from 2008 to 2012, with comparisons to records obtained from previous years. Information is provided on the dragonfly and damselfly species recorded in the UK, their national distribution, flight period, and the habitats they use. In recent years there has been a significant increase in the number of species migrating into the UK, and the atlas analyses trends in the status of species since 1980. The book contains an account and photograph of each species, together with numerous pictures illustrating the places and habitats where they are found. In total 57 species are featured, 56 of which have been recorded in mainland Britain. Of the 56 British species, 42 are regarded as resident breeding species, 14 are migratory, vagrant or non-established, and two are considered extinct. Table 6 informs us that 34 species have been recorded in Berkshire from 2000 to 2012. From our local records, we know that in that same period, 28 species were recorded in Bracknell Forest Borough (One additional species (Lesser Emperor) has since been recorded in 2014, and two other species (Yellow-winged Darter and Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly) were recorded in the 1990s). With two-thirds of the resident British species present, Bracknell Forest Borough is an exceptionally good area to see dragonflies.

Of local interest, the atlas contains photographs of sites within the Borough: Wildmoor Heath (p18 and p156), Swinley Brick Pits (p27), Butter Bottom Ponds, Crowthorne (p92) and Crowthorne Woods bog (p95).

For anyone with an interest in their local wildlife generally, or dragonflies in particular, this is strongly recommended as an important addition to their bookshelf. The atlas contains a wealth of information on all our local dragonflies, which are listed in the Appendix at the end of this report.

Footnotes

Recording effort. Over the period 2008 to 2012 recording was at an elevated level to make the new national atlas as comprehensive as possible. In 2013 and 2014 effort in the Bracknell Forest area has dropped back significantly. For example, permits to enter Wellington College, the Royal Military

Academy, Sandhurst and the Broadmoor Staff Angling Society lakes at Butter Bottom were not requested, so no data were collected from within these important dragonfly sites. A few records were collected from the public footpath that runs alongside the lakes at Butter Bottom, Crowthorne.

Common Hawker. During 2014 there has been a move amongst some British dragonfly observers to adopt the name Moorland Hawker, its European name. This move has my strong support, as the dragonfly is not common in Berkshire and the alternative name is much more appropriate.

Appendix Dragonflies and Damselflies Recorded in Bracknell Forest Borough since 2008

Damselflies (11)		Recorded 2014	Recorded Breeding 2014
Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>	Yes	No
Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>	Yes	Yes
Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	Yes	Yes
White-legged Damselfly	<i>Platycnemis pennipes</i>	No	No
Small Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma viridulum</i>	Yes	Yes
Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma najas</i>	Yes	No
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>	Yes	Yes
Small Red Damselfly**	<i>Ceriagrion tenellum</i>	Yes	Yes
Azure Damselfly	<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	Yes	Yes
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	Yes	Yes
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	Yes	Yes
Dragonflies (18)		Recorded 2014	Recorded Breeding 2014
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	Yes	Yes
Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	Yes	No
Brown Hawker	<i>Aeshna grandis</i>	Yes	Yes
Common Hawker*	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>	Yes	No
Emperor Dragonfly	<i>Anax imperator</i>	Yes	Yes
Lesser Emperor	<i>Anax Parthenope</i>	Yes	No
Hairy Dragonfly*	<i>Brachytron pretense</i>	Yes	No
Golden-ringed Dragonfly *	<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>	Yes	Yes
Downy Emerald*	<i>Cordulia aenea</i>	Yes	No
Brilliant Emerald**	<i>Somatochlora metallica</i>	Yes	No
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Yes	Yes
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>	Yes	Yes
Scarce Chaser**	<i>Libellula fulva</i>	No	No
Black-tailed Skimmer	<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>	Yes	Yes
Keeled Skimmer*	<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>	Yes	Yes
Common Darter	<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	Yes	Yes
Ruddy Darter	<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>	Yes	Yes
Black Darter	<i>Sympetrum danae</i>	Yes	Yes
Totals 2014		27	19

** Nationally important species

* Locally important species