

2020 Dragonfly season in Bracknell Forest

John Ward-Smith and Des Sussex

2020 will be remembered as the year when the coronavirus struck, and many restrictions were imposed inhibiting freedom of movement. But for dragonfly enthusiasts in Bracknell Forest it will also be remembered as an extraordinary year for dragonfly sightings. No less than 30 species were recorded in the Borough, an exceptionally high count.

In chronological order, the highlights were as follows.

Scarce Chaser (*Libellula fulva*). On 26 May 2020, on the River Blackwater at Shepherd Meadows, Sandhurst, a single male Scarce Chaser was seen by John Ward-Smith. This is just the second record for the Borough, following the sighting on 26 July 2012 from the same site, reported by Des Sussex.

Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura pumilio*). This species was first reported on 13 July 2020 by Nick Percival from Buckler's Forest, Crowthorne (the old TRL site), when two males were observed. Subsequently, although numbers were always low – never exceeding five at most - many further sightings have been recorded at the same site, and mating has been reported. The only other records for this species in the Borough were in 1996.

Lesser Emperor (*Anax parthenope*) On 16 July 2020, Steve Harley photographed a male Lesser Emperor at Buckler's Forest. Over the years there have been sporadic reports of sightings of this species in Berkshire, including one at Felix Farm Trout Fishery, Binfield, in 2014.

Willow Emerald (*Chalcolestes viridis*). On 5 September 2020, Alan Holmes reported the sighting of 3 male Willow Emeralds at Englemere Pond, Ascot. This is the first record for the species in the Borough. In the following days, several other observers reported sightings from the site. Also, the characteristic scars left following oviposition have been found there on willow, evidence that breeding has occurred. Then, on 21 September 2020, Alan Holmes reported Willow Emerald sightings of a singleton at Bush Fields and numerous individuals and mating pairs at Mill Pond, two sites within Swinley Forest.

Besides the above records the following are worthy of note. Three species which are classified under the British Dragonfly Society (BDS) scheme as **nationally-important** have been recorded regularly over the years in the Borough. In 2020, it was a goodyear for **Brilliant Emerald** (*Somatochlora metallica*), which was recorded at the Butter Bottom Ponds, Caesars Camp ponds, Forest Pond, Mill Pond (Swinley Forest), Rapley Lake, Swinley Brick Pits, Crowthorne Woods and Shepherd Meadows. **Small Red Damselfly** (*Ceriagrion tenellum*) was reported from several sites, including Crowthorne Woods, Caesars Camp Pond, Mill Pond (Swinley Forest), Rapley Lake, Swinley Brick Pits, Wildmoor Heath, Whitmoor Bog and the new site at Buckler's Forest. As reported above, **Scarce Chaser** (*Libellula fulva*), was seen in the Borough, on the River Blackwater at Sandhurst for the first time since 2012.

Five local species are 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*). **Hairy Dragonfly** (*Brachytron pratense*) was recorded at Crowthorne Woods. **Downy Emerald** was recorded at seven sites: Rapley Lake, Bush Fields and Mill Pond (Swinley Forest), Swinley Brick Pits and Dukes Hill, Crowthorne Woods and Butter Bottom Ponds. **Golden-ringed Dragonfly** was recorded at Swinley Brick Pits, Crowthorne Woods, the Embankment, Swinley Forest and Wildmoor Heath. Larvae were found by targeted searches at Crowthorne Woods and Wildmoor Heath. **Keeled Skimmer** was present in good numbers at several sites. For several year running, including 2020, there have been no reported sightings of **Common Hawker** (*Aeshna juncea*).

Amongst other species, **White-legged Damselfly** (*Platycnemis pennipes*) was recorded at Butter Bottom Ponds, its only local site, indicating that the species is still present there. Over the past few years **Beautiful Demoiselle** (*Calopteryx virgo*) has been recorded at an increasing number of sites and that momentum was maintained during 2020. **Black Darter** (*Sympetrum danae*) was present at Mill Pond, where ovipositing was recorded, and at Swinley Brick Pits and Cobblers Hole Bog. It was also seen at Crowthorne Woods and Dukes Hill. **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** (*Erythromma viridulum*) was recorded at Crowthorne Woods, Felix Farm Trout Fishery (Binfield), Mill Pond (Mill Park), Longshot Lane and Bucklers Forest.

For the first time in 2020, an important new site for dragonflies became easily accessible for monitoring. The former Transport Research Laboratory is being developed for housing, and an important wildlife area, known as Buckler's Forest, has been created there. As Buckler's Forest is adjacent to Crowthorne Woods, and it has good and varied dragonfly habitat, it is already being colonised by most of the species present at the latter site.

Some eight years have elapsed since records have been obtained at two important sites: the ponds at Wellington College and those at RMA, Sandhurst. These are sites requiring a permit for access; they are both important for the **Brilliant Emerald** and a wide range of other species they support.

The table below summarises the species records for the Borough during 2020. The "Recorded 2020" column refers to observations of flying adults. The "Recorded breeding 2020" column includes any record of teneral or emergent adults, or of copulating or ovipositing behaviour.

Appendix Dragonflies and Damselflies Recorded in Bracknell Forest Borough during 2020

Damselflies		Recorded 2020	Recorded Breeding 2020
Beautiful Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>	Yes	No
Banded Demoiselle	<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>	Yes	No
Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	Yes	No
Willow Emerald Damselfly	<i>Chalcolestes viridis</i>	Yes	Yes
White-legged Damselfly	<i>Platycnemis pennipes</i>	Yes	No
Small Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma viridulum</i>	Yes	No
Red-eyed Damselfly	<i>Erythromma najas</i>	Yes	Yes
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	No
Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura pumilio</i>	Yes	Yes
Dragonflies		Recorded 2020	Recorded Breeding 2020
Migrant Hawker	<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	Yes	No
Southern Hawker	<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	Yes	Yes
Brown Hawker	<i>Aeshna grandis</i>	Yes	Yes
Common Hawker*	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>	No	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	Yes
Brilliant Emerald**	<i>Somatochlora metallica</i>	Yes	No
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Yes	No
Broad-bodied Chaser	<i>Libellula depressa</i>	Yes	Yes
Scarce Chaser**	<i>Libellula fulva</i>	Yes	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 2020	30	18

** Nationally important species

* Locally important species

19 April 2021