

## North Wales Dragonfly Newsletter No. 50. 10th May 2011.

Hi all,



### Unusual early emergence

All the early emerging species of damsel and dragon are now on the wing though the cold wind kept the numbers flying low given the long spell of lovely sunshine. There have been reports from across Britain of unusual early emergence of some species. I suspect that the long spell without rain led to shallower water which then warmed up more than normal in the prolonged spell of sunshine thereby enhancing larval development. Anyway, it's an interesting theory!

The few records I've received so far are not without interest. Geoff Gibbs noticed a Four-spotted Chaser (*Libellula quadrimaculata*) in conifers to the east of the Roman Steps on the 27th April. This is the earliest sighting of an adult of this species since recording began in North Wales. The previous earliest record was when I observed emergence at the lovely Gwern Engen bog lake in the Sychnant Pass on the 30th April 2007. Another record breaker was a male Beautiful Demoiselle (*Calopteryx virgo*) photographed by Alun Williams along the Afon Clwyd at Ruthin on the 7<sup>th</sup> May (<http://lennatur.com/en/node/28>). The previous record for North Wales goes to Andrew and Janet Graham for their sighting of several adults at Esgair-wen, Dolgellau on the 16th May 1999.

Kelvin Jones came across a sunbathing Hairy Dragonfly whilst mist netting at Llyn Ystumlllyn on the Lley on the 4<sup>th</sup> May though the species had previously been recorded from there. Debbie Evans photographed this immature male Broad-bodied Chaser at a small coastal pool near Rhiw on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May, also down the Lley, while she was on an Oil Beetle hunt. Although this immature male still has the same coloration as a female its gender is readily determined by an inspection of its anal appendages at the tip of the abdomen. Compare this with those of the female she photographed near Dinas, Llanwnda on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2010, and recently sent in by Debbie, which proved to be a first for the species for 10 km square SH45. In the male they are close together and in the female wide apart.



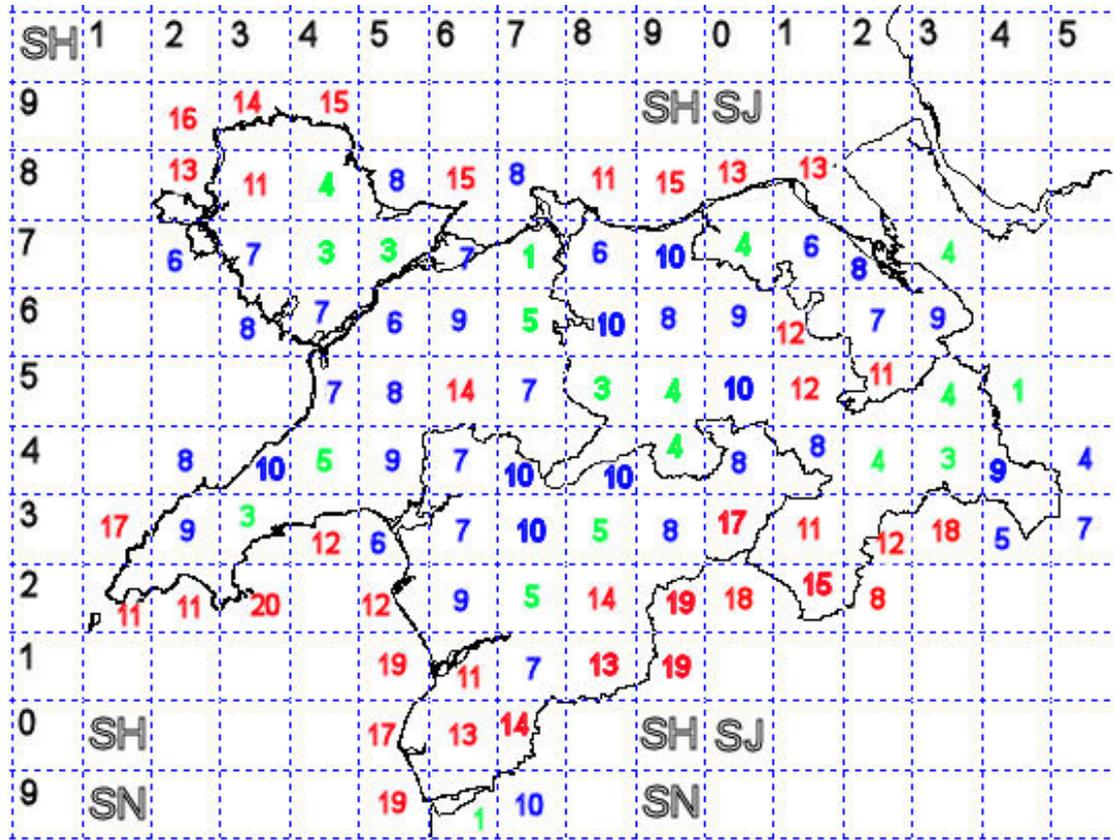
Immature male *Libellula depressa*, photographed by Debbie Evans on the 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2011 at a coastal pool near Rhiw, Lleyn Peninsular



Female *Libellula depressa* photographed by Debbie Evans on the 21<sup>st</sup> May 2011 near Dinas, Llanwnda.

### Progress in recording for new dragonfly atlas

The map below shows how many new species are still hoping to be recorded for each 10km square. Squares with red numerals are therefore the priority areas for recording although records from anywhere in North Wales are, as usual, very welcome. To find out which species these are consult the attached chart.



### Vagrant Emperor invades Britain

In the early part of the year there was a mass northerly migration into Europe of Vagrant Emperor (*Anax ephippiger*) from North Africa. Reports of individuals were reported in Britain from Cornwall to Cheshire during January to March. An account is given at:

<http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/fine-weather-brings-desert-dragonflies-britain>

I would urge enthusiasts to keep a look out for this rare vagrant. It superficially resembles a Lesser Emperor (*Anax parthenope*) except for the brown eyes.



Male *Anax ephippiger*, November 2005, Kerala. Photo A. Brandon

#### Exotic odonates in North Wales

There is an increasing chance that tropical odonate species could be found emerging indoors in North Wales. Due to the importation of freshwater pond weed from such places as south-east Asia for use in tropical fish tanks, eggs of some exotic species are known to have hatched into larvae and developed through to flying adults in Britain. The situation has been summarised by Adrian Parr (Records of exotic Odonata in Britain during 2010. *Atropos*, Vol. 41. 2010). The two most common species known to have done so are the Ubiquitous (or Common) Bluetail (*Ischnura senegalensis*) and the Oriental Scarlet Darter (*Crocothemis servilia*), both species found widely throughout tropical Asia. The former superficially resembles our two bluetail species and has a female orange teneral form which could easily be mistaken for that of the Scarce Bluetail (*I. pumilio*).



Female heterochrome form of *Ischnura senegalensis*. Kerala, 2006. Photo A. Brandon

The latter species is very close in appearance to the Scarlet Darter (*C. erythraea*) found widely across southern Europe and Africa and which is a rare vagrant in Britain. It has been said of *Crocothemis* males that ‘they make a pillar box look green’!



Male *Crocothemis servilia*, November 2005, Kerala. Photo A. Brandon

It would be possible to rear these exotic species into adults using blood worms. Though they are unlikely to survive in our northern climates, just to make sure it is recommended that any that emerge from heated fish tanks are not liberated outside. Unfortunately, Oriental Scarlet Darter is now established in Florida due to such action.

So far the only known occurrence of an exotic species in North Wales was in the form of a 15 mm long nymph reported last November by John Chapman in his tropical fish tank. It appeared to be surviving on small snails and he suspected it was introduced in the weed. The nymph is obviously of the libellulid darter-type but the species is uncertain. Unfortunately, I have not managed to find out if this was reared to adulthood.



Monster and snails in John Chapman's North Wales aquarium, November 2010.

#### **Did you know .....**

that dragonflies can be divided into two groups depending on their mode of flight and rest. The **Flyers**, i.e. those species that spend a good deal of time in the air, rest with their bodies in a vertical attitude and their abdomens hanging downwards. Members of this group include the aeshnids or hawkers, cordulids or emeralds, and cordulegastrids or goldenrings. Though none are British, some libellulids are distinctly flyers in their character such as *Pantala flavescens* (Wandering Glider) and species of crepuscular *Tholymis*. The other group comprise the **Perchers** and all are libellulids including all the British species. It also includes the gomphids or clubtails. These species perch sub-horizontally, typically on a favoured twig or rock, where they wait for passing food, potential mates or to see off rivals. Their flight is generally made in short bursts, hence such names as darters, chasers, skimmers and dashers. There are, of course, a few exceptions and perhaps the best known are species of *Tramea* (gliders) and *Rhyothemis* (flutterers). These beautiful advanced libellulids spend a great deal of time doing their thing in the tropical skies but rest up like perchers.

#### **Lizard predation on dragonflies**

Dennis Paulson noted this paragraph in a Science Daily:

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/10/101026161257.htm>

"Like a never-ending feud, these battles are still going on today. Scientists have documented in some sites near waterfalls in Costa Rica that there are many dragonflies of a certain species. But if lizards are present, there are no dragonflies -- it appears they all get eaten."

**Allan**

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