

No 34. 3rd July 2009

Hi all,



River Dee specials

For the third year running Blue Featherlegs or White-legged Damselfly (*Platycnemis pennipes*) has been found on the Dee around Holt. Neil Friswell saw 5 females and/or teneral males on the 5th June and at least 6 on the 12th June. Corbet and Brooks (2008) infer that its apparent recent range expansion is more in response to improving water qualities than climate change.

Neil returned to the river on the 26th and 29th of June and recorded a few mature Common Clubtails (*Gomphus vulgatissimus*). As far as I know this is the first time that pale green mature males have been seen along the Dee.

Black-tailed Skimmer (*Orthetrum cancellatum*) at Colwyn Bay

John Harold reported a male at a muddy pond at Bryn Cadno, Colwyn Bay on the 16 June.

More Red-veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*) sightings

As reported in the Bardsey Blog, a male was seen briefly on the south end of Bardsey on the 19th June.

While admiring hoards of Silver-studded Blue, Les Colley was surprised by a male browsing along path [SH761831] above Gogarth on Great Orme on the 29th June. This individual was a long way from water.

I should mention here that 'Peewee', who reported finding the 6 Red-veined Darters at Llanfairfechan on the North Wales Birding Forum, is Paul Derbyshire.

All our North Wales sightings so far this year have been around the coasts. I presume in early June these migrants hit the coast where they congregated in favourable places with a supply of food and possibly fresh water and sunny spots sheltered from the wind. Whether they eventually headed-out across the Irish Sea or dispersed locally is unknown.

Small Bluetail or Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura pumilio*)

Paul Derbyshire popped over to the cattle-trampled, muddy 'pumilio pond' [SH 4910 8040] at Craig Wen, Cors Goch on 1st July and saw 3 males.

I encountered quite a few on the 29th June during my monitoring at Cors Geirch on the Lleyn including several copulas (see photo). The species is commonly seen alongside Common Bluetail (*Ischnura elegans*) at Cors Geirch and is then conspicuously the smaller insect.



Ischnura pumilio copula, Cors Geirch, 29th July 2009. Note red mite on female.



Ischnura elegans copula, Cors Geirch, 29th July 2009. The female is the typical blue form.

Hairy Hawker (*Brachytron pratense*)

Several people have reported the species in June from its usual haunts in Anglesey, the Llyn and the Wrexham area: Debbie Evans and Julian Weldrick from Cors Goch; Peter Derbyshire and Matt Latham from Cors Erddreiniog; Ian Hawkins from RSPB Malltraeth and Llyn Ystumlllyn; Neil Friswell from along the Dee at Holt. No new localities were found this year.

Emperor everywhere

I was obviously hasty in mentioning the possibility of the Emperor's demise. Males have been patrolling ponds everywhere I've been in the last week or so.



Anax imperator copula, Morfa Aber, 28th June 2009

Success at the RSPB Burton Mere dragonfly meeting, Sunday 28th June 2009

Neil Friswell, who led the event last Sunday, reports: 'We had 20 participants and all had a good time so it was a win for RSPB and for odonata! We saw eight species on the day (could have added two or three more if we'd visited other parts of the reserve) including 45 Four-spotted Chasers, 16 Black-tailed Skimmers, two Emperors and 50+ emerging Common Darters. Also saw Azure, Blue-tailed, Large Red Damselflies and six Red-eyed Damselflies.'

Legless Frogs Mystery Solved

From BBC News Online 25 June 2009:

'Scientists think they have resolved one of the most controversial environmental issues of the past decade: the curious case of the missing frogs' legs. Around the world, frogs are found with missing or misshaped limbs, a striking deformity that many researchers believe is caused by chemical pollution. However, tests on frogs and toads have revealed a more natural, benign cause. The deformed frogs are actually victims of the predatory habits of dragonfly nymphs, which eat the legs of tadpoles: <http://snipr.com/kx70t>'

This sparked quite a debate online at odonata-l@listhost.ups.edu; it was pointed out that the evidence came from just three English ponds so to extrapolate a world solution to the problem was thought to be going too far. Eventually Dennis Paulson, 27th June, wrote:

‘As is so often the case with science "news" this doesn't actually solve the mystery. It's explains some of the cases of the missing limb phenomena. I was at an amphibian conference in 2008 where one of the speakers was Mike Lannoo. In his talk, Lannoo stressed that many folks were looking for easy, non-anthropogenic answers. He was able to show, through slides of many frog x-rays why predation answered only a fraction of the malformation cases. Chemicals, cattle and urbanization are all still contributors. He's written an entire book on the subject, Malformed Frogs: The Collapse of Aquatic Ecosystems (2008). An excerpt of the first chapter can be found at: <https://www.ucpress.edu/books/chapters/11098.ch01.pdf>’



Allan

Dr Allan Brandon
North Wales Dragonfly Recorder
Bryn Heilyn, Rowen, Conwy LL32 8YT.
01492 651066.
Allan@rowenconwy.wanadoo.co.uk