

## ODONATA REPORT 2014

The following review of the Dragonflies recorded at Woolston this season is the first for a few years and I hope that it complements the other records contained in the Annual Report. It is based to a large extent on the records and information held on the Group's website, individual records passed to me, and entries in the Log Book.

Sixteen species were recorded this year, commencing with Azure Damselflies and Broad-bodied Chasers on 16th May from No.3 bed. During the rest of the spring and the early summer period a variety of damselflies and the odd dragonfly were reported from No.3 bed. However, the greatest variety of dragonfly records throughout the summer period come from No.1 bed, at the eastern end of the Reserve. It is no coincidence that these records resulted from several surveys conducted at the New Pool in particular by a group of permit holders and Wardens. The season continued into the autumn with sightings from across the Reserve, ending on 11th October with a Migrant Hawker.

Dragonflies are most active during warm sunny days and this year we were blessed with a number of these from May onwards, encouraging the first damselflies to be on the wing. Sunny conditions with blue skies prevailed during the surveys on No.1 bed on 14th and 21st June, when eleven different species were observed. The weather was warm on 12th July and even hotter by the 26th when No.1 bed was revisited, and at least eight species were recorded. The weather conditions remained favourable during August and into September and on the final visit to the New Pool on 13th September the sun shone again on a beautiful early autumn morning.

Many thanks to all those who submitted their records and photographs to the website and also for entries in the Log Book, without which this Report would not have been possible. Last but not least, I am grateful to the Wardens for giving me and my fellow permit holder's access to the pools on No.1 bed, on those lovely sunny Saturday mornings.

### Species Accounts

#### **Banded Demoiselle**

*Calopteryx splendens*

These stunning damselflies have coloured wings and are usually seen beside slow-moving lowland watercourses and even Canals. The male is metallic blue-green with a blue-black band across the wings. Females are pale green. The species has been recorded at Woolston increasingly since 2006. The earliest record this year came from Rixton Paddocks, at the eastern end of the Reserve, when a male was spotted on 31st May alongside the Ship Canal. There was an unusual sighting on 11th June when a male was found and photographed by David Spencer at the Rotary Hide on No.3 bed. The next record on 14th June was again from the Ship Canal when one was present at Thelwall Viaduct. There was another record from the No.1 bed area on the 21st June when two were found. The River Mersey, adjacent to the Weir, has often been a good place to spot this species and I recall seeing a male fluttering alongside the vegetation there on one occasion during the summer.



*Banded Demoiselle*

*David Bowman*

### **Large Red Damselfly**

*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

This common early emerging breeding species seems to have been over-looked this year, with no records received.



*Emerald Damselfly*

*David Spencer*

### **Emerald Damselfly**

*Lestes sponsa*

These rather delicate looking damselflies have metallic-green bodies and usually rest with the wings well-spread at around 45 degrees to the body. They are relatively common and have been recorded on the Reserve since 1990. All four records this year came from the New Pool on No.1 bed. On 21st June two were noted followed by 12 in the same area on 12th July. During the visit on the 26th July another two were recorded.

The last record of the year was on the 13<sup>th</sup> September when again two were noted.

### **Azure Damselfly**

*Coenargrion puella*



One of the most common of the blue damselflies which are abundant in early summer. Both sexes have narrow blue shoulder stripes and the male has a characteristic black U shape at the top end of the abdomen. The females are green with extensive black markings. They were first sighted this year on No.3 bed on 16th May and again on the same bed on 21st May when the observer noted "scores" ovipositing by the

*Azure Damselfly*

*Andy Weir* footbridge, during an afternoon visit.

The next record dated 26<sup>th</sup> May, also from No.3 bed states that 10 were present. A photograph of a male taken of a male, taken on 27th May by Andy Weir, was submitted to the website. Numbers peaked on 31st May when during a survey 100 were estimated to be present on a sunny morning at the New Pool on No.1 bed. The species was recorded again on subsequent visits to No.1 bed on both 14th and 21st June when 50 were noted on the latter date. The final sighting this year was on 5th July.

### **Common Blue Damselfly**

*Enallagma cyathigerum*

Another of the most common damselflies which has been recorded at Woolston since records began in 1986. Both sexes have broad shoulder stripes and the male has a spot similar to a table tennis bat at the top end of the abdomen. The females occur as either blue or a dull green colour. There were five records this year. From the footbridge on to No.3 bed on 21st May "scores" were seen to be ovipositing along with Azure Damselflies. When the New Pool on No.1 bed was visited on 21st June two were found. A report by a permit holder from No.3 bed for 22nd June mentioned "five blue damselflies". There was further sighting of this species on 5th July, and finally the report for 26th July from the New Pool on No.1 bed probably included this species when "scores of the commoner damselflies" were noted.

### **Blue-tailed Damselfly**

*Ishnura elegans*

This is an abundant and widespread damselfly which is likely to be the most common across the Reserve. The males have a bright blue spot at the tail on an otherwise dark body but the females have five colour forms. The first sighting, dated 26th July, came from No.3 bed. An entry in the Log Book for 29th May mentions a "Green phase type", which was spotted by a permit holder on the path of No.2 bed. A count of around 100 at the New Pool on No.1 bed on 31st May was a good record. However, the count of 200 recorded when the New Pool was once again surveyed on 21st June was the

maximum number this season. Two photographs, submitted to the website by Andy Weir on 21<sup>st</sup> June, show both male and immature forms of this species. The last record for this species was on 13<sup>th</sup> July when about eight were found, on No.3 bed, by a permit holder.

### **Red-eyed Damselfly**

*Erythromma najas*

As the name suggests both sexes of this species have reddish coloured eyes. The male has the more striking burgundy-red eyes and can be more easily identified. The footbridge on to No.3 bed seems to be a good place to see this species as they rest on the floating vegetation below. Seven records in total were received from 11<sup>th</sup> June onwards. Six were recorded here on 14<sup>th</sup> June and 10 on 16<sup>th</sup> June, followed by two on 21<sup>st</sup> June. On 12<sup>th</sup> July three were noted and more were present on 20<sup>th</sup> July. The last sighting was on 26<sup>th</sup> July when seven were recorded.

### **Common Hawker**

*Aeshna juncea*

A large dark blue or brown coloured dragonfly with either blue (male) or yellow (female) paired dots along the abdomen. Despite the name it is uncommon on the Reserve and we had just one record this year when one was spotted on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, during a Balsam-pulling session on No.3 bed.

### **Migrant Hawker**

*Aeshna mixta*

A smaller dark blue or brown dragonfly, again with blue or yellow paired dots, depending on the sex. However a narrow yellow triangle at the top of the abdomen aids identification. At one time this species was a true migrant but it has increased its range and is now a regular at Woolston. It was recorded on several dates this year beginning with a single on 26<sup>th</sup> July on No.3 bed. Another was spotted at Butchersfield Tip on 9<sup>th</sup> August followed by sightings on No.3 bed of a female on 14<sup>th</sup> August. Records continued throughout September beginning with three on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and two on the both on No.3 bed. More were seen on No.3 bed on 4<sup>th</sup> September whilst a female was found near the Loop of No.4 bed. Two were recorded on No.4 bed on 8<sup>th</sup> September and another was photographed by David Bowman on No.3 bed on the 9<sup>th</sup>. On a visit to No.1 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> September six were found. A male was observed on the same date resting on bracken along the south path of No.3 bed whilst three were recorded on No.2. Bed on



*Migrant Hawker*

*Dave Bowman*



No.2 bed on 26<sup>th</sup> September. I also found a record of this species in the Log Book for 30<sup>th</sup> September. Sightings continued into October when six were noted on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the last record was of a single recorded on 11<sup>th</sup> October on No.3 bed.

### **Southern Hawker**

*Aeshna cyanea*

A large and colourful dragonfly with characteristic apple-green headlights on the thorax. They are an inquisitive insect and will often fly close to the observer. They have only been recorded in small numbers on the Reserve in the past. Typically it was recorded only once this year on 8<sup>th</sup> September when two were found on No.4 bed.

### **Brown Hawker**

*Aeshna grandis*

Another large dragonfly which is aptly named as it has a brown abdomen, amber- tinted wings and has two yellow stripes on the thorax. It has been recorded regularly across the Reserve in the past. There were nine records this year from 5<sup>th</sup> July onwards when three were noted. During the survey on 12<sup>th</sup> July at the New Pool on No.1 bed there was a maximum count of 12. The species was noted on No.3 bed on 23<sup>rd</sup> July and four were counted during the visit on 26<sup>th</sup> July to the No.1 bed pools. There were further sightings on No.3 bed for 6<sup>th</sup> August and 4<sup>th</sup> September and at least one was also present on No.4 bed on the latter. Five were recorded during the visit to No.1 bed on 13<sup>th</sup> September. The last record this year was on 26<sup>th</sup> September when two were noted on No.2 bed.

### **Emperor Dragonfly**

*Anax imperator*

The largest British dragonfly and one of the most attractive hawkers. The males are bright blue with a green thorax and seem to fly continually over the pond in defence of their territory. The females are mostly a duller green colour and are less obtrusive. They were recorded on four dates this season, all at the No.1 bed pools. The first sighting was on 14<sup>th</sup> June at the Viaduct Pools and on 21<sup>st</sup> June two males and a female were recorded at the New Pool. A maximum count of six was recorded at the New Pool during the survey on a sunny 12<sup>th</sup> July morning. Five were present on 26<sup>th</sup> July when a further visit was made to No.1 bed and this was the last record of the summer.

### **Four-spotted Chaser**

*Libellula quadrimaculata*

This is a dull brown and black dragonfly with four distinctive dark spots on the wings. It has always been common at Woolston in the past and was recorded on seven dates this season. The first record was on 20<sup>th</sup> May when one was seen by a permit holder on the path of No.2 bed. Two were found on 31<sup>st</sup> May when the No.1 bed pools were visited. This figure increased to a maximum count of 20 on 14<sup>th</sup> June at the New Pool on No.1 bed and four were present there on 21<sup>st</sup> June. The following day David Waterhouse photographed one at the Wildflower Meadow on No.3 bed. On 5<sup>th</sup> July a count of 12 was recorded on the Reserve and finally the New Pool had four present on 26<sup>th</sup> July.

**Broad-bodied Chaser***Libellula depressa*

Both sexes of this species have a brown thorax and are broad bodied with yellow markings down the sides but can be told apart by the colour of their abdomen. The male is pale powder-blue whilst the female is yellow-brown and both have dark patches at the base of the wings. It was not until 2006 that this species was first discovered on the Reserve. However, ten were found this year on two separate dates. The first sighting was on 16<sup>th</sup> May when two were spotted on No.3 bed. A good count was obtained during a visit to the New Pool on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> June when eight were recorded.

**Black-tailed Skimmer***Orthetrum cancellatum*

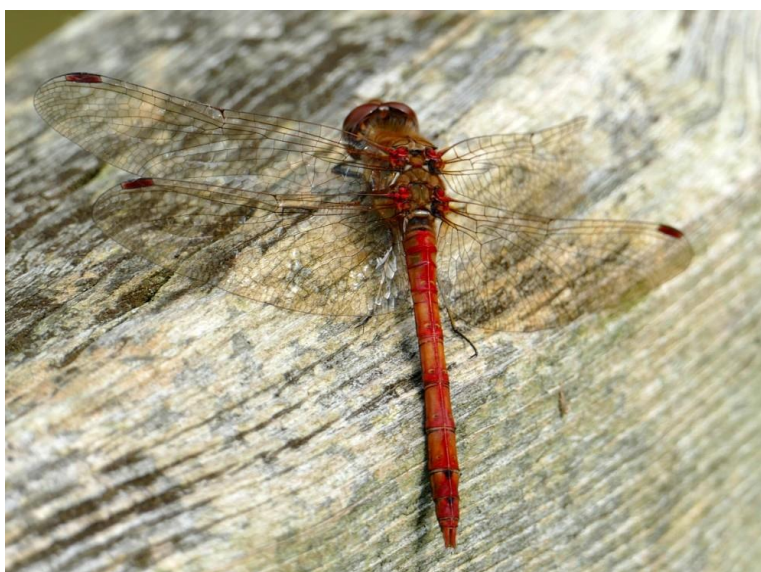
This is another dragonfly which has expanded its range northwards in recent decades and was not recorded at Woolston until 2006. The male's body is mostly a powder-blue colour tapering to a black tail. Female and immature insects are yellowish with two black stripes on the top of the abdomen, giving a ladder effect. The first record this year was from No.1 bed on 31<sup>st</sup> May and a photograph was duly submitted to the website. On 14<sup>th</sup> June six were found in the same location with two at the New Pool on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> June. There were further sightings in July beginning on the 5<sup>th</sup> when five were present in the area and the survey on 12<sup>th</sup> July at the New Pool produced a maximum count of 10. On 23<sup>rd</sup> July several were noted on No.3 bed and the last record was on 26<sup>th</sup> July when five were counted at the New Pool.

**Black Darter***Sympetrum danae*

This is now a rare dragonfly on the Reserve. The last confirmed breeding was in 1993 and 1994. In recent years it has been recorded infrequently on No.1 bed and in 2013 it was recorded on 10<sup>th</sup> August at the New Pool but no records were submitted for 2014.

**Common Darter***Sympetrum striolatum*

This small and active dragonfly is aptly named and can be found almost anywhere across the Reserve. The male has an orange-red body whilst the females are usually a dull ochre colour. There were twelve records this season from 14<sup>th</sup> June onwards. At the New Pool on No.1 bed on 21<sup>st</sup> June four were noted. The next records came from No.4 bed on 5<sup>th</sup> August and from No.1 bed on 9<sup>th</sup> August. Early September had a few sightings on No.3 bed but a maximum count of 10 was

*Common Darter**Dave Bowman*

recorded on 8<sup>th</sup> September when No.4 bed was visited again. Eight were seen at the New Pool on 13<sup>th</sup> September. Another five were found on 30<sup>th</sup> September and the last sighting was on 2<sup>nd</sup> October when a total of six was counted.

### **Ruddy Darter**

*Sympetrum sanguineum*

This is a very small red-black dragonfly which is much less common at Woolston. Mature males have a constricted blood-red abdomen with a clubbed tip, whilst females are ochre- yellow with black



markings on the sides. Both sexes have entirely black legs which is a diagnostic feature. All six records came from No.1 bed beginning with the first on 5<sup>th</sup> July. When the New Pool was surveyed on 12<sup>th</sup> July a count of four was recorded. The species was present in the same area of the Reserve on 26<sup>th</sup> July when two were found, with another photographed on 9<sup>th</sup> August. The final record of the season on 13<sup>th</sup> September produced a maximum count of seven, once again on No.1 bed.

*Ruddy Darter*

*Dave Bowman*

### **Brian Baird**