

# Shropshire (VC40) Dragonfly Newsletter



Spring 2015  
Sue McLamb

## Introduction

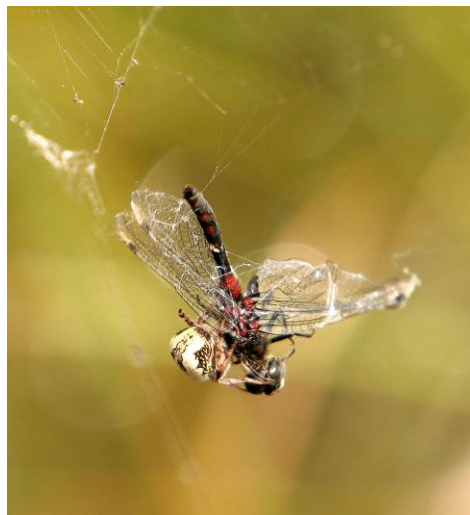
A couple of almost spring like February days have prompted me into writing the newsletter before the 2015 flight season is upon us! A great summer resulted in nearly 1300 records, 1216 of them made during the 2014 flight season. Over 60 recorders made contributions and notably a number of records even referred to exuviae which is fantastic! Many of you also sent sightings and some truly stunning photos to the new **Shropshire Dragonfly Watch Blog** which I launched last spring. I (and hopefully many of you) really enjoyed seeing how the season was shaping up as it actually happened and the blog will definitely be up and running again once dragonflies are on the wing in April.....I await the first sighting!

<http://shropshire-dragonfly-watch.blogspot.co.uk>

As ever, without all of your efforts I would have very little to report so  
**THANK YOU** again for keeping an eye on these fantastic insects in our county.

## Flight Season 2014

In stark contrast to 2013 (with no records of dragonflies or damselflies made in April) we actually witnessed the earliest start ever to the flight season in Shropshire. **Large Red Damselfly** *Pyrrhosoma nymphula* as usual was the first on the scene, recorded by D. Knight at Dolgoch Quarry on April 15<sup>th</sup> – a full 3 weeks earlier than in 2013. Nearly all species were in fact recorded significantly earlier than in 2013 and in many cases up to a month earlier! **White-faced Darter** *Leucorrhinia dubia* proved to be no exception and was recorded by B. Smith on April 28<sup>th</sup> at Whixall Moss representing the earliest ever record for this species in Shropshire. A later White-faced darter was captured by Barrie Smith (or should I say the spider) in this photo he entitled ‘food chain!’



At the other end of the flight season no such trends were seen across the board though a very pleasant autumn did allow some species to remain on the wing. Such conditions did suggest the possibility of record late sightings- the current UK record being **Common Darter** *Sympetrum striolatum* seen in Somerset on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2004 (Parr, 2014). Unsurprisingly no December records were received in Shropshire however Common Darter was recorded on November 3<sup>rd</sup> by P. Spear representing the 4<sup>th</sup> latest ever sighting (November 8<sup>th</sup> 1986 remaining the latest ever). This record coupled with the earliest record of Common Darter since the early 1980's does however mean the longest flight season recorded for this species in Shropshire.

The table below shows the first and last dates for those species recorded in Shropshire in 2014, but it is important to understand that these are directly influenced by recorder effort and the sites visited.

### **First and Last Recorded Sightings 2014**

<b>Species</b>	<b>Common Name</b>	<b>Date of first record</b>	<b>Date of last record</b>
<i>Calopteryx splendens</i>	Banded Demoiselle	15 <sup>th</sup> May	5 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Calopteryx virgo</i>	Beautiful Demoiselle	7 <sup>th</sup> May	13 <sup>th</sup> July
<i>Lestes sponsa</i>	Emerald Damselfly	18 <sup>th</sup> June	10 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Coenagrion puella</i>	Azure Damselfly	5 <sup>th</sup> May	9 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Coenagrion pulchellum</i>	Variable Damselfly	5 <sup>th</sup> June	5 <sup>th</sup> June
<i>Erythromma najas</i>	Red-eyed Damselfly	18 <sup>th</sup> May	9 <sup>th</sup> August
<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>	Large Red Damselfly	15 <sup>th</sup> April	20 <sup>th</sup> July
<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>	Common Blue Damselfly	6 <sup>th</sup> May	17 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	Blue-tailed Damselfly	17 <sup>th</sup> May	9 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Ischnura pumilio</i>	Scare Blue-tailed Damselfly	26 <sup>th</sup> June	26 <sup>th</sup> June
<i>Platycnemis pennipes</i>	White-legged Damselfly	19 <sup>th</sup> May	19 <sup>th</sup> July
<i>Aeshna cyanea</i>	Southern Hawker	3 <sup>rd</sup> June	31 <sup>st</sup> October
<i>Aeshna grandis</i>	Brown Hawker	28 <sup>th</sup> May	28 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Aeshna juncea</i>	Common Hawker	18 <sup>th</sup> June	28 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Aeshna mixta</i>	Migrant Hawker	9 <sup>th</sup> August	28 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Anax imperator</i>	Emperor Dragonfly	6 <sup>th</sup> June	11 <sup>th</sup> August
<i>Gomphus vulgatissimus</i>	Common Club-tail	27 <sup>th</sup> May	1 <sup>st</sup> June
<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>	Golden-ringed Dragonfly	12 <sup>th</sup> June	20 <sup>th</sup> August
<i>Cordulia aenea</i>	Downy Emerald	5 <sup>th</sup> June	6 <sup>th</sup> June
<i>Leucorrhinia dubia</i>	White-faced Darter	28 <sup>th</sup> April	3 <sup>rd</sup> July
<i>Libellula depressa</i>	Broad-bodied chaser	15 <sup>th</sup> May	17 <sup>th</sup> July
<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Four-spotted Chaser	15 <sup>th</sup> May	13 <sup>th</sup> August
<i>Orthetrum cancellatum</i>	Black-tailed Skimmer	12 <sup>th</sup> June	7 <sup>th</sup> August
<i>Orthetrum coerulescens</i>	Keeled Skimmer	12 <sup>th</sup> June	3 <sup>rd</sup> July
<i>Sympetrum danae</i>	Black Darter	20 <sup>th</sup> June	28 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Sympetrum sanguineum</i>	Ruddy Darter	1 <sup>st</sup> July	28 <sup>th</sup> September
<i>Sympetrum striolatum</i>	Common Darter	11 <sup>th</sup> June	3 <sup>rd</sup> November



## Species Summary

A total of 27 species were recorded in 2014 comprising 16 dragonfly and 11 damselfly species. Numerically this is 1 less than in 2013 though there are differences in those species represented. In summary **Hairy Dragonfly** *Brachytron pratense* and **Vagrant Emperor** *Hemianax ephippiger* were not recorded, but on a brighter note **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** *Ischnura pumilio* was seen in 2014.

Common and widespread species were as usual well recorded with over 160 records received of **Azure Damselfly** *Coenagrion puella* and well over 100 records of **Large Red Damselfly** *Pyrrhosoma nymphula* and **Common Blue Damselfly** *Enallagma cyathigerum*. The hawkers were all well recorded with **Brown Hawker** *Aeshna grandis* receiving nearly 100 records. Also of note were nearly 100 recorded



sightings of **Banded Demoiselle** *Calopteryx splendens* - considerably more than in previous years. David Williams' photograph seen here clearly illustrates the distinctive diagnostic dark

band on the wings of the male.

A good number of **Beautiful Demoiselle** *Calopteryx virgo* records were also received and having expressed concern last year at receiving just 3 **Red-eyed Damselfly** *Erythromma najas* records, 19 recorded sightings were made in 2014. Though these observations are obviously directly related to recorder effort these latter 2 species show interesting parallels with trends discussed in the recent Atlas of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland (Cham et al., 2014). This is covered in more detail later in the newsletter.

Some less well recorded species however do remain a concern such as **Common Club-tail** *Gomphus vulgatissimus* with only 3 recorded sightings in 2013 and 4 in 2014. The male (shown here on the right in David Williams photo) clearly illustrates the club shaped abdomen that gives this insect its common name. We are very fortunate to have this Odonata Red Data List (Daguet et al., 2008) 'Near Threatened' species breeding in the River Severn as it only inhabits certain stretches of a few rivers in the UK. The relatively early mass emergence followed by dispersal sometimes of many kilometres may well account for the low number of records, as well as a tendency of adults to perch in the tree canopy- some distance from most dragonfly recorders!





Also of concern is **Variable Damselfly** *Coenagrion pulchellum* with only 2 records made in 2014. This species was recorded firstly at Shomere though notably no individuals were seen at neighbouring Bomere where it remains unrecorded since 2003. Secondly, Variable Damselfly was recorded and photographed as seen here at Berrington Pool by



M. Foley. This is good news having received no records for this species at this site for 2 years despite a number of recorder visits. As I mentioned in the last newsletter this species is indeed rare in Shropshire, but it is also easily confused with the very common **Azure Damselfly** *Coenagrion puella*. Despite the clear 'exclamation marks' seen on the thorax in this specimen, as the name suggests the markings can be very variable so do look closely at a 'the little blue jobs' to ensure you do not miss any variable damselflies!

## **Individual Species Reports**

### **Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly** *I. pumilio*



Having received no records for this species since 2012 it was great to hear from J. Kernohan who saw a male and female form *aurantiaca* (photographed below). These individuals were spotted at Titterstone Cleve Hill – the same location as those recorded in 2012 by J. Almond. Interestingly a historic record was also reported from D. Williams - 1 female form *aurantiaca* photographed at Langleyfields, Dawley (SJ690074) in June 2008. Although historic this record represents a new site for this species and highlights the need to always bear these transient species in mind particularly in water bodies representative of early successional stages. The closest previous record to this location was made in 2005 by V. Green at Granville Country Park (SJ717122).





## Downy Emerald *C. aenea*



A few of us visited Shomere in June 2014 and Downy Emerald was again recorded and beautifully photographed by Jim Almond. Notably the males usually holding territory at the NW end of neighbouring Bomere were however absent. Berrington Pool is another area where this species is recorded however the

last sightings are of an exuvia in 2012 and 1 adult in 2011 –both recorded by J. Balcombe. This lack of sightings at Berrington for the last 2 field seasons is surprising as dragonfly recorders have been present at this location in early June. On a more reassuring note, this stunning species was recorded in 2013 at a new site Ebury Hill (SJ5416) by John Curd. I made a return visit in 2014 fearing this may have been a ‘one off’ and was very pleased to see 2 males holding territories and 5 other species **Emperor Dragonfly, Azure Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Blue-tailed Damselfly and Red-eyed Damselfly**. It should be noted that this quarry forms part of Ebury Hill campsite and access is only available to those staying at the campsite.

## Missing In Action...



✧ **Hairy dragonfly** *Brachytron pratense* – despite much anticipation following the 2013 record made by B. Smith at Whixall Moss there were no 2014 sightings. Known to be present in Cheshire so there remains the possibility it may be seen again in Shropshire. Typically the first hawker dragonfly on the wing in mid-May so be on the look out near clean water with lush surrounding vegetation and nearby shelter (Brooks, 2004).

✧ **Vagrant Emperor** *Hemianax ephippiger* – sadly following the first ever Shropshire record made by G. Hiatt on 23<sup>rd</sup> November at Muxton Marsh (SJ715132) last year there were no mid-winter reports of this incredible rare migrant. They could turn up at any time and it would be a great way to start the dragonfly blog in February.....

✧ **Red-veined Darter** *Sympetrum fonscolombii* – remains unrecorded since the 2012 sighting at Venus Pool. Elsewhere in the UK scattered records are often received and though these are mostly on the south coast a number of teneral were seen in East Yorkshire in September (Parr, 2014). It is perfectly possible that this dispersive migrant may well cross our borders again in the future so always bear it in mind.

✧ **Yellow-winged Darter** *Sympetrum flaveolum* - to my knowledge there have still been no records in the UK since 2006 and still no Shropshire records since the mid 1990's.

✧ **Scarce Chaser** *Libellula fulva* – a regular slot in the 'missing in action' column and definitely living up to it's name! Only 1 Shropshire record ever made at Attingham Park in June 2008 by J. Balcombe. This species has a relatively early flight season emerging on mass in early May. The female (seen in this photo by M.Randall) and immature male are striking orange/brown in colour. Typically found on neutral or base-rich muddy slow flowing small rivers, dykes in floodplains and water meadows (Smallshire & Swash, 2010).



### **National Dragonfly Atlas**

Last year the long awaited Atlas of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland (Cham et al., 2014) was published and I remain extremely grateful for all your contributions. The findings of the atlas must be understood to be influenced by the very nature of dragonfly recording not being carried out in a systematic standardised way. That said, there are still some interesting trends and significant increases in national distribution were seen by the following species:

**Scarce Chaser, Red-eyed Damselfly, Small Red-eyed Damselfly, Beautiful Demoiselle, Banded Demoiselle, White-legged Damselfly, Migrant Hawker, Emperor, Hairy Dragonfly, Downy Emerald, Four-spotted Chaser and Black-tailed Skimmer.**

The most significant increases were seen in the first 3 which could indicate that we may yet see a return of Scarce Chaser and the arrival of Small Red-eyed Damselfly here in Shropshire! Though our Shropshire data is also obviously directly related to recorder effort, analysis of records received in 2014 shows 11 species have increased their local distribution. These are now present in a further 1 or more 10km squares within the county and 7 of these species match those from the list above that show a national increase; **Red-eyed Damselfly, Beautiful Demoiselle, Banded Demoiselle, White-legged Damselfly, Migrant Hawker, Emperor, and Black-tailed Skimmer.**

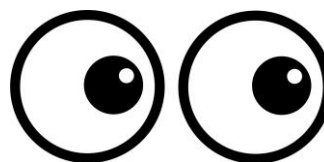
Whereas the increases observed in species on a national scale were largely in accordance with expert opinion (Cham et al., 2014) the noted decreases were more controversial. 9 species showed a significant decline of more than 10% since 2002, 8 of which occur here in Shropshire:

**Blue-tailed Damselfly, Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly, Emerald Damselfly, Brown Hawker, Common Hawker, Golden-ringed Dragonfly, White-faced Darter and Black Darter.**

As discussed in the atlas, a number of these species have predominantly upland distributions and whilst a decline in these species is not apparent at present in Shropshire this highlights the need for ongoing recording in these often less accessible areas. A further interesting finding of the national atlas has been the change in flight period of a number of species. Among those species most noticeably flying earlier in the season are a number of Shropshire based species:

**Variable Damselfly, Large Red Damselfly, White-faced Darter, Four-spotted Chaser and Red-veined Darter.**

Whilst 2 of these species are extremely rare in Shropshire, the remainder are regularly recorded each year and as already discussed Large Red Damselfly and White-faced Darter have both had local record breaking early records in 2014. Four-spotted Chaser also was recorded earlier in 2014 than the previous year. It will be interesting to see if milder winters and earlier springs lead to longer flight periods in general...and on the off chance March is a sizzler – keep your eyes open....

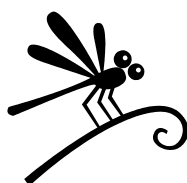


## **Recording Suggestions**

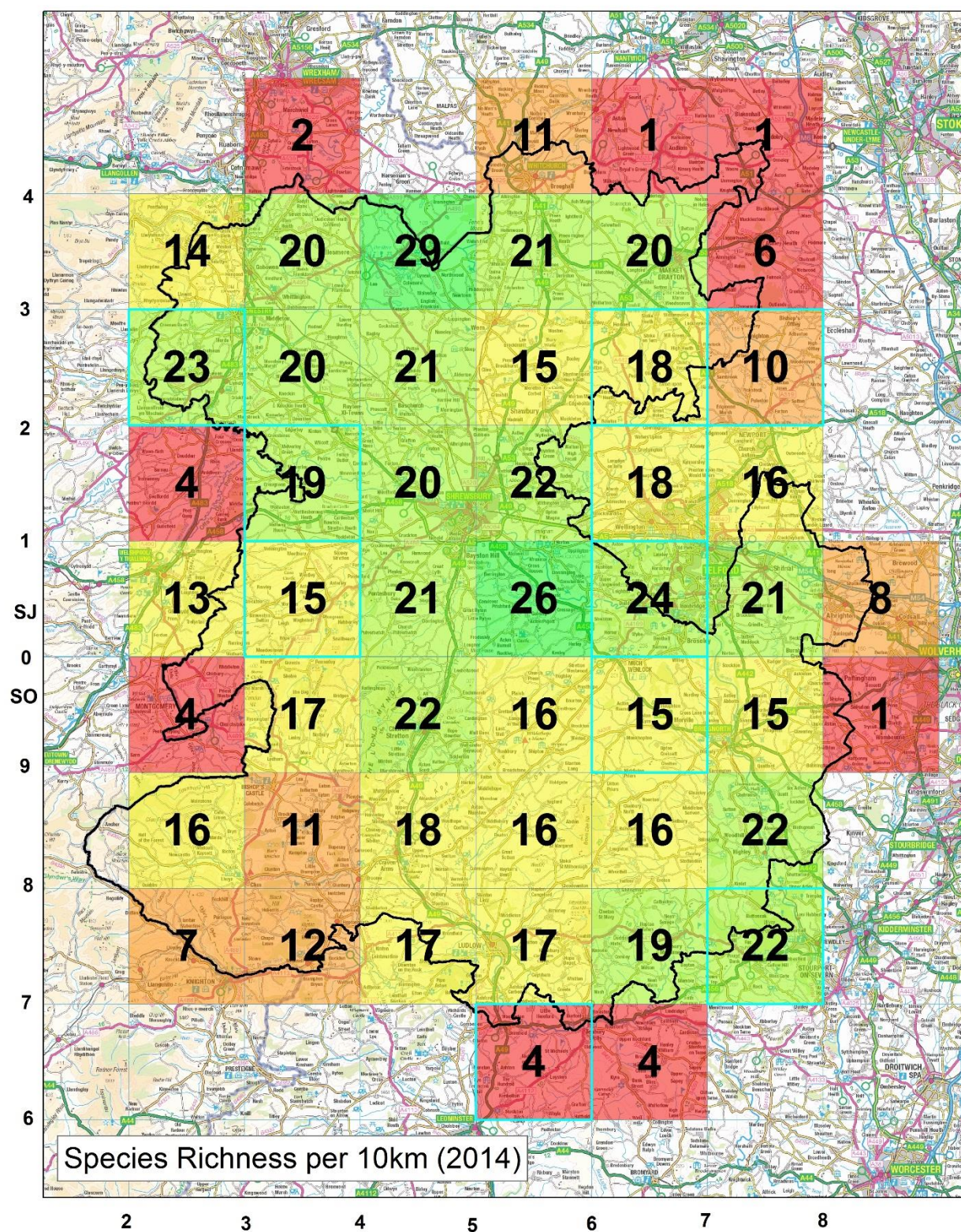
Rest assured I'm always very happy to receive records from anywhere in the county however, following the publication of the national atlas some people have been asking which areas are less well recorded. All the records you send in are sent to the British Dragonfly Society (Dragonfly Recording Network) for a national perspective and also to the Shropshire Ecological Data Network. Jonathan Groom is the Biodiversity Data Officer for Shropshire Council and he has kindly helped me out with a map shown on the following page.

Based on all the Shropshire dragonfly records this map shows the species richness in each 10km square throughout the county. The yellow, orange and red squares show those hectads with the fewest species recorded. Unsurprisingly the border hectads are low in numbers not least because these areas are largely covered by other counties who's data we do not have. If anyone is looking for suggestions it would be great to receive more records from any of the yellow squares and most notably the 3 orange squares in the SW of the county.

Conversely please don't be put off by visiting those healthy green squares that appear to be brimming with species. The high numbers are often due to 1 particularly good site for example SJ43 is home to part of Whixall Moss and SJ50 encompasses Berrington Pool, Venus Pool, Bomere and Shomere. There are often many lesser known quite possibly under recorded sites all over the county- just be sure to find out who owns it and get the necessary permission.









## **STILL Coming Soon to a Pond Near You.....**

I know this is becoming a newsletter regular, but we are still expecting **Small Red-eyed Damselfly** *Erythromma viridulum*. Over 100 were seen in July 2014 copulating and ovipositing at a site in Worcester (Perrin, 2014) so surely 2015 will be our year? In light of this I have included again the main identification tips that differentiate between this species and **Red-eyed Damselfly** *E. najas*. Apologies for the repetition, but it could be you that gets the first county record!



The male Small Red-eyed Damselfly has bright red eyes – often described as a brighter ‘tomato’ red than the deeper ‘burgundy’ red seen in the Red-eyed Damselfly. The blue colouration on the abdomen extends onto the sides of segment 2 from the thorax and onto segment 8 from

segment 9. In addition a black X mark can just about be seen here on the dorsal surface of segment 10. When at rest the wings extend just beyond the join between segments 6 and 7 (Brooks, 2004).

In contrast the wings of the Red eyed Damselfly extend further down the abdomen upon which there is far less blue colouration. Segments 1, 9 and 10 are blue, but this does not spread onto segments 2 or 8. In addition there is no black X mark seen on the dorsal surface of segment 10.



Any records of Small Red-eyed Damselfly received will be a first for Shropshire so it is important to try and get some good photographs highlighting those diagnostic features listed above. Even if you don't manage to get photographs please let me know where you think you've seen them and I'll come and take a look.

## **Shropshire Dragonflies Website**

With work underway on our proposed Shropshire dragonflies book, Paul Hope, Bob Kemp and I were becoming increasingly aware of the costs of such a project and the competing opportunities presented by websites. After much thought we have decided to produce the latter as this provides the opportunity to not only write in detail about our local species and habitats, but allows us to use a far greater number of photographs to illustrate species identification. Most importantly we will also be able to regularly update the website allowing access to current distribution maps of Shropshire species. We hope the website will also serve as a tool keeping people very much up to date with dragonfly news, events and of course the blog allowing people to keep abreast of the flight season as it unfurls. I have been talking about launching a website for some time now(!), but in light of this development I have actually started the process of putting it together. I am however not an 'IT Wizard' by any stretch of the imagination and if anyone is and has a little spare time to help me on the technical side that would be much appreciated. It also means we might get it launched....maybe before the next newsletter....



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## **The Last Word..**

Prior to launching the proposed website I will shortly be updating the Shropshire page on the BDS website

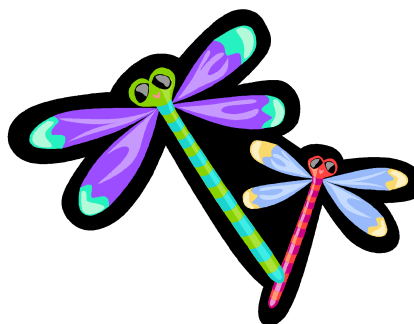
<http://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/local-groups>

Once the website is up and running there will simply be a link from the BDS webpage. There is currently a link on the webpage that will take you to the Shropshire Dragonfly Watch blog –definitely worth taking a look in 2015 and even better to get in touch with your sightings and photographs in 2015.

I am again running a number of courses this year which I have detailed at the end of this newsletter. Incredibly the Larval Workshop was over subscribed last year so don't delay if larvae and exuviae appeal! Even if you don't fancy the course I am always more than happy to receive exuviae to identify so if you are lucky enough to find some and they don't personally appeal then please send them my way!

Thank you once again for your continued interest in Shropshire dragonflies and all your recording efforts. As ever please don't hesitate to contact me with records, newsletter suggestions, ID queries, offers of IT help, 100s of exuviae (!!!) etc. at [mclamb1@btinternet.com](mailto:mclamb1@btinternet.com)

Fingers crossed for an early spring and a late autumn and above all enjoy the dragonflies!



## **References**

Brooks, S. (2004) **Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland**. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Hook: British Wildlife Publishing.

Cham, S., Nelson, B., Parr, A., Prentice, S., Smallshire, D. and Taylor, P. (2014) **Atlas of Dragonflies in Britain and Ireland**. Wallingford: Biological Records Centre.

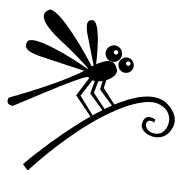
Daguet, C.A., French, G.C. and Taylor, P. (2008). **The Odonata Red Data List for Great Britain**. Species Status 11;1-34. Peterborough: Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

Parr, A. (2014) Wildlife Reports: Dragonflies. **British Wildlife**, 26(2): 123

Perrin, V. (2014) Wildlife Reports: Dragonflies. **British Wildlife**, 26(1): 49

Smallshire, D. and Swash, A. (2010) **Britain's Dragonflies. A field guide to the damselflies and dragonflies of Britain and Ireland**. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Hampshire: Wild Guides

## **Courses**



**Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2015**

**Preston Montford Field Centre, Shropshire**

**Aim: Dragonfly Larvae Workshop** with County Recorder Sue McLamb. Aimed at beginners this course will commence with an introduction to dragonfly larvae and the part they play in the dragonfly lifecycle. Indoor practical sessions will then focus on the identification of exuviae. After lunch the afternoon will be spent out and about at the field centre dipping in ponds and practising some hands on identification.

**Meet:** Please report to reception at Preston Montford Field Centre (SJ433143). The workshop will start at 10.00am and finish at 4pm.

For further directions see

<http://www.field-studies-council.org/centres/prestonmontford/location.aspx>

**Requirements:** Packed lunch .Wellies/walking boots and waterproofs as we will be venturing out! Total walking will be no more than 1km. Larval identification guides and hand lens if owned.

**Contact:** For further details and booking please contact Preston Montford Field Centre Tel: 0845 3307372 or email: [enquiries.pm@field-studies-council.org](mailto:enquiries.pm@field-studies-council.org)

**Cost:** £35

**NB:** For those who wish, the 'Field Guide to the larvae and exuviae of British Dragonflies' by Steve Cham will be available for purchase at £10 (correct cash/cheque only).





**Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> May, Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> June and Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2015**

**National Trust Carding Mill Valley, Shropshire**

**Aim: Discovering Dragonflies-** a repeat of the successful series of 3 dragonfly identification workshops with County Recorder Sue McLamb. Aimed at beginners this series will enable people to identify a range of species that occupy different flight periods throughout the season. Classroom inputs during the morning will focus on identification of 'seasonal species' and an understanding of the natural history of these fantastic insects. Participants will also learn how the life cycle is adapted for species emerging at different times of the year. Following a brief lunch the afternoons will be spent outside at 3 different locations on the Long Mynd putting identification skills to the test in a variety of habitats.

**Meet:** Please report to the National Trust's chalet pavilion at Carding Mill Valley, Church Stretton, Shropshire, SY6 6JG. The workshop will start at 10am and finish at 2pm. For further directions see

<http://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/carding-mill-valley-and-shropshire-hills/how-to-get-here/>

**Requirements:** Packed lunch essential. Wellies/walking boots and waterproofs as we will be venturing out! Total walking will be no more than 1km. Identification guides and hand lens if owned.

**Contact:** Booking essential via Emily Knight 01694 725000 or email [emily.knight@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:emily.knight@nationaltrust.org.uk)

**Cost:** £10 per session

**NB:** Weather permitting 2 afternoons will be spent at pools on top of the Long Mynd so some participants will need to drive and car sharing will be very much appreciated.



**Introduction to Dragonflies and Damselflies**

**17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> July, 2015**

**Preston Montford Field Centre, Shropshire**

**Aim:** This course is aimed at all those with a desire to learn more about these stunning insects. Open to all levels of ability we aim to introduce you close up to a good number of the 32 Shropshire species of dragonfly and damselfly so that you will leave confident in your own abilities to identify them and make species records. Classroom sessions on identification, life history, larvae and exuviae will be combined with a number of field visits to a range of aquatic habitats. This will allow you to put your skills into practice and to observe and understand the visual spectacle of these fascinating insects on the wing.

**Tutors:** Sue McLamb is the County recorder for Dragonflies in Shropshire and Odonata Tsar for the Shropshire Ecological Data Network. Ian Cheeseborough is a self-employed entomologist and previously held the post of County recorder for this group of insects.

**Location:** Preston Montford Field Centre (SJ433143). For further directions see <http://www.field-studies-council.org/centres/prestonmontford/location.aspx>

The course will start on Friday evening and finish on Sunday late afternoon.

**Contact:** For further details and booking please contact Preston Montford Field Centre Tel: 0845 3307372 or email: [enquiries.pm@field-studies-council.org](mailto:enquiries.pm@field-studies-council.org)

**Cost:** £253 (residential) £173 (non residential)