

CLUB-TAILED DRAGONFLY



What do they look like?

Club-tailed dragonflies are medium-sized yellow-green and black coloured, with a noticeable club-shaped tail. In mature adults the eyes are a dull green colour and do not meet over the top of the head.

How else might I recognise one?

Adult dragonflies have a low zig-zagging flight and frequently perch on the ground, in low vegetation or tree tops. They fly between early May to the end of June.

The cases left by the larvae when they become adults are short and squat, unlike many other dragonfly larvae cases which are long and slender.

What do they eat?

The larvae live on river bottoms eating other insect larvae, water fleas, snails, tadpoles, and even small fish.

Adults eat smaller flying insects, including small flies, midges and mosquitoes which they catch and eat in mid-flight, scooping them up with specially-shaped legs.

Where do they live?

Club-tailed dragonflies are found on medium to large slow moving rivers with silty beds. After spending around three to five years in the larval stage the larvae emerge from the river, shed their larval cases and become adults. After emerging the adults fly to nearby woodland, where males attract females in a courtship display. In Worcestershire the species occurs along the Rivers Severn and Avon, and as far as Eastham on the River Teme.

Adult males return to the river from nearby woodland about a week after they have emerged from the larvae. Here they fight other males for the best stretches of river, and search for females to breed with.

Classification

Kingdom: Animalia

Phylum: Invertebrata

Order: Odonata

Sub-order: Anisoptera

Family: Gomphidae

Genus: *Gomphus*

Species: *Gomphus vulgatissimus*



Why are they special to Worcestershire?

Worcestershire contains probably the greatest numbers of this usually scarce dragonfly of any county in the UK.

Problems and solutions?

Poor river water quality, dredging and other destructive river maintenance is harmful to this dragonfly. There is also only a short period of time from mid May to mid June when the larvae emerge from the water and become adults. Trampling at this time from stock at the rivers edges can kill off larvae as they try to emerge.

It is important to have woodland with bracken-filled glades not too far from the river, where the adults can hunt and attract mates.

Did you know?

- Adults often fly very high amongst the tree tops – higher than many other dragonflies – and can be found 5 or 6 miles from the river.
- The Order Odonata includes dragonflies and the smaller, more delicate damselflies. 'Odonata' means 'toothed jaw', referring to the strong jaws that dragonflies and damselflies have
- Dragonflies are an extremely ancient group of winged insects – their ancestors were around 300 million years ago, and some were known to have a wingspan of 70cm!

What can I do to help?

Everything that we buy or use has required water to make it. This means that the more items we buy rather than re-use the less water there is and the dirtier water becomes. Being sensible about our purchases can help all water life enormously!

If you are walking along the Teme or Severn in late May or June look out for dragonflies emerging from their larval bodies, but don't disturb them, and try to prevent dogs from trampling the plants at the edges of the rivers.

Create a pond in your school grounds – you might not get the club-tailed dragonfly at your pond but you will almost certainly find other dragonflies appearing!

Food chain examples

small algae ➡ water flea ➡ dragonfly larvae ➡ frog
nectar ➡ mosquito ➡ adult dragonfly ➡ hobby falcon

Find out more?

Pond Life, by Trevor Beebee (Whittet series)

A Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain and Ireland, by Steve Brooks. British Wildlife Publishing

You can download booklets about creating ponds for dragonflies from the British Dragonfly web site - <http://www.dragonflysoc.org.uk>

