

Derbyshire Dragonflies visits Chartley Moss National Nature Reserve Staffordshire



Following on from the winter programme of identification workshops interest was shown for field excursions this summer. So three Dragonfly Safari's have been lined up!

The First Derbyshire Dragonflies Safari of the year organised by British Dragonfly Society Archivist, David Goddard, took place on June 3rd 2004.

Whilst waiting for everyone to arrive we were able to look at a copy of the latest Dragonfly Field Guide "Hot off the press" which Dave had brought along courtesy of the D Goddard Mobile Dragon Library!

BRITAIN'S DRAGONFLIES

By Dave Smallshire & Andy Swash

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- Aimed at beginners and experts - the only comprehensive photographic guide to the dragonflies of Britain and Ireland now in print, covering the 57 recorded species and 10 potential vagrants.
- Full colour, with 55 stunning plates depicting males, females, immatures and other forms. Produced using the latest digital image technology.
- The text covers the key identification features of each species and includes information on status, distribution, behaviour, habitat preferences, and population and conservation.

- Additional illustrated sections summarise the key identification features of adults and larvae.
- Colour distribution map for each species.

It really is a stunning publication, well worth a look at and a bargain at £15. Dave Goddard has produced a book review for the web site to help you decide whether you want to add this publication to your dragonfly library or why not ask your local library to source a loan copy?



We met up with Tim "Mr White faced Darter" Beynon, midmorning for a site visit to this fascinating floating bog. The Derbyshire Dragonflies group included Jim Alder, Dave Goddard, Marion Horton, Richard Taylor, Bennerley Marsh Group stalwart Mandy Sharpe and "DD" Webmaster himself, Peter White. BDS's Conservation Officer Caroline Daguet and two Environment Agency Staff accompanied us.

As an introduction to this splendid reserve, Tim Beynon has written an excellent handout, which is reproduced here.

Chartley Moss National Nature Reserve, Staffordshire

Chartley Moss is the largest example of a floating bog, or schwingmoor, in Britain. Apart from the much smaller Wybunbury Moss in Cheshire its formation is believed to be internationally unique. Most floating bogs are formed by the gradual closing over a shallow lake surface by Sphagnum. However, some 5000 years ago Chartley was a spring-fed wet woodland with Sphagnum peat beginning to accumulate. The dissolving of salt in the underlying rock caused at least three subsidences and allowed water to flow underneath, and gradually Sphagnum dominated community developed on the floating raft. The last and largest collapse was in the fifteenth century. Recent measurements in the western basin show the underground reservoir to be 14metres deep; pudding basin shaped; and with a raft of mainly peat 3 metres thick floating on top, covering some 25 hectares. There is also a 17 hectare eastern basin of solid peat up to 7 metres thick occupying a shallow depression in the bedrock, with no underlying water.

Although there are no really rare bog plants, the assemblage is possibly the best in lowland Britain. It includes Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*); Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica E. angustifolium*); Cranberry, Cowberry and Bilberry [There is a very large Green Hairstreak population], (*Vaccinium oxycoccus*, *V. vitis-idea*, *V. myrtillus*); Crowberry (*Empetrum nigrum*); Wavy Grass (*Deschampsia flexuosa*); Purple Moor Grass (*Molinia caerulea*); Sundew (*Drosera rotundifolia*); and now at its most south-westerly site in Britain, Bog Rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*). Many occur in quantity; some, notably *Andromeda*, have been increasing recently. There are several species of Sphagnum, the commonest *Sphagnum recurvum*, the "bog builder".

Typical acidophilus trees and shrubs occur in the surrounding woodland, like Rowan, Holly and Alder Buckthorn, the latter sustaining a large Brimstone butterfly population. There is some Silver but mostly Hairy Birch and Scots Pine. The pine is thought to have been planted in the nineteenth century as a timber crop. All also occur as pioneers out on the western raft, where English Nature is systematically removing the birch scrub to restore the original bog surface. Pines can establish on the peat here, but when they reach a critical size and weight they gradually sink through the raft and the roots drown. The basin is dotted with dead pines that are important for some rare but picky beetles, which prefer upright dead to fallen dead pines!

The insect groups present contain many uncommon species. In particular some 22 dragonflies have been recorded of which 16 are regular breeders. Possibly the most important is the White Faced Darter, *Leucorrhinia dubia*, here at its most southerly UK site.

The moss is privately owned and leased to English Nature. It is a very fragile and extremely hazardous site. Access is by permit only. **Tim Beynon 2003.**

Despite the overcast but warm conditions (15 degrees C) Tim's introduction certainly wetted everyone's appetite to see the "Moss" for themselves. Wellies were put on, nets unfurled and optics/cameras slung over necks and shoulders. We headed off down the old railway line for our guided tour before stepping down into the moss. This fragile habitat soon closed in around us as we stepped carefully over a walkway of branches. This trail was not your typical tanalised timber boardwalk but a classic branch walk! Tim advised us where the dodgy bits were and we hoped that we would not find an uncharted hole to swallow any of our intrepid band. Tales of an English Nature Warden going in up to his neck was the best Risk Assessment to bear in mind on this trip! An Alder Buckthorn was soon being checked for Brimstone pupae with Dave Goddard finding the first. Large Red Damselfly *Pyrhosoma nymphula* were on the wing as the weather began to brighten up. A Four-Spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata* quartered over a small pool. Tim showed us the rippling effect on the bog as he and Dave jumped up and down! He also pointed out a tip of a 5 metre pine just poking out of the bog marking where it had slipped down to its watery grave. We had just passed

"Caroline's hole" (her previous visit had seen Caroline loose both a left and right wellie!) when the first White Faced Darter *Leucorrhinia dubia* of the day zipped past. Tim provided the group with an excellent running commentary and the second White Faced Darter was put up off the path. Against a backdrop of song from Blackcap, Garden Warbler and Chiffchaff we began to look for more dragons. A couple of Buzzards, one just starting its moult of its secondaries wheeled above us, mewing. A cry of "Quad!" went up as a Four -Spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata* zipped over the large drainage ditch. This ditch has now been dammed by English Nature to re wet the site and is a safe location to look for White Faced Darter *Leucorrhinia dubia*. It was here that Tim allowed everyone half an hour to find his or her own White Faced Darter *Leucorrhinia dubia*. We needed no second bidding and were soon off checking suitable "perches" for roosting dragons. A couple of males flew past us and Jim Alder was putting up several Large Red Damselflies some of which were paired up. The White Faced Darters (WFD) *Leucorrhinia dubia* at first seemed to be teasing us as they perched up and allowed close approach until the cameras came out. They then lightly lifted and were gone! However a slight movement in the Heather caught my eye and a "headlight" shone out at me. It was the distinctive frons of a female WFD. She was keeping low in the vegetation with the occasional wing movement. Despite having just found a Common Lizard, Jim Alder came hot footed with his net whilst Marion, Mandy and Peter had their first decent views of this wonderful dragonfly. The female was netted and it rested on Richard's hand allowing very close up views.



It was soon released and two female Broad-bodied Chasers (BBC) *Libellula depressa* were watched hunting in the Heather. Jim soon had one caught and the 'BBC' allowed everyone to get to grips with this wonderful insect. She even surprised Richard with a hefty nip to his index finger! As the conditions improved more WFD's appeared, including three mating pairs in tandem. One pair were successfully stalked in the grass allowing photos to be taken and Peter was able to shoot some excellent digital video footage for

the Derbyshire Dragonflies web site. Dave Goddard was certainly very pleased, as this was his first view of a female WFD after seeing many males on past visits. Dave had a male perched up on his finger allowing more photo and video grabs.

Jim Alder caught a small male Four- Spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata*, which on closer examination proved to be a *praenubila* form showing the distinctive smoky smudging of the wing spots just below the pterostigma giving the wing a banded look. Tim felt that this form is more prevalent after warmer temperatures in the previous year effecting larva development. A Raven slipped over as another Buzzard drifted over the trees.

Our half hour was soon up and Tim then took us to the Shooters and Europa Pools. Here Bog Rosemary (*Andromeda polifolia*) was found and views of more WFDs and Common Blue Damselfly. The bog was quite wet at this point, with our boots squelching through the Sphagnum, and it was a sobering thought to be walking over 14 metres of water. This is certainly not a site to wander in without a knowledgeable guide! Tim was disappointed that we had not been able to see large numbers of White Faced Darters on the wing. Although we had missed that spectacle we were all very pleased with the dragonflies that we had seen. If it had been warm and sunny our close up views would have been unavailable to many.

Derbyshire Dragonflies.org.uk is certainly very grateful to Tim Beynon for taking the time to show us this wonderful reserve and its fantastic dragonflies and thanks to DD Tour Leader Dave Goddard for organising the visit.

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www.Derbyshire-Dragonflies.org.uk