Dragonfly Identification Course for NWT at Colwick CP

On the 5th June 2004 run by David Goddard

The day was rather cloudy but warm with a slight breeze, which is not ideal conditions when looking for Dragonflies, but the twelve who gathered where not to be put off (some sun would have made all the difference). We walked from the fishing Lodge around the edge of the lake armed with various books, Field Studies Council Chart and my kite net with witch to catch identify and then release the insects we came across.

Dragonflies belong to the order Odonata which is then split up into two suborders, true dragonflies belong to the suborder Anisoptera and damselflies to the suborder zygopeta). We talked about how to separate dragonflies from damselflies, true Dragonflies have fore wings that are of a different shape to their hinds wings and their wings are held out 90 degrees from the body. Coupled with that fact that in all but one species their eyes meet together in the middle and their larger size. Damselflies are much smaller and appear dainty in comparison to true dragonflies, their fore wings and hind wings are the same shape and are usually held along the length of their abdomen.

The first dragonfly that we came across was a Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigera,* which was caught and carefully placed in a small clear plastic tube that could then be handed around the group so that the key identification points could be clearly seen. These were the 'golf ball on a tee' or and 'apple with the stalk pointing down towards the end of the abdomen', This is located on segment two just behind the thorax. The next area to look at is at the end of the abdomen where the two segments eight and nine are completely blue and on a warm day they show as a lighter shade of blue to the rest of the insect. This feature can be seen quite easily when the insect is in flight and certainly aids easy identification. Once everyone was happy that they would be able to identify a Common Blue Damselfly the insect was release back from where it was caught.

The next dragonfly was an Azure Damselfly *Coenagrion puella,* which looks very similar to the previous species. It to was caught and placed in a small clear plastic tube to aid a close look and to be able to see the identifying characteristics. On this insects second segment there is a U shaped mark, which is thicker along the base and is sometime described as a whisky tumbler that has been cut in half. The eighth segment is totally blue but the ninth segment has what looks like a black crown surrounded by blue. This insect has consistent shade of blue over the whole abdomen.

The third dragonfly was yet another damselfly this being a Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans,* this is quite an easy species to identify as it has a mainly black abdomen except segment eight which is blue. We also saw that the females of this species come in range of colours, we observed Red/Pink, Blue, Violet and Brown. The possible confusion species of Scarce Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura pumilio* does not occur in the midlands but it has half of segment eight and the whole of segment nine blue.

We had now made our way onto the Nottingham race course where there is two ponds, one of which is currently fenced off while work is being carried out to remove New Zealand Stone Crop an invasive non-native plant. It was here where the next species was encountered, this being a male Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*. The identification points for this species are the black legs and a black pterostigma (a small fluid filled sack on the leading edge of the wing towards the tip, which is thought to be used as a counter balance that aids flight). The only other red damselfly found in the UK is the Small Red Damselfly *Ceriagrion tenellum*, which has red legs and a red pterostigma and is not in the midlands.

We left the race course pools and headed for the lake in front of Colwick Hall, It was hear that we came across the Banded Demoiselle *Calopteryx splendens* which are usually associated with slow flowing water. Recent observations have shown that they are moving into and are able to survive in some large ponds / lakes. The identifying points for the males of this species are the metallic blue/green coloured thorax and abdomen along with what looks like a black thumb print on the wing with the rest of the wing hyaline (clear). The females of this species have a metallic green thorax and abdomen and the wings are wholly greenish with a white false pterostigma.

This lake has a lot of lily pads on it, which makes this a prime site for the Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma najas*. These insects never seem to come to bank side vegetation and can best be see with the aid of binoculars flying low over the water and alighting on the lily pads. There are quite a bit bigger and more bulky than the other damselflies that had been seen during the day. Their eyes glow a blood red colour in good sunlight but today they only showed a red colour rather than glowing, the males have segments nine and ten blue. Females are less noticeable as they have brownish-red eyes and no blue segments. There is the possibility that in a few years we may have to make a little more detailed study of these insects, as there is a recent coloniser called the Small Red-eyed Damselfly *Erythromma viridulum* which has now reached as far inland as Bedfordshire. The colour of the eye in the Small Red-eyed Damselfly is a tomato red rather than a blood red and on the side of segment eight there is a blue triangle in the male.

The walk ended with seven spikes of Bee Orchid being found which is always nice to see.