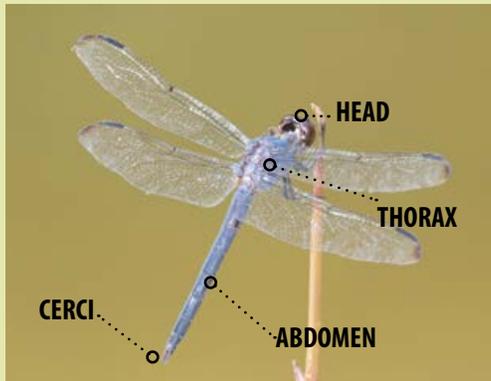


DRAGONFLY IDENTIFICATION



The best way to identify dragonflies is to "let the field be the guide."

In other words, **observe the dragonfly first.**

Study the field guide later.

Examples of useful identification characteristics include:



SIZE

Length from head to tail tip

SHAPE

Note whether stocky or thin



PERCHING STYLE

Some perch on top of vegetation, others on the side of vegetation

FIELD MARKS

Consider obvious color, stripes, and spots

HABITAT

Note whether the dragonfly is over running water or still water



SEASON

Note whether spring, summer or fall

WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?

Check out these books:

Dragonflies and Damselflies of Georgia and the Southeast by Giff Beaton

Dragonflies and Damselflies of the East by Dennis Paulson

Visit these Websites:

www.odonatacentral.org

www.bugguide.net

This guide was authored by University of South Carolina Sumter student Amelia Cornell under the guidance of Naturalist Austin Jenkins and USC Sumter students.

Contributing photographers include Casey Szocinski and Roger Buenzow of the Carolina Nature Photographers Association—Midlands Region in addition to naturalist Jack Jenkins.

COMMON DRAGONFLIES OF SWAN LAKE IRIS GARDENS



A Field Guide for Visitors



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH CAROLINA
SUMTER

A Palmetto College Campus



NATURAL HISTORY

Sumter's Swan Lake Iris Gardens offers a fantastic opportunity to observe one of nature's most spectacular groups of organisms, the dragonflies. Vegetated pond margins and slow moving streams make this place especially productive. We hope this guide enriches your Swan Lake experience by enabling you to better understand the dragonflies you see in this special place.

What is a dragonfly? Dragonflies are insects, having six legs and three body parts. They are further defined by the presence of large compound eyes, a long abdomen, and four wings held horizontally at rest. The latter differentiates them from damselflies, which are smaller and hold their wings together vertically above the back.



DRAGONFLY



DAMSELFLY

Dragonflies have impressive multidirectional flight, reaching forward speeds of 30 mph in pursuit of their prey. This ability has been honed over many millions of years, as dragonflies were the first animals to fly, well before birds and bats. With two huge compound eyes, dragonflies have stellar vision. Most consume smaller insects, but some even eat other dragonflies. They can see a greater range of colors and interpret motion much better than humans. These qualities make them some of the most effective predators on earth.



Blue Dasher - Female
Abdomen striped, yellow & black striped thorax; dark wing bases



Blue Dasher - Male
Blue abdomen, green eyes striped thorax; dark wing bases



Eastern Pondhawk - Female
Body bright green; abdomen: green & black spots; "Boys blue, girls green"



Eastern Pondhawk - Male
Blue green eyes, body blue white cerci; "Boys blue, girls green"



Common Whitetail - Female
Abdomen with row of pale spots along side; barred wings; thorax brown with two light stripes down each side.



Common Whitetail - Male
Abdomen white or pale blue barred wings



Great Blue Skimmer - Female
Abdomen yellow to brown; white face; dark wing tips; bright, blue eyes



Great Blue Skimmer - Male
Abdomen bright blue; white face; dark wing tips; bright, blue eyes



Eastern Amberwing - Female
Wing clear but with dark spots, small



Eastern Amberwing - Male
Amber wings; small



Slaty Skimmer - Female
Face dull brown; thorax brown in front, paler on sides; brown eyes



Slaty Skimmer - Male
Body slaty-blue, brown eyes; Face metallic blue and black

After hatching from an underwater egg, dragonflies begin their lives as nymphs, living in various underwater habitats, breathing through gills, and eating other invertebrates. They molt several times as nymphs. Depending on the species and climate, the nymph can live several years before emerging as an adult when the weather warms. After the wings expand and the adult exoskeleton hardens, they begin life in the air. Male dragonflies set up territories along the edge of the water and then use special appendages to clasp the female when mating. Females then lay eggs in water, and the life cycle begins anew.



Dragonfly reproductive posture



Exoskeleton of a nymph