

Few insects can match the jewel-like colours of the dragonflies and damselflies which enliven the Gardens during the summer months. Their vivid adult lives are all too short, lasting a few months at most. In contrast their larval stage may take up to five years in some species and is spent underwater. Dragonflies and damselflies belong to the same insect order, Odonata, and are easy to distinguish despite their similarities.

The damselflies are smaller and altogether more slender than the dragonflies. At rest they close their wings and fold them back over their abdomens. The dragonflies are much chunkier in appearance and hold their wings open at right angles to their abdomens when at rest.

Five species of damselfly and nine species of dragonfly have been recorded at Kew in recent years. Most breed in the Gardens but numbers are also augmented by migrants. Sit and watch for a selection from the following list at the Waterlily Pond, Lake or Aquatic Garden from mid-May to September.

## Damselflies

### Red-eyed Damselfly

*Erythromma najas* (Hansemann)

A fairly robust dark-coloured damselfly with striking red eyes. This species prefers still waters or very slow moving waterways with plenty of floating foliage. Most of Kew's records are from the Lake where males can be seen perching on the leaves of aquatic plants in late June and early July. Several records are from the Aquatic Garden where they favour the waterlilies.

### Common Blue Damselfly

*Enallagma cyathigerum* (Charp.)

The males have a blue and black banded abdomen while females occur in blue, brown or green colour forms. Common Blue Damselflies exploit many different water bodies and can be found at Kew at the Lake, Banks Building Pond, Aquatic Garden and Waterlily Pond between May and September.

Images: Peter Gasson



## Kew information sheet K23

### Blue-tailed Damselfly

*Ischnura elegans* (van der Linden)

A distinctive species with a dark abdomen bearing a blue band near the end in both the males and some females. It is the most common damselfly at Kew and has been recorded from early June to late August. Look for both males and females hovering low down among bankside plantings around the Lake or Waterlily Pond while males especially may be encountered flying over the grass almost anywhere in the Gardens.

### Emerald Damselfly

*Lestes sponsa* (Hansemann)

This species has a metallic emerald-green body; in addition the males have powder-blue on the thorax and near the end of the abdomen. It prefers brackish water and is not seen every year at Kew but it is always worth looking out for it along the boundary between the Gardens and the Thames towpath.

### Banded Demoiselle

*Calopteryx splendens* (Harris)

The males of this conspicuous species are gunmetal-blue with a broad inky band across the wings while the females are bright green. Their flight is reminiscent of a butterfly as they flutter around aquatic plants in the Waterlily Pond.

Above: **Female Emperor Dragonfly**

A further three damselfly species; Large Red Damselfly (*Pyrhosoma nymphula*), Azure Damselfly (*Coenagrion puella*) and Variable Blue Damselfly (*Coenagrion pulchellum*), have been seen at Kew but there are no recent records of them.

Below: **Common Blue Damselfly**



## Dragonflies

### Hairy Dragonfly

*Brachtron pratense* (Mull.)

Both males and females have a hairy thorax although this is not easy to see at any distance. The males are marked with apple green and bright blue while the females are brown and yellow. This rather scarce species was first recorded at Kew in 2002. Its arrival was not unexpected as its range is expanding at the moment. Look out for it around the Lake in late May or June.

### Southern Hawker

*Aeshna cyanea* (Mull.)

The broad yellow/green stripes on the thorax of this dragonfly are characteristic. It likes garden ponds where it will breed but surprisingly it is recorded only as a scarce, probably annual, visitor at Kew. It is occasionally seen between early July and late August hunting over land in various sunny parts of the Gardens.

### Brown Hawker

*Aeshna grandis* (L.)

This conspicuous hunter with orangey-brown wings is present every year in variable numbers between mid-July and late September. Often just one is seen but there can be five or more individuals on one day. It favours the Lake and Syon Vista but visits many other open sunny spots.

### Black-tailed Skimmer

*Orthetrum cancellatum* (L.)

The males have a narrow powder-blue abdomen and the females and juveniles are yellow. Females turn dull grey with age but sometimes become blue like the male. The larvae live in mud, unlike those of the dragonflies listed above which live in water weed.

### Broad-bodied Chaser

*Libellula depressa* (L.)

Easily recognised by its broad plump abdomen which is powder-blue in the adult male and pale brown in females and juveniles. The larvae live in mud. The adults can be seen from late May until mid-July at the Waterlily Pond, Aquatic Garden and the small pond in the Dukes Garden.

### Common Darter

*Sympetrum striolatum* (Charp.)

The smallest dragonfly at Kew; the slender abdomen is dull red in adult males and pale brown in females and juveniles. This is the last dragonfly of the year at Kew, emerging in late summer and often lingering into October. It can be found anywhere in the Gardens even some way from water. Adults bask on the warmest surfaces which they can find such as paths, fences, hosepipes and even an outstretched hand.

### Common Hawker

*Aeshna juncea* (L.)

This species has wings with a golden front edge and blue, green and yellow spots on the abdomen. Present in low numbers at Kew during August in most years.

### Migrant Hawker

*Aeshna mixta* (Latrielle)

The commonest and smallest hawker in the Gardens. It is similar to the last species but has an inverted yellow triangle at the base of the abdomen and the wings have a dark front edge. It flies from late July till as late as early November, the great majority being seen in August and September. As many as nine can be found on a good day, hunting at the Lake, along Syon Vista and in many other sunny rides and corners.

### Emperor Dragonfly

*Anax imperator* (Leach)

A large and beautiful species, the prominent black line down the blue (male) or green (female) abdomen of this big dragonfly is sufficient for identification. They are occasionally seen at the Waterlily Pond and the Aquatic Garden between late July and mid-August.

Below: **Migrant Hawker**



Below: **Banded Demoiselle**

