

Red-veined Darters at Marsh Lane - 2017

Red-veined Darter (*Sympetrum fonscolombii*) is a widespread and common species found across Africa, southern Europe and eastwards to the Middle East, Central Asia, the Indian Subcontinent and the Indian Ocean Islands. It has expanded its range considerably in the last few decades and is now common in most of Central Europe.



Climate change is likely to cause further expansion north.

Migrant Red-veined Darters arrive in Britain in varying numbers annually during the spring and early summer months.

Across Warwickshire there have been sightings of the species in six of the years since 2000, although, to date, there has been no evidence of breeding in the county.

A male specimen was seen around Marsh Lane Dragonfly Pool on the 31st May 2017. At least three male specimens were observed on the Dragonfly Pool the following day. On the 3rd June an individual male was found on the small pond at the side of the car park (possibly wrongly identified as a Common Darter some days earlier). None of the specimens showed immature, newly emerged male colouring. No females were reported.

There were no reports of Red-veined Darters at Marsh Lane in 2016. These would have provided the offspring for 2017. Whilst the species may have been overlooked in 2016 it is more likely that the specimens recorded at Marsh Lane in May and June were part of a country wide inward migration in 2017 that saw Red-veined Darter reports submitted from the south coast, the east coast, and north to Cumbria.



Male identification:

The most distinctive feature is the blue underside to the eyes. Only the rare Scarlet Darter (6 British records since 1995) has this same characteristic.

The coloured wing veins, that give the species its name, are more conspicuous than in other darters.

Male Red-veined Darter

Comparison images:



Male Ruddy Darter



Male Common Darter

On 15th August 2017 a darter was spotted on the edge of the car park pond. It was initially identified as a female Red-veined Darter. Was this a possible second phase of inward migration? However, a later review of images taken revealed that it was an immature male Red-veined. It was in very fresh condition with no wing wear. This suggested that it had been born and bred locally.

This species is capable of producing two generations a year because the larvae develop in three months. Other darter species in Britain take 12 months to develop. So Red-veined migrants arriving here in early summer can produce an emerging population in late summer.

On 19th August another specimen was observed near Oak Hide. This one a female, again very fresh, with no wear. Were we seeing the offspring of the migrants that had arrived in May and June? Most likely. Definite proof of local breeding, however, would only come from the finding of exuviae (shedded larval skins) and that proved an impossible task.

Comparing female and immature male Red-veined:



Female comparison with other darter species:

The abdomen of the female Red-veined Darter is yellow-ochre in colour, and the wings have yellow veins, not red veins as found in the males. The females share the same distinctive blue to the lower part of the eye. The legs of both sexes are mostly black with some yellow.



Female Red-veined Darter.
Showing the blue to the underside of the face. Legs black with a stripe of off-yellow. Yellow veining along the wings.



Female Common Darter.
Brown above and green below on the face. Legs black with the hint of a white stripe.



Female Ruddy Darter.
Brown above and green below on the face. Legs all black – no striping.

In both male and female Red-veined Darters the spots at the end of the wings are pale, outlined in black. In both Common and Ruddy Darter the wing spots are reddish-brown.



The Red-veined Darter's tendency to disperse from the birth site soon after emergence may explain why colonies fail to establish, and also why the two fresh specimens seen in August were not to be found in the days following.

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