

# Orcadian Dragonflies and Damselflies

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A short guide to the Odonata of Orkney

There are only eight breeding species of Odonata to be found on Orkney; four each of dragonflies and damselflies. This small assemblage does make identification much simpler, as the various species are distinctive from each other and can easily be told apart.

### **Damselflies**

Damselflies are small, matchstick-sized insects with a weak, fluttery flight. At rest, their wings are normally fully or half closed along the abdomen. A damselfly's eyes are small and are far apart on either side of its head.

The Orkney species are Emerald Damselfly, Large Red Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly and Blue-tailed Damselfly.

### **Dragonflies**

Dragonflies range in length from small (3cm) to large (9cm), and are much more robust than damselflies. Their flight is strong and purposeful, and when at rest, their wings are fully open. A dragonfly's eyes are large and nearly cover the whole head.

The Orkney species are Common Hawker, Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Four-spotted Chaser and Black Darter.

## Emerald Damselfly

*Lestes sponsa*

Emerald Damselflies are metallic green in colour. The males also have a blue pruinescence around the thorax and at either end of the abdomen. At rest, Emerald Damselflies usually hold their wings half closed.



## Large Red Damselfly *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*

Large Red Damselflies are usually the first damselflies to emerge in late Spring. They are a deep red in colour, with males having less black on their abdomens than females.



## Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum*

The male Common Blue Damselfly is predominantly blue with black markings. It has wide blue stripes on the thorax and a black 'mushroom' shape on segment 2 of the abdomen. The female is either blue, green or brown with much more black on its abdomen.



## Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans*

Blue-tailed Damselflies have a black abdomen with a bright blue segment 8. Males have blue on the thorax, whilst there are three colour forms of the female: reddish-pink (*rufescens*); violet (*violacea*); green (*infuscans*).



# Common Hawker

## *Aeshna juncea*

The Common Hawker is a large dragonfly. Males have yellow stripes on the thorax and a blue/black abdomen. They spend a great deal of time on the wing. At rest, the yellow leading edge of the wings (the costa) can be seen. Females are brown with yellow markings, although occasionally the spots are blue, mimicking the male.



# Golden-ringed Dragonfly

## *Cordulegaster boltonii*

Golden-ringed Dragonflies are large insects with green eyes. They have striking yellow and black markings on the thorax and abdomen. Males will patrol along small moorland streams. Females are the largest dragonflies to be encountered in Orkney and have a long pointed ovipositor with which to lay eggs into stream beds.





## Four-spotted Chaser

### *Libellula quadrimaculata*

Four-spotted Chasers are medium sized dragonflies. Both sexes have a dark brown abdomen with yellow sides and with black at the tip. They have a spot in the middle of the leading edge of each wing and dark patches at the wing bases.



## Black Darter

### *Sympetrum danae*

Black Darters are small dragonflies. The males are predominantly black with three yellow spots on the sides of the thorax. Females are yellow with a black triangle on the top of the thorax.



The table below gives an indication of when it is possible to see the eight Orcadian species on the wing. The key flight period is shown in dark green shading, with the early or late flight period in paler green.

Common Name	Latin Name	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
Emerald Damselfly	<i>Lestes sponsa</i>			Light Green	Dark Green	Light Green	
Large Red Damselfly	<i>Pyrrhosoma nymphula</i>	Light Green	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Green		
Common Blue Damselfly	<i>Enallagma cyathigerum</i>		Light Green	Dark Green	Light Green		
Blue-tailed Damselfly	<i>Ischnura elegans</i>	Light Green	Light Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Green	
Common Hawker	<i>Aeshna juncea</i>		Light Green	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green
Golden-ringed Dragonfly	<i>Cordulegaster boltonii</i>		Light Green	Dark Green	Dark Green	Light Green	
Four-spotted Chaser	<i>Libellula quadrimaculata</i>	Light Green	Light Green	Dark Green	Light Green		
Black Darter	<i>Sympetrum danae</i>			Light Green	Dark Green	Light Green	Light Green

Dragonflies and damselflies are more visible on warm, sunny days with little or no wind. They are most abundant on Hoy, but are also present on the mainland and have been recorded on most of Orkney's islands.

Photo credits: Large Red Damselfly (male and female) and Black Darter (female) - Betty Kirkpatrick; Common Hawker (male) and Black Darter (male) – Brian Ribbands; Common Blue Damselfly (female) – David Kitching; Emerald Damselfly (male and female), Common Blue Damselfly (male), Blue-tailed Damselfly (male and female), Common Hawker (female), Golden-ringed Dragonfly (male and female), Four-spotted Chaser (male and female) - Graeme Walker.