

Dragonfly Survey on Rougham Estate 2021 – a summary

Dragonflies were recorded as part of Rougham Estate’s ongoing Pond Survey of its 37 ancient and very well-connected woodland, grass and arable edge ponds. These ponds have been regularly surveyed since 2003 to prioritise those for restoration and to guide ongoing conservation management.

Dragonflies can be seen around the ponds in summer, newly emerged teneral adults drying their wings on ride-side vegetation, and adults often hunting along sunny rides. The very best wildlife sites in Suffolk hold 20 species or so, but given the restricted range of aquatic habitats present on Rougham Estate (notably the absence of streams/rivers), the tally of 18 species that have been recorded in total on the various ponds since 2003 is very satisfactory. One relatively recently restored pond has had all 18 species recorded there! The best ponds are the open, sunny, well vegetated ponds, while the shadier, darker ponds that support few species will be part of an ongoing pond restoration programme to improve them for dragonflies and other aquatic invertebrates such as mayflies, water stick-insects, water beetles and water bugs.

Dragonflies and damselflies are good indicators of pond health as most like to breed in open, sunny ponds with clean, unpolluted water, varied underwater profiles and plenty of aquatic and emergent plant diversity. Adults also need good, invertebrate-rich terrestrial habitat such as hedges or sheltered green lanes nearby where they can hunt for small insects.

Dragonflies recorded on Rougham Estate are relatively widespread generalist farm pond species – hawkers, darters, chasers and damselflies that all have slightly different ecological niches that allow them to co-exist at the same ponds and some have relatively specialist requirements which can be delivered on a farm level by having a range of pond types. As species that have both aquatic and terrestrial stages of their life cycle, dragonflies require good aquatic habitat in which to breed and good terrestrial habitat in which to hunt for their prey. Dragonflies need good terrestrial habitat corridor connections to enable them to colonise suitable



Southern Hawkers spend much of their life away from the pond – and can often be seen hunting along the hedges and edges of Rougham public and permissive footpaths, and roosting on scrub, so well sheltered corridors between ponds and scrub is essential.
© Juliet Hawkins



The Willow Emerald Damselfly lays its eggs in trees (the only UK species to do so) that overhang still waters, and was recorded at a well-grazed pasture pond and an arable field edge pond. © Juliet Hawkins

ponds easily and thus when ponds are restored or management is fine-tuned, they will quickly re-colonise.

The assemblage of dragonflies and damselflies recorded includes two species that are relatively recent colonists to the UK, namely the Willow Emerald Damselfly and the Small Red-eyed Damselfly – the former first appeared in Britain only as recently as 2007, the latter in 1999. The Willow Emerald Damselfly needs an occasional branch overhanging a pond on which to lay its eggs (the hatched larvae drop into the pond), whilst the Small Red-eyed Damselfly prefers waters with extensive floating and submerged vegetation.

Broad-bodied Chaser, a thinly scattered species throughout Suffolk which likes small, open ponds, were noted at the pasture ponds during the survey. The Emerald Damselfly was noted at one field edge pond only – a species seems to have struggled somewhat in recent years as a result of changes in land use in the wider countryside.

There are several ponds where you can see dragonflies and damselflies immediately adjacent to public or permissive footpaths. Work, which can look a little brutal initially, is ongoing to restore shaded ponds, full of organic matter, and within a year or two dragonflies and other wildlife quickly colonises.

There are several ponds where you can see dragonflies and damselflies immediately adjacent to public or permissive footpaths. Rougham Estate Trust is committed to implementing pond management recommendations that enhance the historic, wildlife and landscape value of its ponds. Work, which can look a little brutal initially, is ongoing to restore shaded ponds, full of organic matter, and within a year or two dragonflies and other wildlife will quickly colonise.

Juliet Hawkins
Conservation adviser



The Four-spotted Chaser is a widespread pond species in Suffolk. It likes the margins of shallow ponds with well-developed emergent vegetation and some open water. © Juliet Hawkins



Bare ground and plants to perch on are components of a habitat mosaic that dragonflies such as the Black-Tailed Skimmer, and recorded on Rougham ponds where the fluctuating water levels and drying out of the pond provide excellent bare ground. © Juliet Hawkins