

Warning, some photos may cause Creepy Crawlies or Heeby Jeebies

This Month's MVB is ... Blue Dasher Dragon Fly, *Pachydiplax P. longipennis*



Also called the Swift Long-Winged Skimmer or the Blue Pirate depending on where you are in North America. Although not at risk of species decline, an increase in severity and number of droughts in the region could damage their numbers as they rely on still water for reproduction and hunting. The Blue Dasher is one of the most widespread Dragonfly species found in North America. The only species under the genus *Pachydiplax* and largest member of the skimmer family. Considered Non aggressive to humans but will bite when threatened.

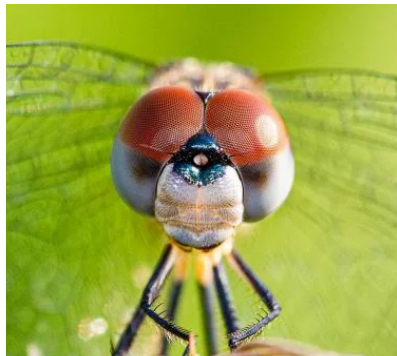
Can be spotted flying around stillwater habitats including lakes, ponds, marshes, bogs, and even wet ditches. As long as the water remains still they will come. The Blue Dasher Dragonfly is classified as a summer species based solely on the time of which their eggs hatch.

Adult Blue Dasher Female	Adult Blue Dasher Male

Adults can be 35-45mm long; their blueish colour does not manifest until maturation. Their thorax has green and yellow stripes with yellow dashes along the sides of their abdomen Sexual dimorphism is very obvious, this is the visual differences in colour and pattern

between males and females. Males have metallic turquoise eyes and they have a yellowish tinge behind the wings on the sides of the abdomen. The Males' wings are clear with a couple of dark streaks through them. Females are not as vibrant as the males, which is common among insects. Female eyes are compounded with two sections: rusty above and blueish grey below. Their abdomen is shorter than the males and brown; they also have yellow stripes on the sides of the abdomen with a small pale yellow tip. With age some females can develop a bluish tinge but it is never as vibrant as the males. Both have white faces and an amber hue on the hindwing. Possessing two sets of wings that operate independently allows them to fly in multiple directions or hover in one spot like a helicopter.

With a 360 degree field of vision they have excellent eyesight allowing them to track the smallest and fastest of prey.



Young Naiads can range from 18-21 mm long and can be found under water using a propulsion/defecation method of swimming. Their bodies are a bright greenish- blue with a brownish covering on top. These colours provide camouflage in aquatic habitats both from above and below.



Typically found around still bodies of water in lower elevations including ponds, marshes, slow moving water ways, and ditches. The adults will roost in nearby trees at night, they are most active in the early morning and later evening when the sun's heat is over for the day and the prey insects become active as well.

Females hover over still water and lay their eggs mid-flight. Within 35 seconds one female can lay up to 700 eggs, many of which will not hatch, and those that do will be easy prey as

nymphs in the water. Once hatched they feed on aquatic insects, invertebrates, small fish and even tadpoles. However they themselves are also prey to fish and frogs. Once they metamorphosize into adults they fly up into the sky and only return to the water to either catch prey or lay their eggs. Surprisingly, naiads can live up to 2 years under water and after maturing adults can live for several more years.

The presence of Dragonflies is a good indicator of a healthy ecosystem and means the air is cleaner, plants are more abundant and there is a more diverse array of other species. Severe water contamination can result in eggs hatching too soon and the larvae being more vulnerable to predators, causing their survival rate to decrease and therefore the overall population as well. They are also threatened by habitat loss from industrialization, freshwater loss, and water contamination by pollution/pesticides. The destruction of wetland habitats has led to a sudden decline in their distribution across Canada.

Dragonflies are carnivorous and can eat hundreds of insects a day. Their diet includes mosquito and mayfly larvae, moths and flies. If it is flying it is fair game. They are highly aggressive predators and will eat hundreds of flying insects a day, up to ten percent of their body weight. Highly territorial they will defend their feeding sites. Males are often seen at the waters edge patrolling their territory, while females can be found on or around vegetation. The only time they will approach the water is to lay eggs.



The Blue Dasher hunts by perching near prey and remaining completely still waiting for the prey to come within striking distance, once prey comes close enough the Blue Dasher darts forward catching it off guard. Adults will patrol a hunting territory for a few days catching every insect they possibly can before moving on to another territory and repeating the process. Catching 95% of the prey they chase makes them one of the most efficient hunters in the animal kingdom

How can we help them? Once again it's all about providing them with a safe place to reproduce and hunt. Protecting their habitat is the most beneficial thing we can do to help bolster their numbers and in turn they will help control the mosquito populations. Young

naiads will feed on the mosquito larvae found in the water and adult dragon flies will hunt flying mosquitos.

If you possess a small pond or swampy area, or even a wet ditch on your property try to provide it with some shade to help it hold to moisture just a little bit longer or if you see the water level start to get low try throwing a hose in there and bump up the level a little bit. Of course this depends on whether there is a water restriction in place and how full your well may be. Only do what you can when you can.

At Maries West River Greenhouses we all appreciate our local beneficials and believe they are ultimately the best form of natural insect control in the garden but we are not experts on the subject. The purpose of these posts is to raise awareness to the fact that not all insects are harmful and we should keep that in mind when applying insecticides for pest control.

Sources:

[blue dasher dragonfly facts - Dragonfly Facts](#)

[Blue Dasher Facts, Description, and Pictures](#)