

An Illustrated Checklist of the Damselflies & Dragonflies of the UAE

by Graham B. Giles

Several papers have been published on the dragonfly fauna of Oman, Saudi Arabia and the Yemen. In 1987 Walker & Pittaway produced 'Insects of Eastern Arabia', a useful handbook published by Macmillan. Alas this is no longer available. Since then, new discoveries have been made, and no doubt others will follow. The following list incorporates observations made in 1996-98 and is, I believe, the first to specifically cover the UAE.

The accompanying photographs depict those species of dragonfly found in the UAE. It should be noted, however, that dragonflies may vary in colour with both age and sex, and also from one geographic location to another. In some cases, identification requires expert examination of anatomical details, particularly wing venation.

ZYGOPTERA — Damselflies

PROTONEURIDAE

- 1 *Arabineura khalidi* (Schneider 1988)

PLATYCNEMIDAE

- 2 *Arabcnemis caerulea* (Waterston 1984) Powder blue damsel

COENAGRIIDAE

- 3 *Ishnura evansi* (Morton 1919) Blue banded Ishnura

ANISOPTERA — Dragonflies

GOMPHIDAE

- 4 *Lindenia tetraphylla* (Van der Linden 1825) Arabian lobetail
- 5 *Paragomphus genei* (Selys 1841)
- 6 *Paragomphus sinaiticus* (Morton 1929)

AESHNIDAE

- 7 *Anax imperator* (Leach 1815) Emperor
- 8 *Anax parthenope* (Selys 1839) Lesser Emperor
- 9 *Hemianax ephippiger* (Burmeister 1839) Vagrant Emperor

LIBELLULIDAE

- 10 *Pantala flavescens* (Fabricius 1798) Globe skimmer
- 11 *Orthetrum sabina* (Drury 1773) Oasis skimmer
- 12 *Orthetrum chrysostigma* (Burmeister 1839) Girdled skimmer
- 13 *Orthetrum taeniolatum* (Schneider 1845) Azure (Blue) skimmer
- 14 *Diplacodes lefebvrii* (Rambur 1842) Purple darter
- 15 *Trithemis annulata* (Beauvais 1807) Purple blushed darter
- 16 *Trithemis arteriosa* (Burmeister 1839) Gulley darter
- 17 *Trithemis kirbyi* (Selys 1891) Orange darter
- 18 *Crocothemis erythraea* (Brullé 1831) Carmine darter
- 19 *Selysiothemis nigra* (Van der Linden 1825) Desert darter
- 20 *Zygonyx torridus* (Kirby 1889)

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Notes:

- 1 This new species was only fully described in 1994 when the female was found. It was probably overlooked previously due to dark colouring and the habit of remaining close to water or in shaded areas. Common in the wadis of northern U.A.E. where J.N.B. 'Bish' Brown found it in 1988. One of the two endemic species.
- 2 Discovered in 1984 by Rodger Waterston. Unmistakable vivid blue male, paler female. One of the two endemic species.
- 3 Common and widespread throughout Arabia. The thorax of the female can be orange/brown.
- 4 Distinctive side projections at the end of a greenish slender body. About 72mm long. The only migratory *Gomphid* occasionally seen in the UAE. It prefers to breed in pools in open areas of desert. I found several patrolling a deep fast flowing *falaj* in Wadi Abyadh (Oman).
- 5 A Mediterranean species with sand dwelling larvae. Bluish head, green thorax, yellow and black body with hooked appendage. 37-41 mm long. Recently established.
- 6 An African species known in Egypt and Sudan to Sinai. Similar to, but not as colourful as 5, being greyish brown and black all over, with orange hooked appendage. Usually camouflaged well as males perch on rocks close to running water, returning to the same spot when disturbed. Established only in the last few years.
- 7 Common in Europe. The iridescent blue of patrolling males is noticeable at most areas of water. Aggressively defends its territory. 73-80 mm long. Newcomer to UAE, now plentiful in Hajar Mountains.
- 8 Widespread from Mediterranean to Asia. Noticeable blue collar on greenish brown body, about 66-75 mm long. Migratory, often in swarms.
- 9 Difficult to distinguish from 8 without close examination, but smaller 61-66mm. An Afro-Asian species which makes long migratory flights into Mediterranean areas and northwards even as far as Iceland, where it was the only dragonfly captured there. Collections at E.R.W.D.A. from desert environments in Abu Dhabi suggest that it is the predominant *Aeshnid* there.
- 10 A very successful migrant with almost worldwide tropical distribution. Often found in groups flying several metres high. Constantly feeding on the wing, it is difficult to observe. Yellowish in colour, but males can be quite red in Arabia. When close, a yellow face is very noticeable. 49-52mm long. Has been found in India at 18,000 feet!

- 11 Very common and tolerates poor water quality. Easily identified with greenish yellow and black segmented body. Sexes alike. Prefers to 'hang' like *Anax* species, rather than perch.
- 12 Common. Male is blue, female brownish. Upper abdomen 'pinched' or waisted behind wings to give its common name. Medium sized 39-43mm. Mature females can develop the powdery blue appearance of the males.
- 13 Smaller than 12, and similarly coloured. Abdomen tapers evenly without a 'waist'. More difficult to find. Several recent sightings.
- 14 Smallest *Libellulid* with a variable colour and size. Some males almost black. It perches like other darters. Both sexes easily confused with 19. Close examination of wings necessary to distinguish them.
- 15 Very common. Males reddish purple and aggressive to intruders in their territories. Like all *Trithemis* species the body is held almost vertically when perched. Females difficult to find.
- 16 Common, especially in upper mountain wadis. Narrowest body of the three *Trithemis*. Has black marks between segments. Varies in colour according to locality. Females yellow and black with four noticeable yellow wing patches in UAE.
- 17 Common. Bright red male, yellowish brown female. Obvious large, orange/brown patches on all 4 wings near the body. The size of these varies slightly. In Arabia they are intermediate between those of the type locality of India and the African subspecies *ardens*.
- 18 Common and numerous, the vivid orange red body of the male is very noticeable. Abdomen wider than other members of the family, flattened and tapering to end. Female yellowish with two paler marks on top of the thorax. Able to tolerate poor water quality.
- 19 A small dragonfly which can easily be confused with 14, but not so common. It does not frequent waterways, but is found in open spaces settling on stunted grass. Less likely to be found in mountain areas. Wings clear and shiny making the veins difficult to see. Males are blackish, females yellow/brown. Widespread in eastern Arabia, migratory over large distances.
- 20 A body about 50mm long makes this a large *Libellulid*. Sexes alike, with yellow spots on a dark abdomen and may develop powdery blue appearance. An Asiatic species which prefers to patrol near the surface of fast flowing streams and waterfalls. Like *Anax* in preferring to 'hang' rather than perch. Frequent in wadis of the Hajar Mountains.

OTHER SPECIES FOUND IN NORTHERN OMAN

Some of which could occur in U.A.E. in the future.

ZYGOPYTERA — Damselflies

COENAGRIONIDAE

- 21 *Ischnura senegalensis* (Rambur 1942)
- 22 *Pseudagrion decorum* (Rambur 1842)
- 23 *Ceragrion glabrum* (Burmeister 1839) Olive eyes

ANISOPTERA — Dragonflies

LIBELLULIDAE

- 24 *Orthetrum ransonneti* (Brauer 1865)
- 25 *Crocothemis sanguinolenta* (Burmeister 1839)
- 26 *Sympetrum fonscolombei* (Selys 1840) Red veined darter
- 27 *Trithemis pallidinervis* (Kirby 1889)
- 28 *Tramea basilaris* (Beauvais 1817)
- 29 *Urothemis thomasi* (Longfield 1932)

Notes:

- 21 Very similar to 3 (*Ischnura evansi*) in size and colour, but pterostigma (wing markings) are darker. Quite rare in Dhofar and Northern Oman.
- 22 Looks similar to 3 but much bigger. Many locally established populations in wadis of N. Oman.
- 23 A striking orange damselfly found in Hajar mountain wadis. It is already on the Western side in Khatwa so only a short flight would add it to the UAE list. Like most damselflies, it stays close to shallow pools with plenty of emergent vegetation.
- 24 Uncommon in Arabia; found near Muscat in 1994.
- 25 New to Oman in 1976. Few found since.
- 26 A darter which is a well known migrant. Only odd specimens recorded. Found in Northern Oman near Muscat in 1977.
- 27 Found near Muscat in 1976 but none since. Occurs in Saudi Arabia & Yemen.
- 28 Another strong migrant. Two specimens in the Natural History Museum in Muscat from 1992, but one was also found in 1977.
- 29 Only a few specimens found in Oman to date. Rare migrant from Nigeria.

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1. *Arabineura khalidi* pair, male on right.

2. *Arabicnemis caerulea* pair, male on left.



3. *Ischnura evansi*
left male,
right female.



4. *Lindenia tetraphylla*



5. *Paragomphus genei*



6. *Paragomphus sinaiticus*



7. *Anax imperator*
left male,
right female.



8. *Anax parthenope*



9. *Hemianax ephippiger*



10. *Pantala flavescens*
above male, left female.



11. *Orthetrum sabina* (sexes alike)



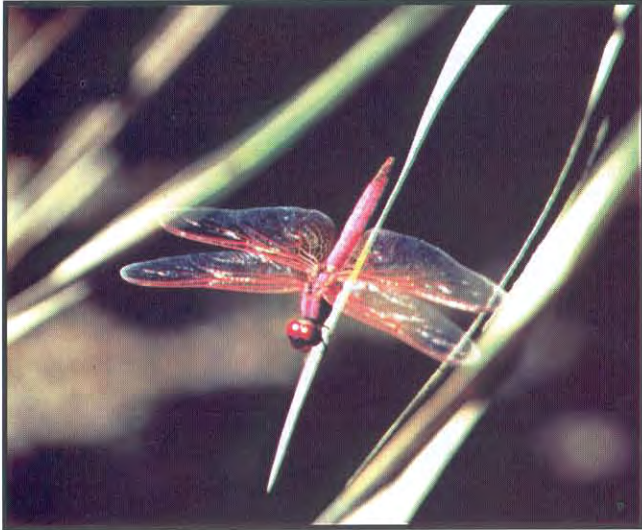
12. *Orthetrum chrysostigma* left male, right female.



13. *Orthetrum taeniolatum* left male, right female



14. *Diplacodes lefebvrei*
male (female
not shown).



15. *Trithemis annulata* left male, right female.



16. *Trithemis arteriosa*
left male,
right female.



17. *Trithemis kirbyi* left male, right female.



18. *Crocothemis erythraea* left male, right female.



19. *Selysiothemis nigra* female (male not shown)



20. *Zygonyx torridus* (sexes alike)



23. *Ceragrion glabrum*