

Butterflies and Dragonflies meeting at Potteric Carr on 22nd July 2007

Ten people assembled at 10 a.m. for this walk which was led by John Hancox and Siggie Parratt-Halbert. Whilst this time of year is often a prolific time for butterflies and dragonflies, because of the rain in the previous days and overcast skies, there was not much optimism about what might be seen. A close examination was made of the vegetation along Loversall Bank. This yielded small numbers of the usual butterflies for this time of year: Gatekeeper (with the first females being seen for the year), Ringlet, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Large White, Green-veined White and Small White, plus one or two elusive species that flew away. Unfortunately, the Wych Elm did not yield the usual White-letter Hairstreaks. Whilst this may seem a low count, the butterflies were generally inactive and it was possible to explain, for instance, the differences between sexes of the Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and Ringlets. There were also a few damselflies about often resting deep in the vegetation. Blue-tailed and Azure damselflies were found and their relative identification features explained, in particular, the difference between the Azure and Common Blue damselflies, two very similar species which are often confused. In this respect, close-focusing binoculars were a distinct advantage.

As the party moved onto Loversall Field the sky had cleared somewhat and the temperature had risen, making the insects a little more active. At Square Pond there was a male Emperor Dragonfly patrolling. This species is easily identified in flight by its size and the pale blue patch to the rear of the thorax/segment 2. There were also one or two Four-spots and Common Darters; unfortunately these were also patrolling the water area and not easily examined. In the vegetation surrounding the pond there were plenty of damselflies, mainly Blue-tailed and Emeralds. These two species are sometimes confused because superficially both have blue tails. However, it was possible to make a side-by-side comparison, when it was clear that they are easily separated – the Emeralds are noticeably larger and the blue tail is a much paler, powdery blue; also the abdomen is an iridescent green not black as in the Blue-tailed; also, the Emeralds almost invariably rest with their wings extended at 45° rather than over their bodies.

There were lots of "brown" butterflies in the surrounding grassland and a new species encountered was Small Skipper when it was possible to explain the differences between the males and females and also their different appearance to Large Skipper (using a field guide since unfortunately this species was not seen).

Along the banks of the Reed Bed Filtration cells we had to usher out of the way a large flock of 25 Canada Geese, mainly juveniles, which gave us malevolent stares and some hissing! Here there were more Azure, Blue-tailed and Emerald damselflies including some mated pairs. We flushed Brown Hawker and Southern Hawker dragonflies whilst an Emperor patrolled the water area. There were more Small Skippers here plus Meadow Browns and Gatekeepers and the odd Ringlet; there was also a fleeting glimpse of a Red Admiral. At Loversall Delph, we encountered the first Ruddy Darter of the year, an immature male, which we were able to examine at close quarters. After 2½ hours, the party made their way back to the Field Centre for a spot of lunch.