Dragonflies and Damselflies of Northeast Iowa

Some of the best places to find dragonflies and damselflies are rivers, streams, bogs, open swamps, marshes, and lakes or ponds, though you'll find different kinds at each type of water. You'll probably want an insect net if you want to see them up close!

Dragonflies are larger than damselflies, almost always hold their wings out to the sides, have front wings that are different shapes than back wings, and usually have eyes that touch each other.

Common Whitetail

Mature Male: bright white abdomen; wings have broad black band at middle and small black patch near body. Hovers over females as guard while she lays her eggs.

Size: about 1.5 inches

Flight: late May–early September

Immature Male: wings have black band at middle and small black patch near body; light spots form a jagged line down sides of the abdomen.

Female: wings have 3 black patches; light spots form a jagged line down sides of the abdomen.

Common Green Darner

Female

Both males and females have bright green thoraxes. Male abdomen is bright blue. Female abdomen is reddish or gray. Males and females have a bulls-eye marking on the top of their face in front of their eyes.

Size: about 3 inches

Flight: mid April–mid October

Male

Bulls-eye on face

Common Pondhawk

Mature Male: light blue thorax and abdomen and green face

Size: about 1.5 inches

Flight: late May–early September

Notes: A ferocious dragonfly that will eat anything its size or smaller. Uses large spines on legs to help hold prey. Follows large animals to feed on swarming insects.

Female and Immature Male: bright green with black markings on abdomen.

Twelve-spotted Skimmer

Mature Male: 3 black splotches per wing, with white splotches in between and near abdomen on hind wing

Size: about 2 inches

Flight: late May–late September

Female and Immature Male: 3 black splotches per wing; yellow side spots that form a smooth stripe down the sides of the abdomen

Eastern Amberwing

Male: orange wings with occasional dark marks

Size: very small, about 1 inch

Flight: early June–mid August

Notes: Both males and females have broad abdomens with light rings. Females lay egg masses that explode apart after sinking a few inches in the water.

Female: clear wings with orange or brown patches

Ruby Meadowhawk

Male: red abdomen

Males and females have yellow-brown faces, black wing veins, and small, amber patches at the bases of wings.

Size: about 1.5 inches

Flight: late June–late September

Female: yellow abdomen

Blue Dasher

Mature Male and Female: pale blue abdomen with green and black striped thorax; white face; amber patches on clear wings

Size: from 1 to 1.5 inches

Flight: early June–early September

Immature Female: dark brown with yellow marks on thorax and abdomen; pairs of yellow spots on thorax reaching almost to tip

Marsh Bluet

Male: blue and black thorax and abdomen

Male

Female: light green, tan, or blue thorax; dark on upper surface of abdomen

Size: about 1 inch

Flight: early June–mid August

Female

Slender Spreadwing

Very long, slender abdomen, twice as long as wings in male. Abdomen and thorax dark above with pale yellow sides. Holds wings spread to sides.

Size: about 2 inches

Flight: early June–mid September

Ebony Jewelwing

Head, thorax, and abdomen bright metallic green

Size: about 2 inches

Flight: early May –early September

Male: broad, black wings

Female: black wings with white spots near tips

Damselflies are smaller and more slender than dragonflies, have front and hind wings that are the same shape and usually held together over their back, and have eyes that never touch.