

Bitten, Stung, Scratched, Sticky and Nettled...

My first FAUNA Odonata survey.

I undertook my first survey of the Odonata today, 29th May, 2020. The weather was fine and sunny, approximately 5% cloud, wind southerly, light breeze force 2.

I am undertaking the surveys by a combination of walking transects between ponds, surveying approximately 2m either side of my path; and by point surveys, standing by a pond for ten minutes and noting everything I see. I am endeavouring to walk the same route each time, subject to avoiding fields which are occupied by livestock.

Having looked at School Pond, which has been dry for a while, I began my first transect in Big Meadow. No Odonata to be seen - not really a surprise, given the area's unfortunate habit of drying out completely over the past few summers. Odonata require permanent water to complete their life-cycle - nymphs spend at least one year (dependent on species and conditions) underwater, before emerging as adults.

Moving into the Hay Meadow, and passing through it close to Lucy Brook, I began to encounter young female Azure damselflies (*Coenagrion puella*), three in total whilst walking. In general, females tend to stay away from water until ready to mate, to avoid being mobbed by the males, which tend to congregate near open water. Females are usually duller, and harder to spot too!

Cromwell's Pond was home to four young male Azures, plus one adult male Blue-tailed Damselfly (*Ischnura elegans*) and an adult male Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*).

Moving towards Lucy's Pool, I encountered a young common toad.

Lucy's Pool had five Common Blue males, two male Azure, and two male Blue-tailed.

Moving along to Upper Sowerholme Pond, I encountered four female Azures on the way, plus a female Common Blue. On the pond here were five male Common Blue and one Azure (they're quite hard to tell apart - a close-up photo is often necessary - the main distinguishing feature is different markings on segment 2 of the abdomen).

Moving from Upper Sowerholme Pond to Anna's pool was the trickiest from the point of view of footing, and I didn't have my head up enough to spot much other than two female Azures.

Anna's pool was a veritable damselfly metropolis, with at least fifteen adult male Azure Damselflies, two copulating pairs, and a pair ovipositing, as well as three male Blue-tailed Damselflies.

Moving on to Willow Pond, I startled a large hawk dragonfly as I arrived, which flew off southwards. I am virtually certain it was an Emperor Dragonfly (*Anax Imperator*) - the silhouette, and flight manner, with slightly bent, drooping, abdomen, is very distinctive, though because the position of the sun precluded observation of its colours, I have no idea whether it was male or female. Emperors are Britain's largest dragonfly, and quite commonly seen along the canal from late May to the middle of July; they're also the first of the large hawkers to appear each year. Willow pond had two male Blue-tailed damselflies, a copulating pair of Azures, and two male Azures.

Moving on to the Flora Field, the two small ponds there were host to three male Azures and a male Blue-tailed damselfly.

It's quite interesting how the population varies in a short distance - the canal is home to large numbers of Blue-tailed Damselflies, but very few Azures, whilst the situation is reversed in FAUNA/Flora. It was nice to see both colour forms of female Azures - green and blue. It was also interesting that the Hay Meadow population seemed less mature than in other areas.

