

Dragonfly and damselfly identification

Features to look for

Adults

Photo: Tim Ransom
Emperor dragonfly



Leg colouration

Face and eye

Thorax markings (front and side)

Wing colouration and markings

Abdomen markings (front and side)

Anal appendages

Nymphs

Dragonfly



Dragonfly (nymph) by *Dave Huth*

Damselfly



Stout body

Slender body

5 stiff, short spiky appendages

3 soft flexible gills

Blue-tailed damselfly (Ischnura elegans) nymph by *Charles J. Sharp* licensed under [CC BY-](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)



Step 1: Dragonfly or damselfly?

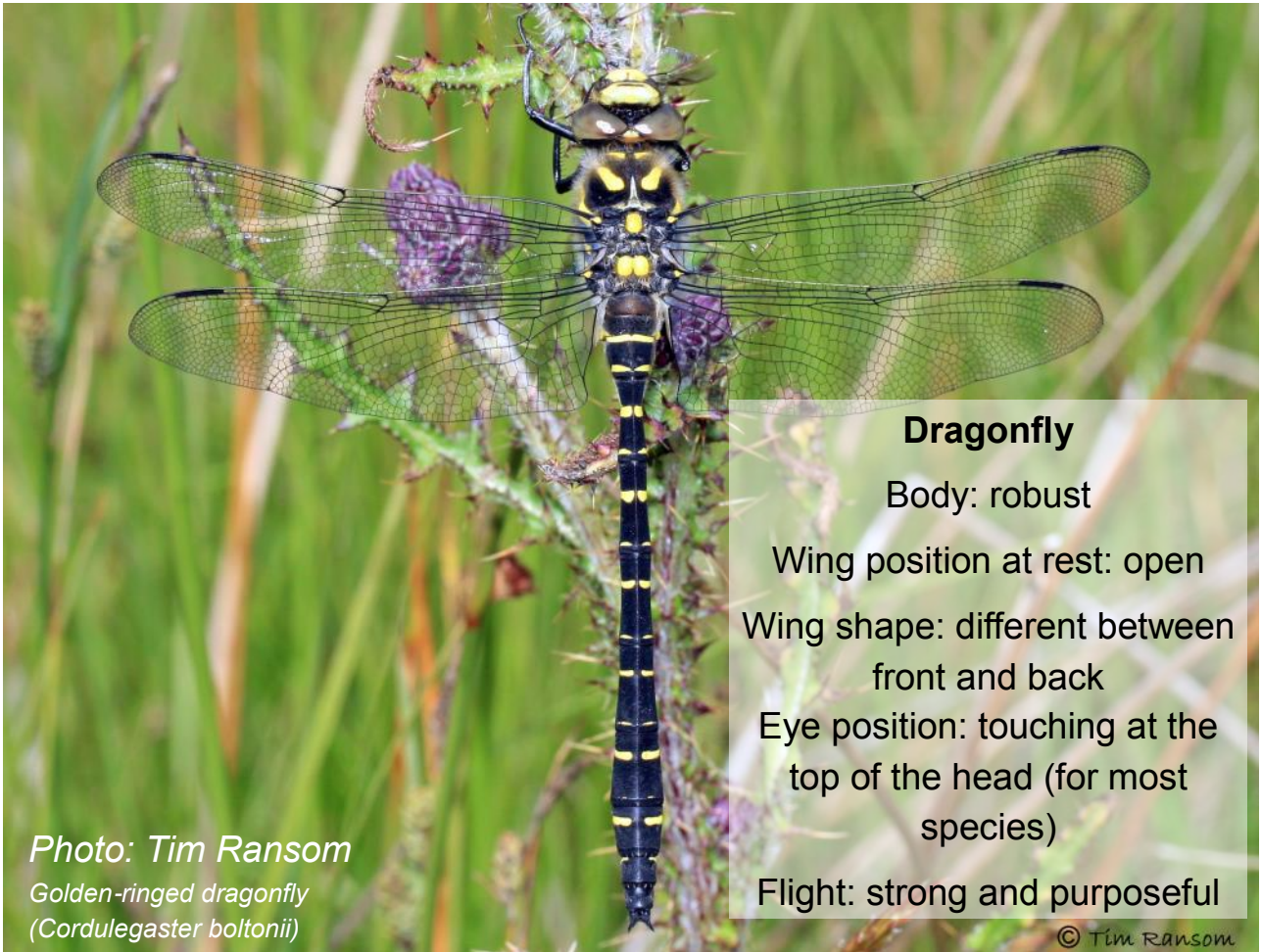


Photo: Tim Ransom

Golden-ringed dragonfly
(*Cordulegaster boltonii*)

Dragonfly

Body: robust

Wing position at rest: open

Wing shape: different between
front and back

Eye position: touching at the
top of the head (for most
species)

Flight: strong and purposeful

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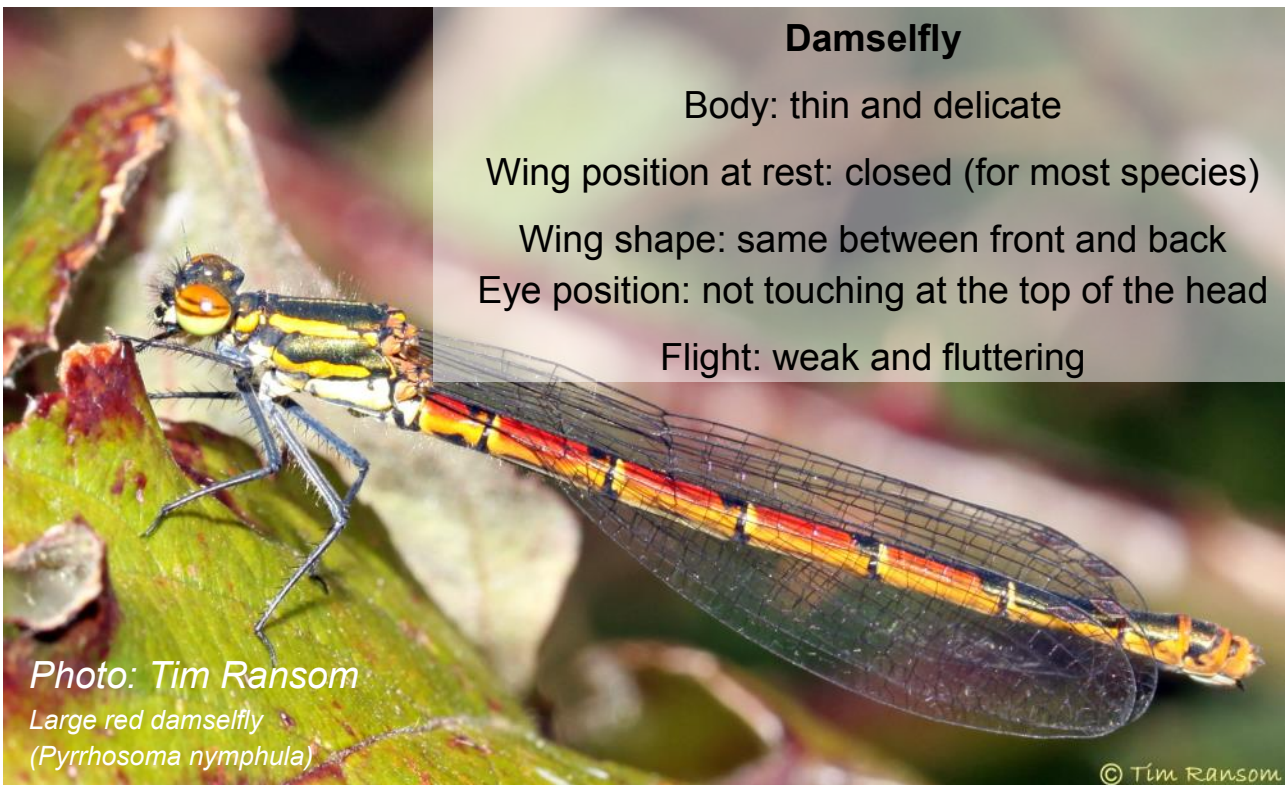


Photo: Tim Ransom

Large red damselfly
(*Pyrrhosoma nymphula*)

Damselfly

Body: thin and delicate

Wing position at rest: closed (for most species)

Wing shape: same between front and back

Eye position: not touching at the top of the head

Flight: weak and fluttering

© Tim Ransom



Step 2: What sort of dragonfly?

Hawkers, emperors and similar species

Colour: Dark with bright stripes or spots. Some brown. No dark wing markings except for wing-spots.

Body shape: Large and robust, but thin bodied



Photo: Tim Ransom
Migrant hawker
(*Aeshna mixta*)

Darters, chasers and skimmers

Colour: Body is often blue, red, yellow or brown occasionally with black markings. Some species have dark markings on the wings.

Body shape: Smaller than hawkers and similar species. Stout bodies.



Photo: Tim Ransom
Four-spotted chaser
(*Libellula quadrimaculata*)

Links:

British Dragonfly Society identification help webpage

<https://www.british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/dragonfly-and-damselfly-identification-help>

Insects of the Channel Islands Facebook Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/518340844961982/>



Pondwatch...JE