

# The Damselflies & Dragonflies of Barcombe Parish

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**Cover picture:**

**Small Red-eyed Damselfly (male), Barcombe (at the edge of a garden pond), 21 July 2025.**

## Introduction

Damselflies and dragonflies are fascinating predatory insects that live most of their lives underwater as larvae but are colourful and aerial in their short adult life. They are excellent environmental indicators.

As adults, dragonflies hold their wings out from the body when perched, have pairs of wings that differ in shape, have compound eyes that touch together on the head and are rather robust insects. In contrast, damselflies are rather delicate, have identical pairs of wings, have the eyes well separated on the head and (most!) tend to sit with their wings folded along the body.

Damselflies and dragonflies comprise the insect order Odonata and, as with other insects, have six legs. They have two pairs of wings. Each wing is capable of independent movement giving tremendous manoeuvrability and even allowing backwards flight. Wing strength is increased by 'veins' while a slightly thicker spot ('pterostigma') on the front edge appears to reduce unstable 'flutter'. Two large compound eyes and three light receptors ('ocelli') on the top of the head provide the insect with an ability to find and catch prey, normally caught with the front legs and transferred to the jaws. In addition to the head, the body comprises a thorax and a ten-segmented abdomen and these contain pores called 'spiracles' that deliver oxygen direct to the tissues. The genitalia are located at the tip of the abdomen though for mating, the male transfers sperm to a secondary organ under the upper abdomen. The male grabs the female close to the neck using appendages (claspers) at the end of the abdomen and they are then said to be 'in tandem'. When ready to mate, the female curves her abdomen up under that of the male and they create a 'mating wheel' either while perched, or sometimes in flight. After mating, in damselflies, the pair remain in tandem while the female lays the fertilised eggs, usually, into submerged vegetation. Some dragonflies (e.g., Common Darter) also remain in tandem but in flight while the female dips the eggs underwater but in other species (e.g., most hawkers), the females lay their eggs independently of the male while either in flight or perched; he often remains nearby to deter rivals. The larvae live underwater and are formidable predators. They develop by shedding their exoskeleton a number of times. They grab aquatic prey by pincers on an extendible lip ('labium') and breathe dissolved oxygen by drawing water into their lower digestive tract. Squirting the water out creates rapid propulsion. After anything up to five years in the case of some dragonflies, the larva climbs out of the water and up waterside vegetation where the adult insect emerges from the exoskeleton (the 'exuvia') and dries out. They are initially colourless and flightless until the wings expand and dry out and are known as 'tenerals'. Colour is acquired over several days and the flying adults then disperse, often into dry locations, but returning to water to breed. They live for a week or two (most damselflies) but up to a few months (some dragonflies). More details about their biology and ancient lineage can be found in David Attenborough's book 'Life in the Undergrowth'. For instance, there is evidence that 320 million years ago, the first prototype dragonflies had the sky to themselves and a wingspan of 73cm that is over 6.5 times that of the Emperor Dragonflies found nowadays in Barcombe Parish!

Being in the warmer south of the country, Sussex is a good place in which to see these insects and by far the majority of its species have been seen in Barcombe Parish. This document contains the species seen in the Parish up to and including 2025, most of which seem to be holding their own, or even thriving, despite some pollution in the main waterways and some choking of pond-life by exotic aquatic weeds.

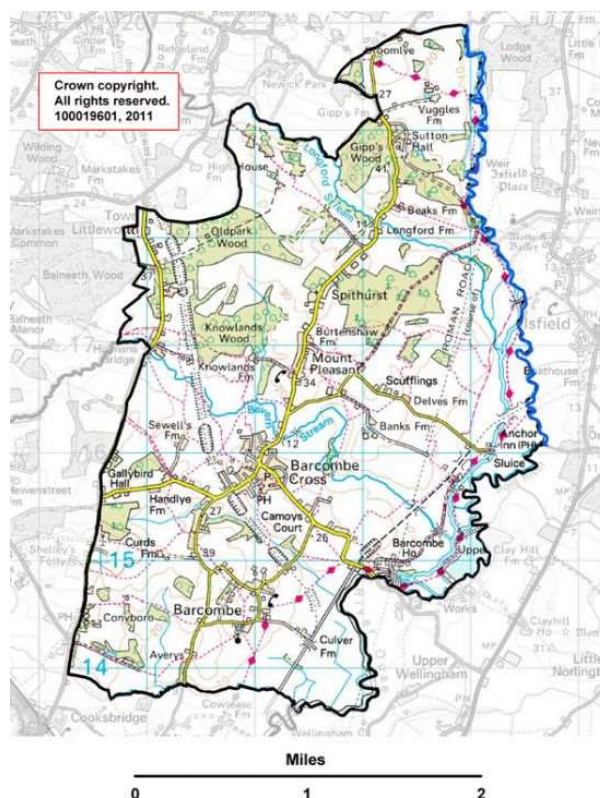
## Barcombe Parish

The civil Parish of Barcombe comprises 17.81km<sup>2</sup> and represents just 1% of the land area of East Sussex. It is located in the Low Weald and is fortunate in being bordered by the River Ouse while two of its tributaries (the Longford Stream and the Bevern) flow across the Parish. There are also two reservoirs (neither with public access) plus a range of ponds. As the map on the following page shows, the eastern

Parish boundary runs along the River Ouse and its western edge is bounded by the road from the Rainbow Inn (Cooksbridge) to Town Littleworth. It is quite a rural parish with the population of 1,493 (2021 census) centred on Barcombe Cross. As elsewhere in southern England, housing development is a threat to its rural character and wildlife. The Parish is well served by public footpaths.

## Place names used in this document

In line with common parlance, 'Barcombe Cross' is referred to as '**Barcombe**'. References to the '**Old Railway Track**' relate to the 1.5 km stretch (owned by UK Power Networks) that runs northward from just west-north-west of the village as far as the Secret Campsite (to the north-west of Knowlands Wood). Other specific place names are primarily as shown on Ordnance Survey Maps or as described in the next section.



**Map of Barcombe Parish** (ref. Barcombe Parish Council website)

## Good places to find damselflies and dragonflies in Barcombe Parish

Damselflies and dragonflies can be found widely within the Parish and, because adults often disperse far away from water after emergence, they can be found in quite dry habitats including field margins and woodland rides. They do need to return to water to breed and that provides good opportunities to watch them. Many of the species listed in the Parish can be found around garden ponds and even small water features will attract some. However, the following locations within the Parish are particularly good and are reasonably accessible. Obviously, the usual caveats about being around deep water apply.

### Knowlands Farm Pond (TQ420168)

Both Red-eyed and Small Red-eyed Damselflies perch on the lily-pads close to the access road. Azure, Blue-tailed, Common Blue and White-legged Damselflies are also found around the margin of the pond and there are usually one or two Emperor Dragonflies and Black-tailed Skimmers patrolling. Later in the season, Willow Emerald Damselflies can be found on vegetation overhanging the pond.



**Knowlands Farm Pond on 6 September 2020**



**An Emperor Dragonfly (male in flight) at Knowlands Farm Pond on 1 August 2025**

**Knowlands Wood (TQ420171)**

After emergence, adult damselflies and dragonflies disperse (returning to water later to breed). Consequently, the woodland rides at Knowlands can hold a number of species that might include Hairy Dragonfly (early season) and, later on, White-legged Damselfly, Common Darter, Ruddy Darter, Southern Hawker and Migrant Hawker. Just occasionally, there are Southern Migrant Hawkers and Golden-ringed Dragonflies.



**Main clearing in Knowlands Wood on 9 July 2025**

### **Andrew's Cut, Barcombe Mills (TQ435148)**

A good range of species can be found around Andrew's Cut at Barcombe Mills (subject to access). One of the specialities in May is Scarce Chaser but Hairy Dragonfly and many of the commoner damselflies are usually also present at this time.



**Andrew's Cut on 8 June 2020**

### **Longford Stream, Overs Bridge (TQ442170)**

With a good pair of binoculars, Overs Bridge and the Longford Stream on the eastern edge of Barcombe Parish near Isfield offer a very good range of species which might include Hairy Dragonfly (early season), Brown Hawker, Ruddy Darter and perhaps Brilliant Emerald or Southern Migrant Hawker.



**Overs Bridge and the Longford Stream on 18 June 2025**

### **Sutton Hall Weir area (TQ440185)**

The small waterway that runs west from the River Ouse near Sutton Hall Weir is known as 'The Loop'. The edge of it can be viewed from the public footpath (please don't leave it) and species include the commoner damselflies, Brown Hawker, Emperor Dragonfly and sometimes either Downy Emerald or Brilliant Emerald.



**'The Loop' next to the footpath close to Sutton Hall Weir on 18 June 2025**

### **Barcombe village reservoir (TQ426158)**

Sadly, public access ceased by 2025 but this site below the Village Hall is included here in case that situation should change (in the meantime, please don't trespass!). It is a very good site to see a wide range of the Odonata species found in Barcombe Parish. These include the commoner damselflies (Red-eyed and White-legged are both present), Black-tailed Skimmer, Downy Emerald, Emperor Dragonfly, Four-spotted Chaser, Hairy Dragonfly and Scarce Chaser.



**Barcombe village reservoir on 5 June 2024**

## Status

The table below shows the 28 species recorded in Barcombe Parish. The status shown for each species provides a rough indication of their frequency in the Parish during an ‘average year’ based on personal opinion. Of these, SL has seen 26 species in the Parish with only Emerald Damselfly (seen by NL and others including John Luck) and Variable Damselfly (noted in the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre database) so far proving elusive. With climate change, it is possible that other species will be encouraged across the Channel from the Continent. One species, the Norfolk or Green-eyed Hawker (see p45), that has colonised Sussex either from the Continent or from eastern England, is a likely candidate to be added in the next few years especially from Barcombe Mills or further north up the River Ouse. All but the Variable Damselfly have been seen on the Sutton Hall Estate while all but Variable Damselfly and Red-veined Darter have been seen at Knowlands.

**Status classification used below.** **Common** = one or more individuals likely to be seen on the wing during a half day walk in the Parish: in the right habitat; at the correct season; under reasonably bright, still, warm and dry weather conditions; and in an ‘average’ year. **Fairly common** = as ‘Common’ but generally less abundant. **Scarce or local** = may take rather more effort because they tend to occur at specific sites. **Unusual** = less than annual. The main flight seasons shown in the table are those for Sussex noted in Martin, Linington & Foreman (2024), *The Damselflies & Dragonflies of Sussex*. These seasons have changed even in the 20 years since Belden et al. (2004), *The Dragonflies of Sussex*. The dates on the photographs also give some clue as to expected season and possible locations to observe the different species. Distribution maps of some selected species can be found in Appendix 1.

| Species                         | Season                       | Status        | Comments   |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------|--|
| <b>Beautiful Demoiselle</b>     | Early May – late August      | Common        | Can be abundant e.g., along the Old Railway Track.   |
| <b>Banded Demoiselle</b>        | Early May – late August      | Common        | Can be abundant e.g., along the River Ouse. Sparring males low over water are a real sight of summer.  |
| <b>Emerald Damselfly</b>        | Early June – mid-September   | Unusual       | There have been sightings at Overs Bridge on the Longford Stream by John Luck in 2010 and on Knowlands Farm in 2013 by NL.   |
| <b>Willow Emerald Damselfly</b> | Late July – mid-October      | Fairly common | The first records for the Parish were in 2021 and it is now well established in a number of locations. It has spread from a single 1-km square in Sussex in 2016 to 440 squares in 2025! |
| <b>White-legged Damselfly</b>   | Mid-May – late August        | Common        | Often seen in quite dry locations.   |
| <b>Large Red Damselfly</b>      | Early April – late August    | Common        | Usually one of the first species on the wing each year.  |
| <b>Azure Damselfly</b>          | Late April – early September | Common        | Can be abundant even on garden ponds.  |
| <b>Variable Damselfly</b>       | Early May – early August     | Unusual       | There is one record in the SXBRC database - at Barcombe Mills on 3 May 2000 (Environment Agency).  |
| <b>Common Blue Damselfly</b>    | Early May – late September   | Fairly common | Mainly around larger ponds and reservoirs.   |

| <b>Species</b>                  | <b>Season</b>                | <b>Status</b>   | <b>Comments</b>  |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|--|
| <b>Blue-tailed Damselfly</b>    | Late April – early September | Common          | Occasionally visits garden ponds.  |
| <b>Red-eyed Damselfly</b>       | Early May – early September  | Fairly common   | Especially likes ponds with water lilies.  |
| <b>Small Red-eyed Damselfly</b> | Mid-June – early September   | Fairly common   | Likes ponds (even garden ones) with surface water weed or water lilies. Increasing – the first UK breeding record was in 1999.   |
| <b>Hairy Dragonfly</b>          | Mid-April – mid-July         | Scarce or local | An early dragonfly found at Barcombe Mills, Knowlands, Longford Stream at Overs Bridge and Sutton Hall Weir.   |
| <b>Southern Hawker</b>          | Early June – late October    | Common          | A stunning dragonfly that will visit garden ponds. Most often seen as solitary individuals. Very inquisitive.  |
| <b>Migrant Hawker</b>           | Mid-June– early November     | Common          | Can be abundant in late summer / autumn e.g., the Old Railway Track and Knowlands Wood. Often seen in small groups.  |
| <b>Southern Migrant Hawker</b>  | Late June – early September  | Scarce or local | The first records were in 2020 and it is now annual. Knowlands Wood and Overs Bridge are prime spots to see one.   |
| <b>Brown Hawker</b>             | Early June – late September  | Fairly common   | Our only dragonfly with orange-brown wings and Knowlands Farm & Wood are good places to see one.   |
| <b>Emperor Dragonfly</b>        | Mid-May – mid-September      | Common          | A large and dominant species. Sadly, it often means that if one is present, other species are chased off!  |
| <b>Golden-ringed Dragonfly</b>  | Early June – mid-September   | Scarce or local | There was one record in 2010 (Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre database), then a number of records from 2018 at Knowlands Farm & Wood and on the Sutton Hall Estate. |
| <b>Downy Emerald</b>            | Early May – late July        | Scarce or local | This is a national scarcity found at Knowlands Farm and the Sutton Hall Estate.  |
| <b>Brilliant Emerald</b>        | Early June – mid-August      | Scarce or local | A national rarity found for example at Overs Bridge.   |
| <b>Four-spotted Chaser</b>      | Early May – mid-August       | Scarce or local | A robust species found for example at Knowlands Farm.  |
| <b>Broad-bodied Chaser</b>      | Late April – mid-August      | Common          | Another dominant species. It is an early coloniser of recently-dug garden ponds.   |
| <b>Scarce Chaser</b>            | Mid-May – late July          | Scarce or local | A species expanding east in Sussex. Barcombe Mills is a good site.   |
| <b>Black-tailed Skimmer</b>     | Mid-May – late August        | Fairly common   | This species likes to perch on bare earth near water.  |
| <b>Common Darter</b>            | Early June – late October    | Common          | One of our commonest dragonflies. Sometimes found late in year.  |
| <b>Ruddy Darter</b>             | Mid-June – early October     | Scarce or local | This requires a bit of skill in identifying it from the Common Darter.   |
| <b>Red-veined Darter</b>        | Early June – mid-September   | Unusual         | There is just one record of this scarce, cross-Channel migrant species - from the Sutton Hall Estate in 2023.  |

## Images

All images were taken in the Parish (except the one of the Norfolk or Green-eyed Hawker on p45) and by SL unless otherwise labelled as taken by NL.

The adult male damselflies and dragonflies found within the Parish are mostly relatively easy to identify given the small number of species involved and the fact that they are well-marked. Identification tips can be found in *The Damselflies & Dragonflies of Sussex* (2024) and on the Sussex Dragonfly Group's website (see References on p47). There are also two simple keys to the identification of male damselflies and dragonflies in Appendix 2. Things to look out for are patterns on the thorax (body immediately behind the head), the abdomen (long thin part of the body behind the thorax with ten segments) and the wings. Other things such as the colour of the eyes, legs and wing spots also help. Females and immatures can be more of a challenge in that, in many species, they can be quite differently marked or coloured to the males. Additionally, in some damselfly species, there are several distinct forms of the female (either 'morphs' or, where transient, 'phases'). Where males and females are very similar either as adults or immatures, sexing of individuals is often possible by looking at the tail appendages. Use of close-focusing binoculars or, even better, reference to digital photos taken on a camera or phone, will help with the identifications. Of course, the flying adult is just one short stage in the life cycle and identification of larvae to species is more of a specialist subject. To this end, photos of examples of a few more commonly encountered larvae are shown at the end of this document (p45).

## Damselflies



**Beautiful Demoiselle (young male), Old Railway Track, 10 May 2018.** There are two species of these bright, shiny Demoiselles. This species has completely dark wings. When fully mature, the eyes are almost black and the wings go a dark bluish colour. Sometimes, it can be abundant.



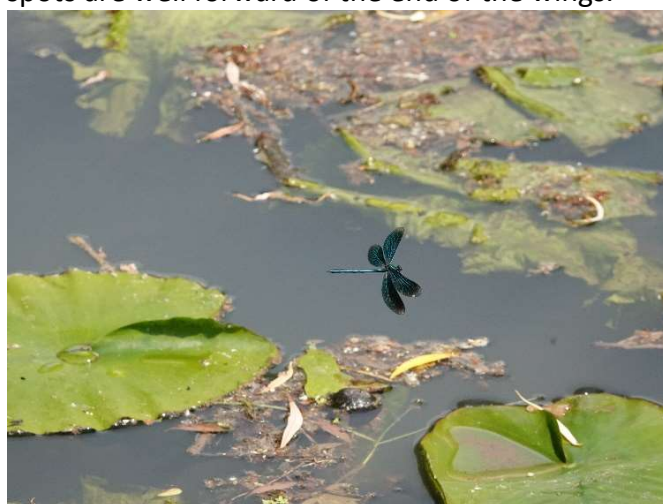
**Beautiful Demoiselle (male), Old Railway Track, 22 June 2019.** Males are metallic blue-green.



**Beautiful Demoiselle (female), Barcombe, 14 July 2016.** The metallic green female has noticeably brown wings and the white wing-spots are well forward of the end of the wings.



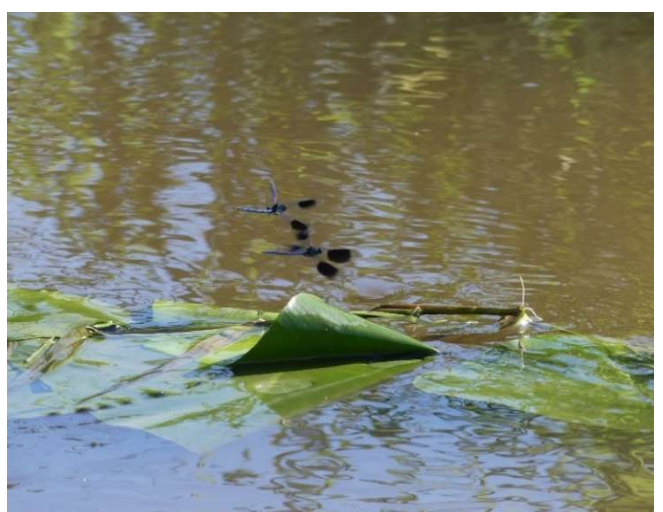
**Beautiful Demoiselle (males), Knowlands Farm, 7 June 2016 (photo – NL).** This photo shows the dark wing coloration and also the independent action of the two pairs of wings.



**Beautiful Demoiselle (male), Overs Bridge, 20 May 2025.** Not infrequently seen with the next species.



**Banded Demoiselle (adult male), Barcombe Mills, 20 May 2016.** Males are metallic blue-green and have distinct dark blue patches on each wing that are really obvious in flight.



**Banded Demoiselle (males in flight), Barcombe Mills, 20 June 2016.** The dark patch on each wing of the male shows up well in flight. This is a classic sight of summer along the River Ouse.



**Banded Demoiselle (male), Knowlands Farm, 26 July 2021.**



**Banded Demoiselle (young female), Longford Stream, 20 July 2019.** Difficult to tell from the female Beautiful Demoiselle though this species has a greenish wash to the wings and the white wing-spot is a bit nearer the wing-tip. Of course, accompanying males help identification.



**Emerald Damselfly (male), Knowlands Farm, 14 July 2013 (photo – NL).** For every rule there is an exception – emerald damselflies perch with their wings part-open. This species has an emerald green top to the thorax, blue eyes and blue at the base and tip of the abdomen.



**Emerald Damselfly (male), Knowlands Farm, 14 July 2013 (photo – NL).** The wing spots are dark bordered at each end with a narrow pale band.



**Willow Emerald Damselfly (male), The Gallops near Anchor Lane, 3 August 2023.** This metallic green damselfly has pale wing spots and a dark, forward-facing 'spur' marking on each side of the thorax. As with other Emerald damselflies, it perches with wings part-open.



**Willow Emerald Damselfly (male), near Sutton Hall Weir, 25 September 2023.** Unknown in the Parish before 2021, it is fast becoming one of the most well distributed damselfly species in the Parish and elsewhere in Sussex.



**Willow Emerald Damselfly (male), Knowlands Farm, 29 August 2022.**



**Willow Emerald Damselfly (pair in 'mating wheel'), Knowlands farm pond, 22 September 2023.**



**Willow Emerald Damselfly (egg-laying scars), River Ouse near Sutton Hall Weir, 7 June 2024.**  
Most species lay their eggs into or on submerged vegetation, but this one lays into the bark of branches overhanging water creating a distinct ladder pattern.



**White-legged Damselfly (male), Knowlands Wood, 3 August 2018.** The whitish legs, pale blue colour and pale brown wing spots help identify this species which is perhaps the damselfly most regularly seen away from water in the Parish.



**White-legged Damselfly (male), Spithurst Churchyard, 30 June 2019.**



**White-legged Damselfly (pair in tandem, female egg-laying), Knowlands Farm, 3 June 2022.**



**White-legged Damselfly (pairs in tandem with female egg-laying), River Ouse near Sutton Hall Weir, 29 June 2024.**



**White-legged Damselfly (immature female form *lactea*), Knowlands Farm, 14 July 2017. This form has an extremely white abdomen (with less black than the mature adult) and is sometimes said to look like a flying matchstick!**



**White-legged Damselfly (male), Knowlands Farm, 3 June 2019.**



**Large Red Damselfly (male), Barcombe Mills, 20 May 2016.** The only red damselfly likely to be seen in the Parish. It is nearly always the first species on the wing each year.



**Large Red Damselfly (male), Old Railway Track, 28 May 2018.**



**Large Red Damselfly (female), Old Railway Track, 10 May 2018.**



**Large Red Damselfly, Knowlands Farm, 25 April 2024**



**Azure Damselfly (newly emerged female), Barcombe, 27 April 2020.** Many young (teneral) damselflies have a washed out colour initially.



**Azure Damselfly (immature female), Barcombe Mills, 20 May 2016.** Immature Azure Damselflies often have some pinkish coloration.



**Large Red Damselfly (pair in mating 'wheel'), Barcombe, 7 May 2018.** The male grabs the female using his tail (they become 'in tandem'). Having previously transferred his sperm from near the tip of the abdomen to secondary genitalia near its upper end, the female brings the tip of her tail up under the male in order to mate, thereby creating a 'mating wheel'.



**Azure Damselfly (male), Barcombe, 12 May 2016.** This is by far the most common damselfly in the Parish. It will readily visit garden ponds. Males are identified from the similar Common Blue Damselfly by the black 'U' shape at the top of the abdomen, the black 'bow-tie' at the tip of the abdomen, the narrow coloured stripes over the thorax and a narrow black 'spur' mark on the sides of the thorax.



**Azure Damselfly (female), Barcombe Mills, 8 June 2020.** The mature female is usually green instead of blue but with the same markings on the thorax. The abdomen has more dark markings than that of the male.



**Azure Damselfly (female), Knowlands, 3 June 2022.**



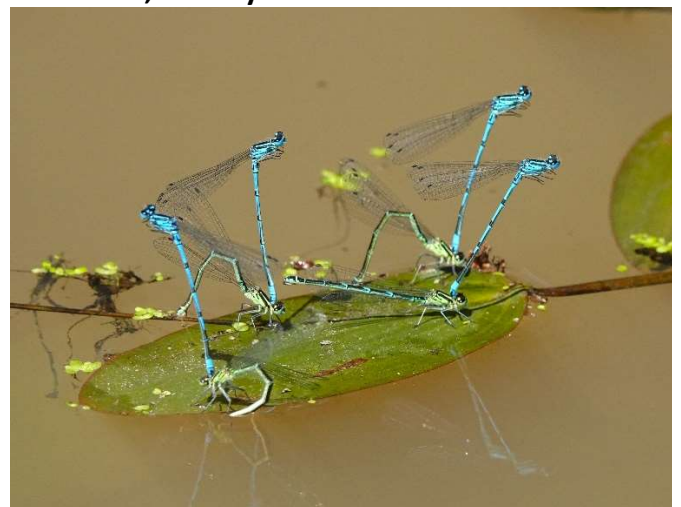
**Azure Damselfly (pair in tandem), Barcombe, 27 May 2016.**



**Azure Damselfly (pair in 'mating wheel'), Barcombe, 22 May 2022.**



**Azure Damselfly (pair in tandem), Barcombe, 6 June 2018.** Following mating, the female still held in tandem by the male (to deter rival males), egg lays around aquatic vegetation.



**Azure Damselfly (pairs in tandem with female egg-laying), Sutton Hall Estate, 2 June 2024.** Azure Damselfly pairs regularly gather together in this way when egg-laying.



**Common Blue Damselfly (male), Knowlands Farm, 25 June 2017.** Distinguished from the Azure Damselfly by the broad blue stripes over the thorax, the black 'mushroom' shape at the top of the abdomen and the absence of black markings at the tip of the abdomen.



**Common Blue Damselfly (male), Barcombe Reservoir, 6 July 2020.** This species tends to favour larger ponds than the Azure Damselfly.



**Common Blue Damselfly (male), Knowlands Wood, 20 July 2024.**



**Common Blue Damselfly (pair in tandem), Barcombe village reservoir, 12 June 2023.**



**Blue-tailed Damselfly (male), Barcombe, 3 July 2016.** This damselfly is quite similar to the Azure damselfly but has a dark abdomen with a blue tip and bicoloured wing-spots.



**Blue-tailed Damselfly (immature female *violacea* form), Sutton Hall Estate, 9 June 2022.** This is one of the two transient colour forms of the female (see below).



**Blue-tailed Damselfly (male), Barcombe, 6 June 2018.** This species will visit garden ponds.



**Blue-tailed Damselfly (immature female *rufescens* form), Sutton Hall Estate, 5 July 2023.** Females start life in one of two forms, this and *violacea*. This form with a reddish thorax is particularly striking. It matures into another form, *rufescens-obsolata*. *Violacea* can mature into either male-like or *infuscans* forms. See Brooks *et al* (2014).



**Blue-tailed Damselfly (male with female *rufescens-obsoleta* form in 'mating wheel'), Knowlands Farm pond, 20 July 2024.**



**Red-eyed Damselfly (male), Knowlands Farm, 16 May 2022.** One of two red-eyed damselfly species, this one is quite similar to the Small Red-eyed Damselfly though is slightly larger, with longer wings. It also has a neat blue band on the tip of the abdomen that is sharply demarcated from the black – almost like a blue bandage wrapped around its tail. It is on the wing earlier than the smaller species.



**Red-eyed Damselfly (female), Barcombe village reservoir, 5 June 2024.** Quite similar to the female Azure Damselfly, this is immediately distinguished by the lack of coloured spots behind the brownish eyes. It is also similar to the female Small Red-eyed Damselfly but has incomplete coloured stripes over the thorax.



**Red-eyed Damselfly (pair in tandem, female egg-laying on water lily flower bud), Knowlands Farm, 30 May 2020.**



**Red-eyed Damselfly (female), Barcombe Mills, 8 June 2020.** Females tend to have a distinct pale greenish coloration.



**Red-eyed Damselfly (pair in tandem with submerged female egg-laying), Knowlands Farm, 16 May 2022.** Damselflies sometimes submerge to lay their eggs on aquatic plants using a trapped air bubble to breathe. If, as is usual, the female is in tandem with the male, she will drag him under as happened in this example. They can survive submerged for quite a few minutes.



**Red-eyed Damselfly (immature male), Barcombe Mills, 20 May 2025.** The identification of damselflies and dragonflies sometimes throws up a real puzzle and advice of a national expert (in this case Adrian Parr) has to be sought. Obviously not a demoiselle (see above) or one of the Emerald damselflies (wings folded over back), it lacks the coloured spots behind the eyes of Azure, Common Blue and Blue-tailed Damselflies. This leaves White-legged Damselfly (but this one has black legs), Large Red Damselfly (lacks coloured stripes over the thorax), Small Red-eyed Damselfly (too early in year) or Red-eyed Damselfly. It is a young male of the latter.



**Small Red-eyed Damselfly (male), Barcombe, 5 August 2020.** This species was first recorded breeding in the UK in 1999 and has since spread rapidly. One of the easiest ways to distinguish this species from the Red-eyed Damselfly is by the stepped blue pattern and the black 'X' on the blue tip of the abdomen and the slightly shorter wings. The individual shown was on vegetation in a garden pond.



**Small Red-eyed Damselfly (male), Barcombe, 19 July 2018.**



**Small Red-eyed Damselfly (pair in tandem), Knowlands Farm, 21 July 2018.** Unlike the female Red-eyed Damselfly, the female of this species has complete coloured stripes over the thorax.

## ***Dragonflies***



**Hairy Dragonfly (male), Barcombe Mills, 8 June 2019.** Also known as the Hairy Hawker, this is one of the earliest dragonflies on the wing each year. Its yellow and brown striped thorax is markedly hairy and its abdomen has paired blue markings along its length. The eyes are blue.



**Hairy Dragonfly (male in flight), Barcombe Mills, 1 June 2017.**



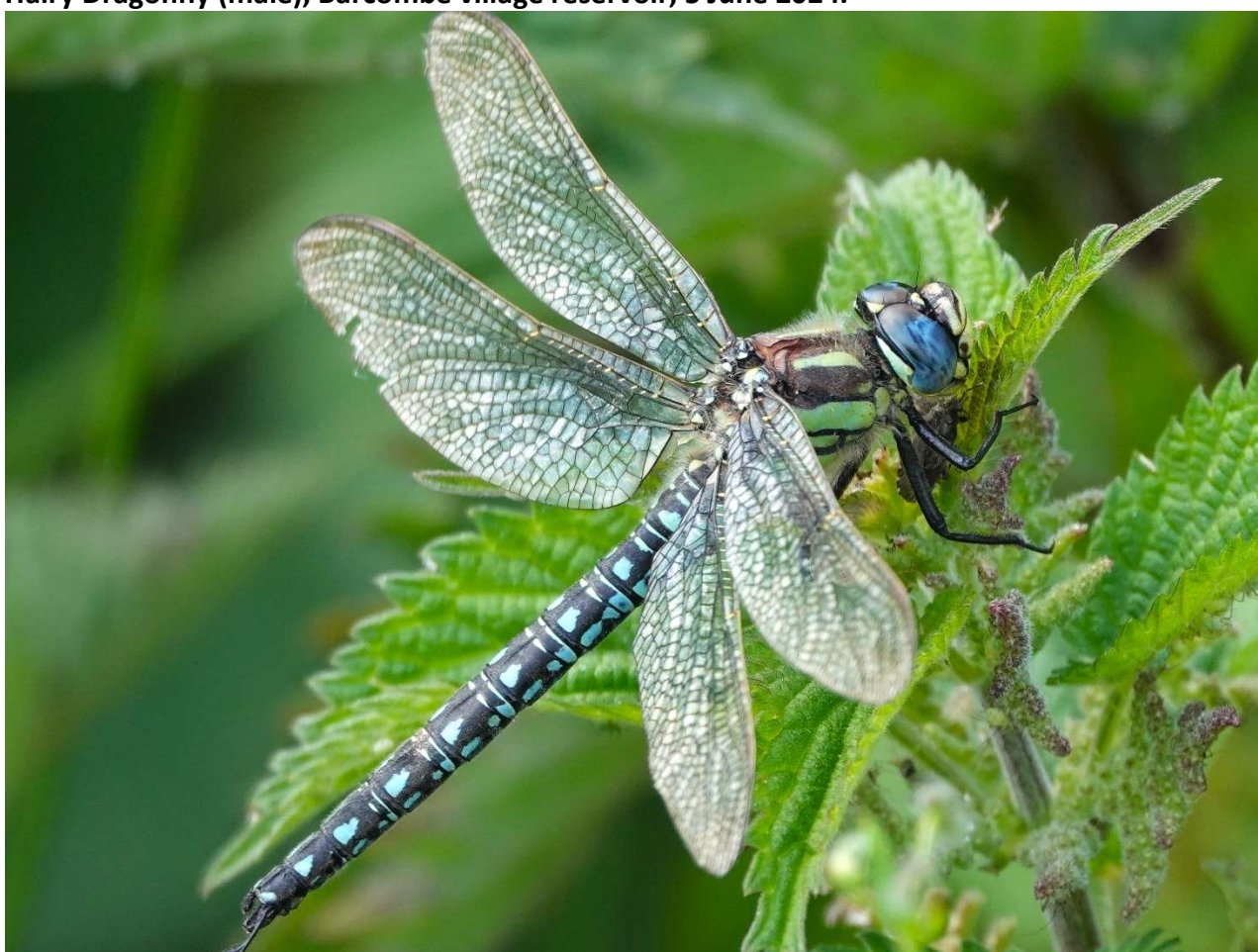
**Hairy Dragonfly (female), Old Railway Track, 3 June 2019.** The female has less well-marked yellow stripes on the thorax and the blue of the male's abdomen is replaced by yellow.



**Hairy Dragonfly (slightly immature male), Knowlands Wood, 10 May 2018.**



**Hairy Dragonfly (male), Barcombe village reservoir, 5 June 2024.**



**Hairy Dragonfly (male), Sutton Hall Estate, 2 June 2025.**



**Hairy Dragonfly (female), edge of Knowlands Wood, 9 May 2020.**



**Southern Migrant Hawker (immature male), Knowlands Wood, 22 June 2020.** This is a newly-arrived species in the country that is gradually expanding its range in Sussex. This was the first sighting in the Parish with a female in the same location (seen by John Luck) next day. The young males are gingery in colour with eyes the same colour as marrow-fat peas! They are not dissimilar to Norfolk Hawkers (see p45).



**Southern Migrant Hawker (male), Knowlands Wood, 17 July 2023.** When mature, the males have a large amount of blue coloration including strikingly blue eyes (their alternative name is 'Blue-eyed Hawker') and inhabit wet ditches when breeding. This individual was in a woodland ride post-emergence.



**Southern Migrant Hawker (male), Overs Bridge, 10 August 2024.** The blue-green sides to the thorax are an important distinguishing feature from both Southern & Migrant Hawkers.



**Migrant Hawker (young male), Old Railway Track, 30 July 2018.** This species is quite similar to the Southern Hawker but has a much less striking pattern on the thorax and there is no coloured band at the tip of the abdomen. This individual is a young male. Adult males have predominantly blue eyes. Individuals are seen on the wing from mid-summer through to late autumn (including November).



**Migrant Hawker (female), Old Railway Track, 30 July 2018.** This species can occur in some numbers in woodland rides during late summer and into autumn. Like the Southern Hawker, it has a yellow 'golf-tee' shape at the top of the abdomen. Unlike that species, Migrant Hawkers tend to fly well off the ground, often up near the tree canopy.



**Migrant Hawker (male in flight), Knowlands Farm, 19 September 2020.** The brownish thorax with slightly less bold yellow markings are a relatively easy way to identify this species from Southern Hawker in flight. It is also slightly smaller.



**Migrant Hawker (female egg-laying into wood), Sutton Hall Estate, 31 August 2022.** It lays its eggs independently of the male (compared to most damselflies).



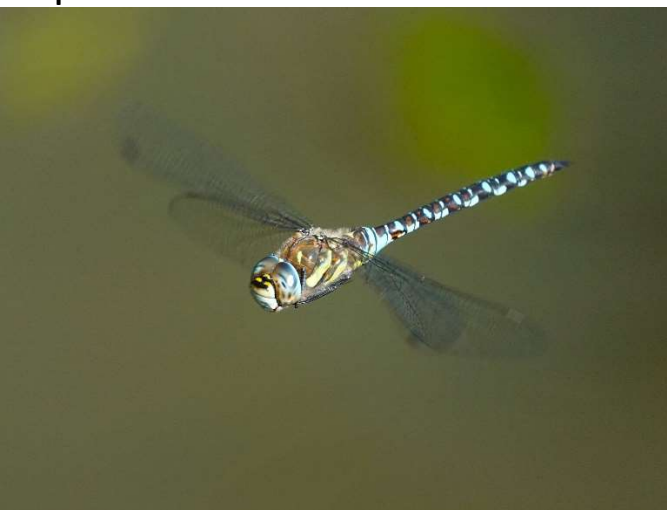
**Migrant Hawker (male in flight), River Ouse near Overs Bridge, 16 September 2022.**



**Migrant Hawker, Knowlands Farm, 3 September 2023.**



**Migrant Hawker (female), Barcombe, 3 August 2024.**



**Migrant Hawker (male in flight), Sutton Hall Estate, 25 August 2024.**



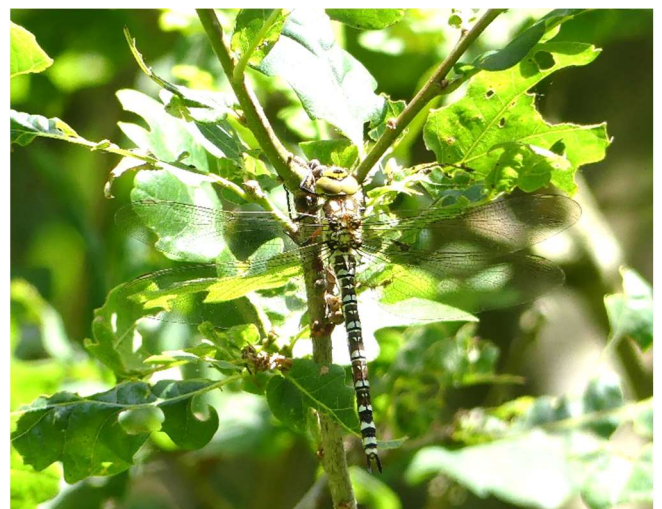
**Migrant Hawker (male), Knowlands Farm, 1 August 2025.** Interestingly, it has chosen to perch near sloes that match its eye colour.



**Southern Hawker (male), Knowlands Farm, 11 August 2018.** The male of this species is striking and has bold yellowish-green stripes on the thorax and a set of complete bluish bands near the abdomen's tip. It uses a wide range of habitats and will visit gardens. Seen from mid-summer into autumn (though one seen by John Hayhurst and NL at Knowlands on 1 December 2020 was the latest seen in the UK that year). These dragonflies are very inquisitive and will fly close by, usually just off the ground.



**Southern Hawker (female—egg laying at edge of garden pond), Barcombe, 7 October 2018.**



**Southern Hawker (female), Knowlands Wood, 30 June 2019.** The unbroken colour bands on the tip of the abdomen are reasonably clear in this photo.



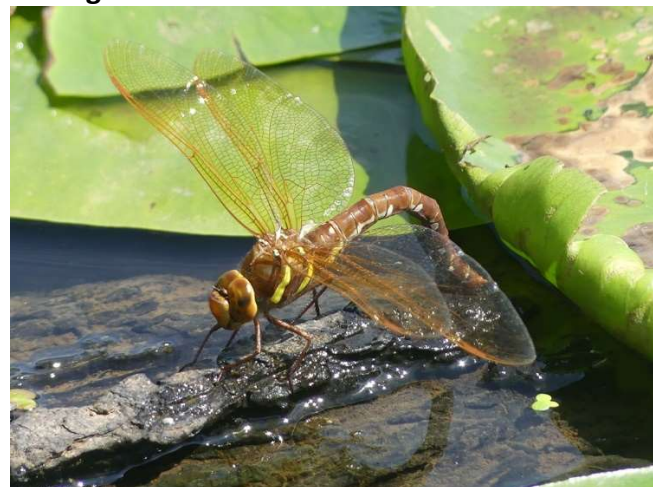
**Brown Hawker (male), near the Sutton Hall Weir, 10 August 2024.**



**Brown Hawker (female), Knowlands Farm, 23 August 2021.**



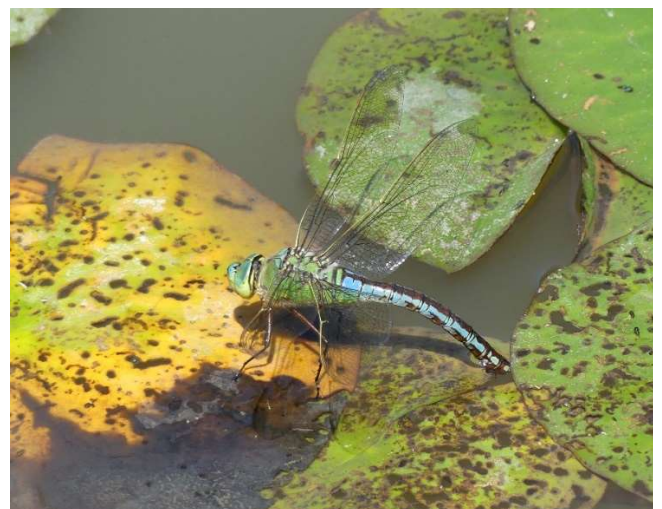
**Brown Hawker, Knowlands Farm, 11 July 2019.**  
This species of dragonfly is readily identified by the orange-brown wash to the wings.



**Brown Hawker (female egg-laying), River Ouse near Sutton Hall Weir, 18 July 2023.**



**Emperor Dragonfly (male), Knowlands Wood, 27 June 2023.** One of our most impressive dragonflies that dominates at ponds. It ranges widely and is large with apple green eyes (with some blue) and thorax. The male has a considerable amount of blue on the abdomen though colours can change with temperature.



**Emperor Dragonfly (female egg-laying), Knowlands Farm, 13 June 2021.** Some females are more green on the abdomen. Although she lays eggs independent of the male, he will remain nearby to chase off rivals.



**Emperor Dragonfly (female), Knowlands Wood, 30 June 2022.**



**Golden-ringed Dragonfly (male), Longford Stream, 14 July 2022.** More at home on Ashdown Forest, this impressive species is gradually becoming more regular in the Parish. It has a black abdomen with a set of golden rings (giving it the old country name of 'horse stinger' due to its vague resemblance to a giant wasp). The eyes are green. Males and females are fairly similar.



**Golden-ringed Dragonfly (male), Knowlands Farm, 26 July 2021.**



**Downy Emerald (male), Sutton Hall Estate, 2 June 2024.** This species is quite scarce in Sussex but likes ponds surrounded by trees. It has bright green eyes and, in flight, has a characteristically up-tilted abdomen.



**Downy Emerald (male), Barcombe village reservoir, 25 May 2024.** Unlike the Brilliant Emerald, the broadest part of the abdomen is close to the tip. It also lacks the extensive yellow on the 'face' of that species. When seen well, the male Downy Emerald has forked upper and lower appendages on the tip of the abdomen; in the Brilliant, the lower is entire.



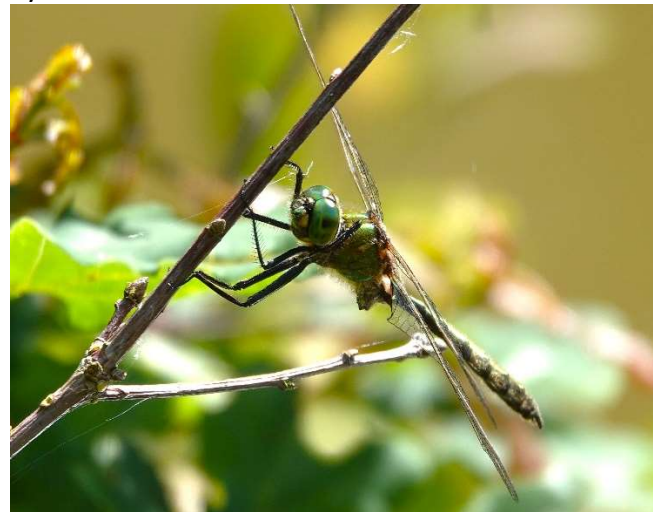
**Downy Emerald (male), Knowlands Farm pond, 13 May 2025.** The eyes are strikingly green and the abdomen has a bronze-coloured wash.



**Downy Emerald (young male), Knowlands Farm, 16 May 2013 (photo – NL).** This individual had crash-landed. Note its brownish eyes.



**Brilliant Emerald (male), Knowlands Wood, 18 June 2023.** The abdomen tends to be a brighter metallic green than in the Downy.



**Brilliant Emerald (male), Sutton Hall Estate, 18 June 2025.** The extensive yellow on the 'face' is just about visible.



**Brilliant Emerald (male), Longford Stream near Overs Bridge, 18 June 2025.** The broadest part of the abdomen is about 2/3 to the tail unlike in the similar Downy.



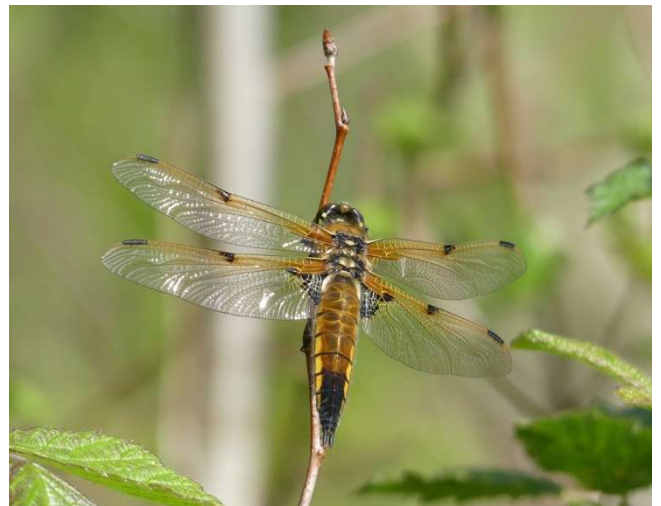
**Brilliant Emerald (male), Overs Bridge, 14 July 2024.** Even the Brilliant Emerald's abdomen can appear quite bronzy in some lights.



**Four-spotted Chaser (male), Barcombe Reservoir, 20 May 2019.** This quite stocky, brown dragonfly is characterised by the two black-spots on each wing. 'Four-spotted' seems a misnomer! It has black at the base of the hind wing.



**Four-spotted Chaser (male), Barcombe village reservoir, 12 June 2023.**



**Four-spotted Chaser (female), Old Railway Track, 7 May 2020.** Females are quite similar in appearance to the males.



**Scarce Chaser (male), Barcombe Mills, 20 June 2016.** Superficially similar to the male Black-tailed Skimmer which also has a powder blue abdomen with a dark tip, this species has bluish eyes and dark patches at the base of the wings.



**Scarce Chaser (young male), Barcombe Mills, 20 May 2016.** The young male is a smart insect with orange on the abdomen and along the wing veins. It looks fairly similar to the female. Barcombe Mills is a good place to see this species.



**Scarce Chaser (male), Barcombe Mills, 10 July 2023.** This species is not quite so scarce now as it was when given its name. It is spreading eastwards in Sussex.



**Scarce Chaser (young female), Barcombe Reservoir, 18 June 2018.** The young male also has an orange abdomen like the female but the arrangement of the tail appendages help sex this individual. In the female, the eyes become darker as it ages.



**Scarce Chaser (female), Longford Stream, 1 June 2020.** This mature female has dark eyes.



**Scarce Chaser (female), Spithurst Churchyard, 17 May 2025.** The dark wing tips are unique to this species in the UK but not obvious on all individuals.



**Scarce Chaser (male), Longford Stream, 1 June 2020.**



**Scarce Chaser (male), Barcombe Mills, 17 June 2025.** The powder blue 'pruinoscence' on the abdomen of this individual has been partly rubbed off at some point by a female while in a 'mating wheel'.



**Broad-bodied Chaser (male), Barcombe, 20 May 2023.** This powerful dragonfly is also one of our most well-known. The male has a powder blue abdomen edged with yellow spots. Each wing has an extensive dark patch at the base. It often visits garden ponds.



**Broad-bodied Chaser (immature male), Dallas Lane, 20 May 2022.** The blue coloration of the adult male is starting to develop on the abdomen.



**Broad-bodied Chaser (female), Barcombe, 5 June 2016.** The female has a brownish abdomen edged with yellow spots.



**Broad-bodied Chaser (female / immature male), Old Railway Track, 13 May 2022.**



**Black-tailed Skimmer (male), Knowlands Farm, 30 June 2019.** Quite a common species that likes to perch on bare soil. It has greenish eyes unlike those of the Scarce Chaser.



**Black-tailed Skimmer (young male), Barcombe Reservoir, 6 June 2016.** The yellow and black pattern on the abdomen of the young male is similar to that of the female; the eyes are pale.



**Black-tailed Skimmer (immature male with White-legged Damselfly prey), Knowlands Wood, 16 June 2024.** Odonata are not averse to eating close relatives!



**Black-tailed Skimmer (female), Knowlands Farm, 26 June 2019.** The abdomen pattern tends to suggest it has a rather triangular cross-section. It often perches with its wings held forward.



**Common Darter (male), Barcombe, 14 July 2016.** A familiar sight from mid-summer to late autumn. Males have an orange-red abdomen. It visits garden ponds.



**Common Darter (male), Knowlands Wood, 4 August 2016.**



**Common Darter (recently emerged female), Knowlands Farm, 15 July 2017.**



**Common Darter (male), Barcombe, 7 August 2018.** Unlike the Ruddy Darter, this species has yellow-striped legs and mature insects have large yellow panels on the sides of the thorax.



**Common Darter (female), Knowlands Wood, 5 July 2020.**



**Common Darter (mature female), Barcombe, 18 September 2020.**



**Common Darter (female), Knowlands Farm, 2 December 2021. A particularly late individual.**



**Common Darter, old railway track north of Barcombe, 23 July 2023. A rather cheerful looking individual! Unlike the Ruddy Darter, the black line around the 'face' is restricted to the top edge.**



**Ruddy Darter (male in tandem with female Common Darter), Sutton Hall Estate, 4 August 2024. An unusual case of mistaken identity.**



**Ruddy Darter (male), Longford Stream, 20 July 2019. Males of this smart-looking species are a brighter red than in the Common Darter. This species also has a more waisted appearance to the abdomen and all-black legs.**



**Ruddy Darter (male), Knowlands Farm, 21 July 2019.**



**Ruddy Darter (female), Knowlands Wood, 25 June 2017.** The black line extends down the 'face' sides.



**Ruddy Darter (immature male), Overs Bridge, 10 July 2023.**



**Ruddy Darter (immature male), Longford Stream near Overs Bridge, 14 July 2024.**



**Red-veined Darter (immature male), Sutton Hall Estate, 27 August 2023.** This cross-Channel migrant species is a scarce visitor to Sussex, occasionally breeding here. The mature males are a deeper red than those of the Common Darter and have reddish wing veins. Like that species, the Red-veined Darter has yellow stripes on its black legs. However, a characteristic of this species is the pale blue colour on the lower half of the eyes.

## A species to look out for



The **Green-eyed or Norfolk Hawker** is colonising Sussex though whether this is from the Continent or from its stronghold in East Anglia is uncertain. It is a very distinctive orange-brown dragonfly with green eyes and a yellow 'face'. Ditches close to the River Ouse would be a good place to find the first one in Barcombe Parish. Martin *et al* (2024) also list other species that might be possible candidates for arrival here in the future. The photo above was taken at West Rise Marsh in Eastbourne on 17 June 2025.

## Larvae

The identification of larvae (and exuviae) is far less straightforward than for adults. It is worth knowing some of the basic larval types but for those wishing to explore further, Chan (2012) is a very good reference (see p47). A few examples are shown.



Damselfly larva, Barcombe, 13 April 2024.



Chaser larva (probably Broad-bodied), Barcombe, 13 April 2024.



**Hawker larva (probably Southern), Barcombe, 24 April 2020.**

## **Acknowledgements**

- Thanks to John Luck for his help in getting one of us (SL) started with the identification of this insect group. Thanks also to Geoff Gowlett for helping SL particularly with some of the early identifications.
- Thanks to Bob Foreman of the Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre (SxBRC) for providing records for this and other taxonomic groups.
- Thanks to those who have submitted their records, directly or indirectly, to the SxBRC thereby helping us to build up a picture of this taxonomic group within the Parish.
- Some of the observations were made on the Sutton Hall Estate by SL and thanks are extended to John & Catherine Sclater and Ruth & James Wallis for permission and encouragement.
- Some of the observations have been made by SL during the monthly wetland bird surveys at Barcombe Reservoir which are facilitated by South East Water. Consequently, thanks go to the company's ecologists and particularly Patrick Austin and Sam Pottier.
- Adrian Parr kindly identified the damselfly shown on p22.
- Thanks to Barcombe Parish Council for hosting this document on their website.
- Isabelle Linington is thanked for proof-reading.

## References

The Sussex Dragonfly Group website: <https://sussexdragonflies.org.uk/>. This site has a recent sightings page and details of news and events.

The British Dragonfly Society website: <https://british-dragonflies.org.uk/>

The Sussex Biodiversity Records Centre website: <https://sxbrc.org.uk/home/>

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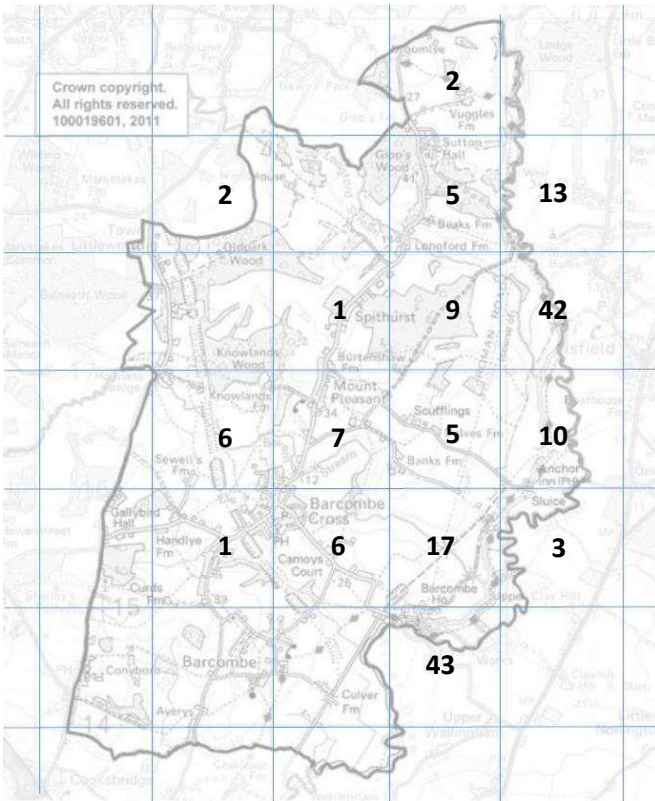
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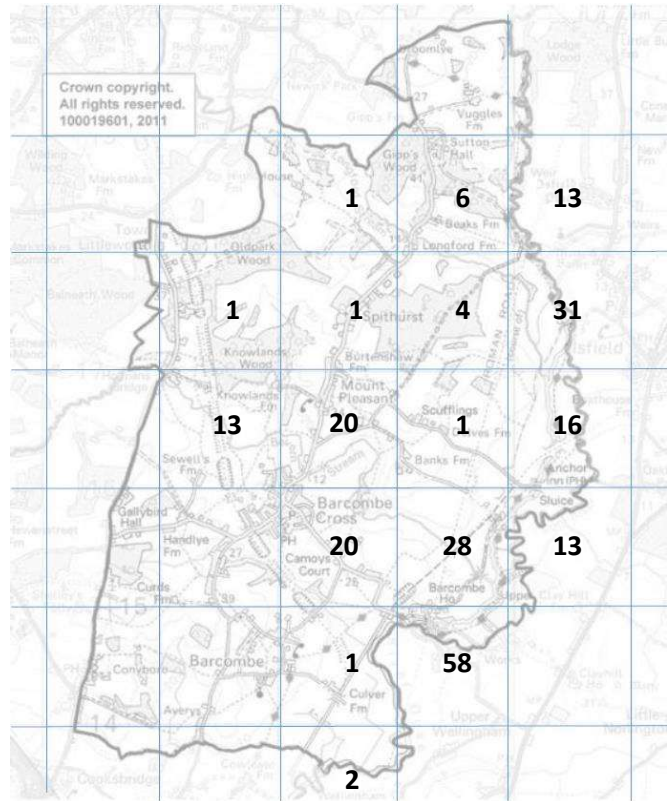
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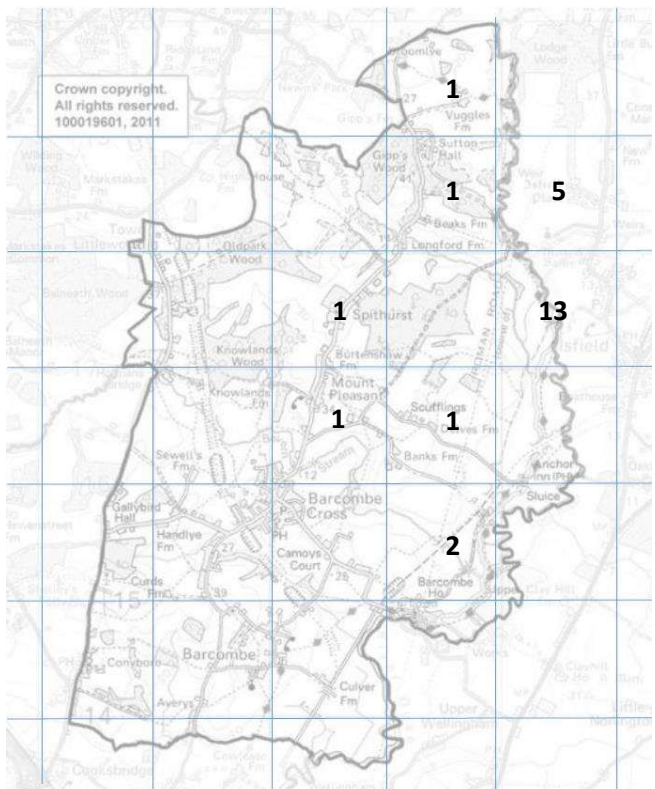
**Appendix 1. Distribution of certain species in Barcombe Parish showing the number of SxBRC 1-km square records. Note that recording effort will influence the data in these maps.**



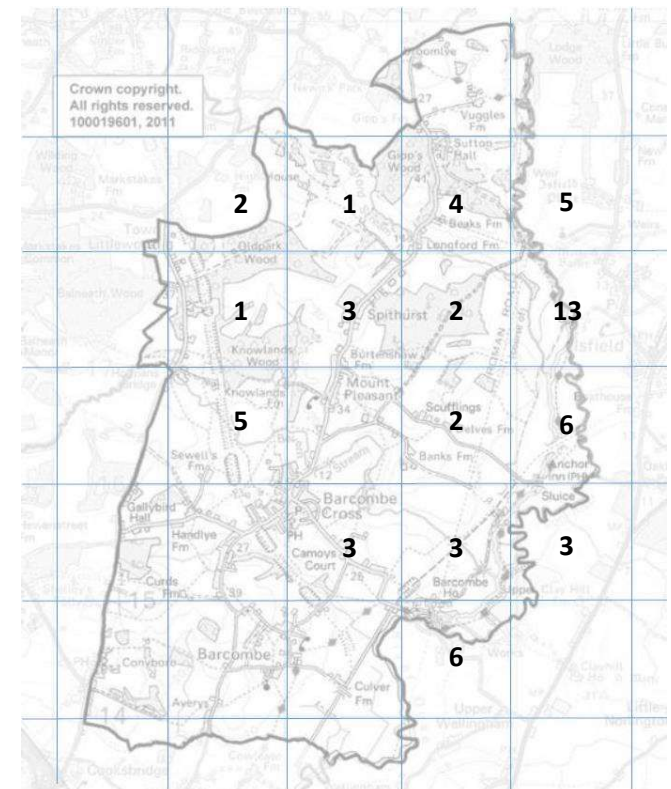
**Azure Damsel fly**



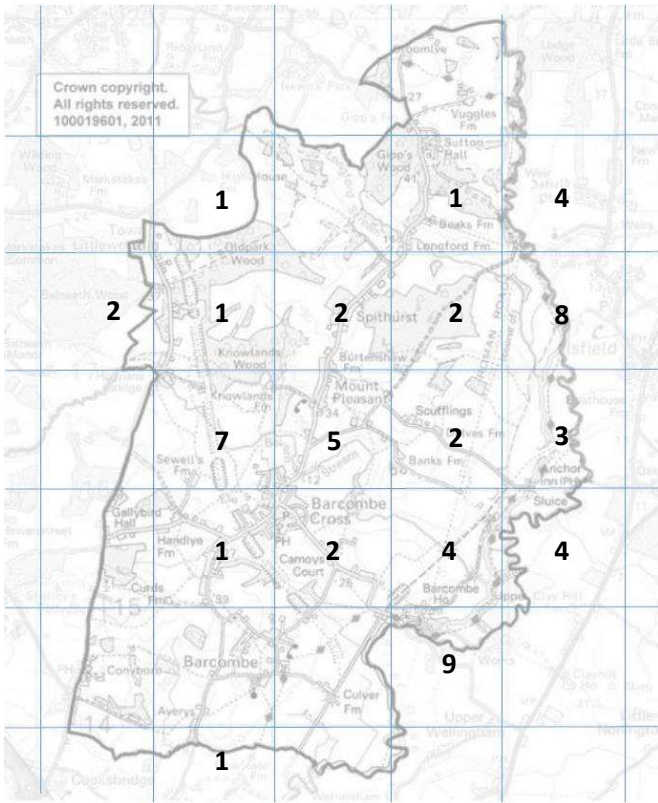
**Banded Demoiselle**



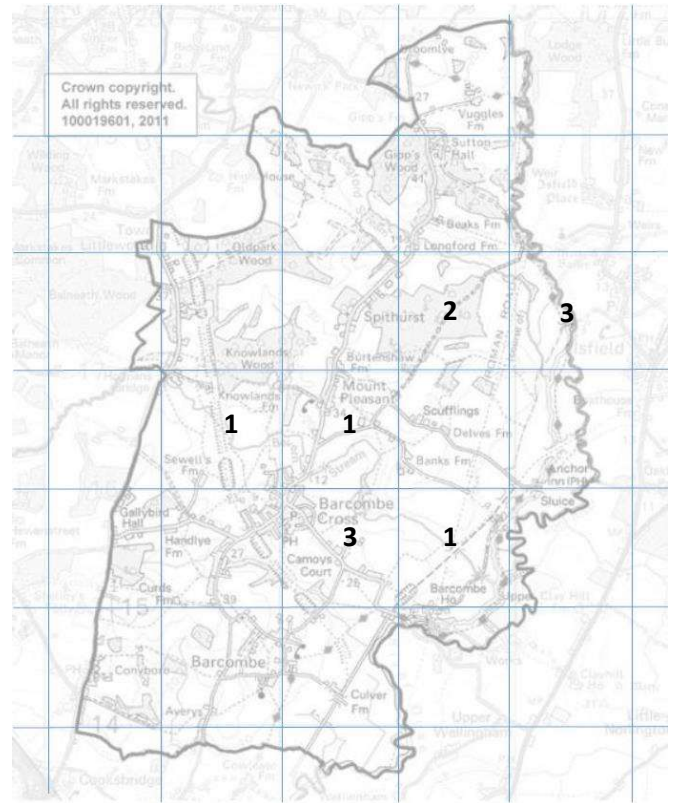
**Brilliant Emerald**



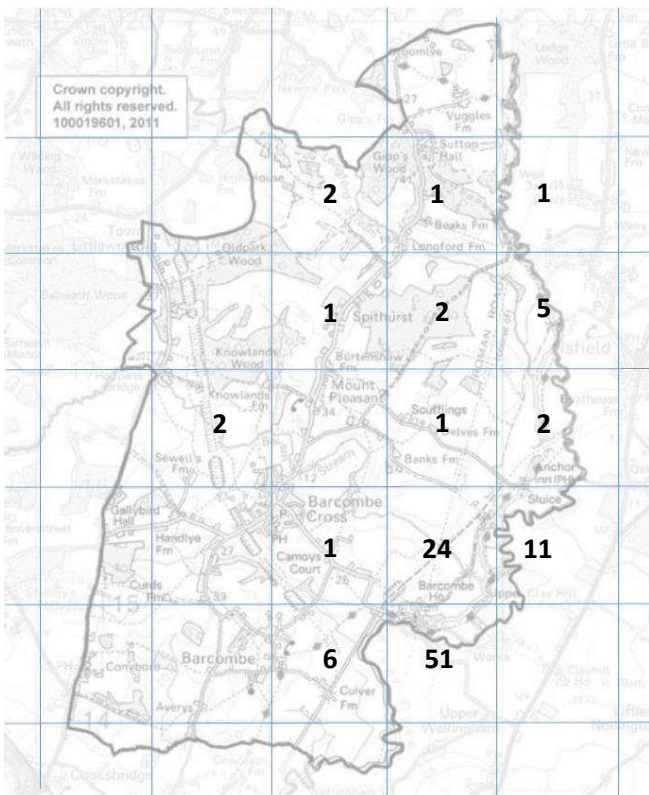
**Brown Hawker**



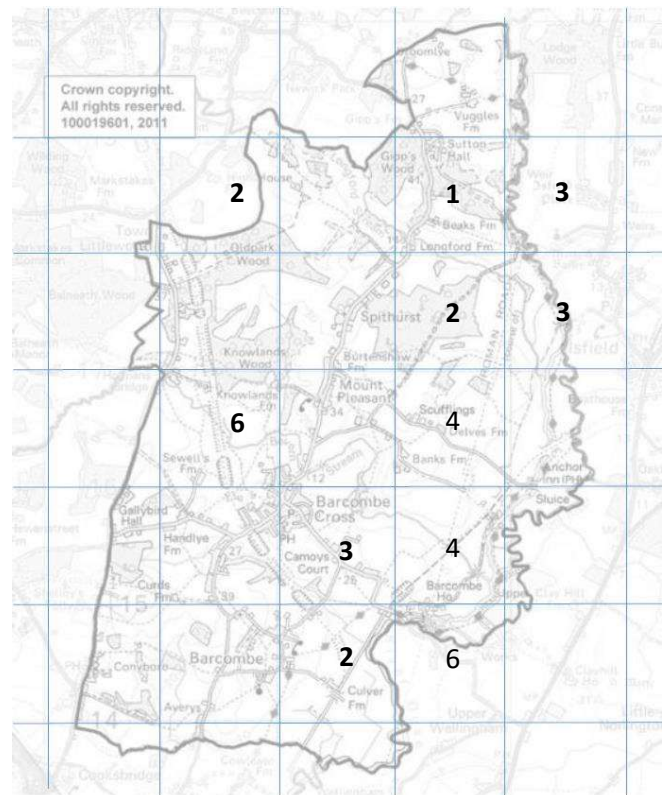
**Common Darter**



**Four-spotted Chaser**



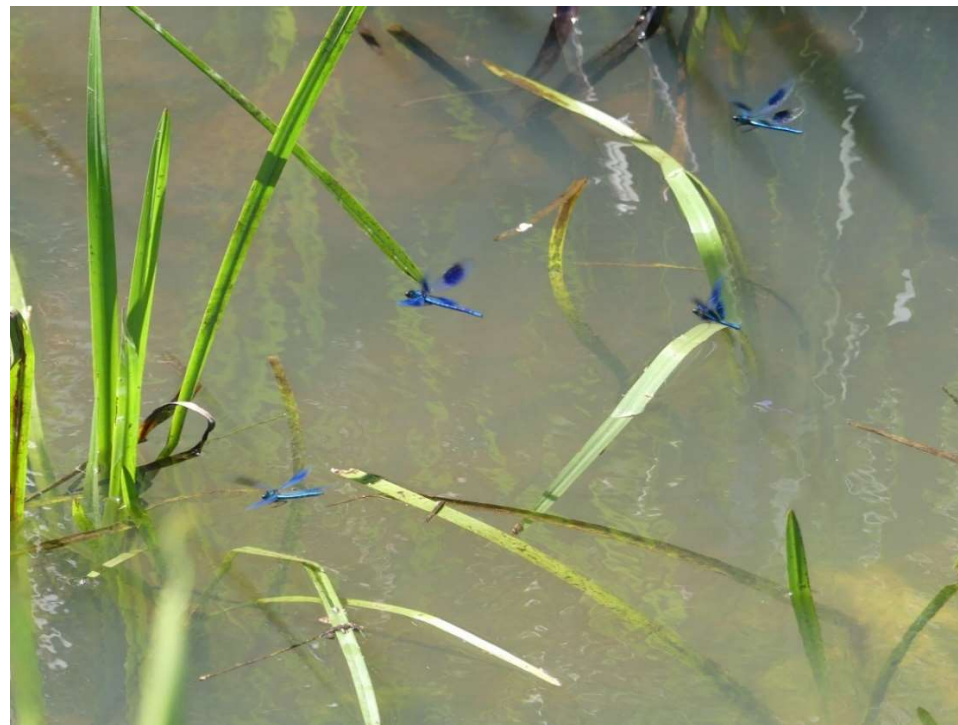
**Scarce Chaser**



**Willow Emerald Damselfly**

**Appendix 2a. Simple key to Damselflies (*males*) seen regularly in Sussex**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Mainly <i>metallic</i> blue or blue-green | Beautiful Demoiselle or Banded Demoiselle   |
| Perches with spread wings                 | Emerald Damselfly or Willow Emerald Damselfly   |
| Mainly red                                | Large Red Damselfly or Small Red Damselfly (heathland, scarce, <i>not Barcombe Parish</i> ) |
| Significant blue                          | Red eyes & blue abdomen tip Red-eyed Damselfly or Small Red-eyed Damselfly                  |
|   | Mainly blue eyes & blue abdomen tip Blue-tailed Damselfly                                   |
|   | Pale blue with obvious white legs White-legged Damselfly                                    |
|   | Mainly bright blue Azure Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Variable Damselfly               |



**Appendix 2b. Simple key to Dragonflies (*males*) seen regularly in Sussex**

|   |   |
|---|---|
| Red                                     | <b>Common Darter, Ruddy Darter or Red-veined Darter</b> (scarce migrant)  |
| Black and small                         | <b>Black Darter</b> (heathland, rare and decreasing, <i>not Barcombe Parish</i> )   |
| Brown                                   | Distinctly orange-brown wings <b>Brown Hawker</b>   |
|   | Two obvious black spots on each wing, robust <b>Four-spotted Chaser</b>   |
|   | Obviously green eyes <b>Norfolk Hawker</b> (rare but increasing, <i>not yet in Barcombe Parish</i> )                                    |
| Large, black & yellow rings, green eyes | <b>Golden-ringed Dragonfly</b>  |
| Green & black with a club-shaped tip    | <b>Common Clubtail</b> (River Arun & tributaries, <i>not Barcombe Parish</i> )  |
| Metallic green with bright green eyes   | <b>Downy Emerald or Brilliant Emerald</b>   |
| Noticeable blue on the abdomen at least | Large, blue abdomen and green thorax & eyes <b>Emperor Dragonfly</b>  |
|   | Robust, blue abdomen bordered by yellow spots <b>Broad-bodied Chaser</b>  |
|   | Not above but blue abdomen <b>Scarce Chaser, Black-tailed Skimmer or Keeled Skimmer</b> (mainly heathland, <i>not Barcombe Parish</i> ) |
|   | Abdomen spotted with blue (or blue & green) <b>Southern Hawker, Migrant Hawker, Southern Migrant Hawker or Hairy Dragonfly</b>          |

