

Fascinating Facts about Dragonflies and Damselflies

Adult Dragonflies are the fastest insects in the world, zooming around at up to 30 miles an hour!

Dragonflies and Damselflies help control populations of mosquitoes and other insects, and are usually found around lakes, ponds, streams and wetlands because their larvae, known as "nymphs" or "naiads", are aquatic.



Common Green Darner, official insect of Washington state

Dragonflies and Damselflies have been around for a long time. 200 million year old fossils of ancient dragonflies with 27" wingspans have been found! Today, the largest ones have wingspans of 5-6 inches.

Females lay their eggs on water grasses and other plants, sometimes diving down deep in the pond, breathing via a protective coating of air that gets trapped in the many fine hairs on their bodies.

After the egg hatches, the nymphs crawl around underwater, usually near the bottom of a pond, and prey on other aquatic insects, such as mosquito larvae. Larger nymphs may prey on fish fry!

A damselfly larva has 3 fin-like appendages, called lamellae, at the end of its abdomen, which are important for breathing.

Dragonfly and Damselfly larvae go through a series of molts as they grow and develop. Some species have a short larval stage (1-2 months from egg hatching to emergence from water), most spend at least a year and some much longer (5 years or more!) as aquatic larvae.

At the end of the final larval stage, the nymph climbs out into the air, perhaps onto a stone, or a plant stalk, or even some algae floating at the surface. Then it splits this last larval skin open along a suture on the back of the thorax and pulls itself out through this hole. Look in the water to see if you can find its empty skin, or exuviae!

After the Dragonfly or Damselfly is free from its last larval skin, it takes a couple of hours or so for its body and wings to expand and cure enough to withstand flight. During this time, it is very vulnerable to predators, weather, or accidental drowning.