

Who Eats Who:

Dragonflies, larvae and adults, are indispensable links in any wetland foodchain, and the adjoining forests, meadows and suburban landscapes. They provide essential population control of countless insect species (including mosquitos!), AND provide an important food source for many wildlife species, including birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish and mammals.

All dragonflies are predators – to our knowledge, none of them eat plants or scavenge. The larvae eat whatever small aquatic life they can find. This includes other aquatic insect larvae (midges, mosquitos, damselflies, beetles, etc.) as well as small fish, tadpoles, aquatic worms, and even other dragonfly larvae. As winged adults, they follow many of the insects they ate as larvae, chasing down their adult stages, such as midges, mosquitoes, mayflies, damselflies, and yes, other adult dragonflies. They may also eat bees, wasps, butterflies and grasshoppers, depending on the species of dragonfly. Some dragonfly families (skimmers, emeralds) specialize in “hawking” flying prey right out of the air, while others (clubtails, spiketails) are more adept at “gleaning” small insect prey from tree and shrub branches. Although different dragonfly species may specialize in particular prey, if it flies or looks easy to pluck off a branch, and it fits in their mouths, then it has a good chance of ending up in a dragonfly’s gut.

Who eats them? Just about everything. Birds, especially the more acrobatic fliers such as flycatchers, swallows, kingfishers, falcons and kites, eat countless dragonflies, while spiders, praying mantids, robber flies and even early-emerging bats will dine on dragonflies as well. Frogs, lizards, snakes and turtles will grab “tenerals” as they emerge at the water’s edge from their aquatic exoskeletons, not yet ready to fly, as will herons, sandpipers, raccoons, foxes and skunks patrolling a pond or river shoreline. And of course those aquatic nymphs make tasty snacks for just about any underwater creature big enough to snap one up: fish, salamanders, turtles, ducks, grebes, predaceous diving beetles, hellgrammites, other dragonfly larvae, etc.





A Robber fly dines upside down, as he drains the life from his prey, a male Eastern Pondhawk. Dragonflies aren't the only insect predators with aerial skills.

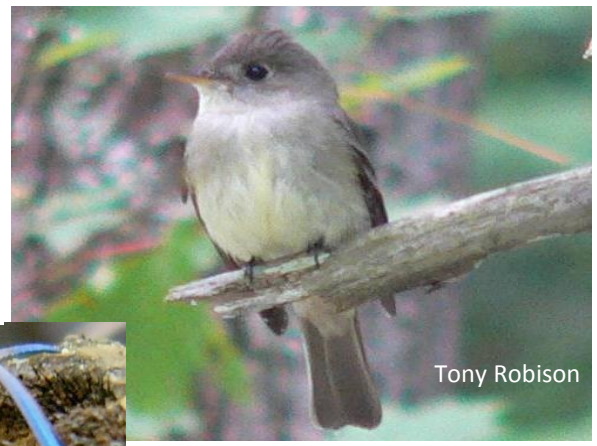
A water spider takes a well-earned rest while guarding her meal, a Canada Darner, caught seconds before, during a remarkable battle. Water spiders don't trap their prey with webs, but rather stalk, sprint, dive and pounce, making this catch that much more impressive.





Clockwise:

- *Pewee
- *Sandpiper
- *Skink
- *Tree Frog
- *Tree Frog



Tony Robison



Dragonflies have MANY predators



This Green Heron was lucky enough to catch a pair of mating Great Blue Skimmers while hunting at Huntley Meadows Park.

Two for the Price of One
by John Nolley II