

Mimicry and Camouflage – Wasps to Tree bark:

Mimicry in dragonflies, like migration, is little understood. It does appear that the Eastern Amberwing uses both color and behavior to **mimic wasps**. Their body coloring resembles that of a paper wasp or yellow-jacket, and when threatened, a perched amberwing will often move their wings and abdomens in a very undragonfly-like manner. It's believed that this behavior is meant to resemble a wasp, therefore scaring off potential predators like birds, frogs or even dragonfly geeks. I've seen this behavior several times, usually when amberwings are perched on wildflowers like goldenrod or eupatorium, and I suppose it does make them look a bit like a small wasp. Amberwings spend more time on meadow wildflowers than any other dragonfly – perhaps that's how they evolved to mimic the behavior of flower-visiting wasps.



This female Eastern Amberwing possesses a combo of markings and behavior that resemble a hornet or paper wasp – is it mimicry to scare off would be predators? Perhaps.

Many dragonflies will poke you with their **abdomen tips** if you catch and hold them. It's all bluff, they of course cannot sting, but perhaps it's enough to scare off birds, lizards, raccoons and other potential predators that think they're about to be stung by their dinner. Or they may simply hope that the ovipositors, cerci and epiprocts on their abdomen tips, harmless as they are, are pointed enough to bother the mouths, eyes or toes of their captures. Some dragonflies also have widened "clubs" towards the tip of their abdomen – it's thought by some that this may be an attempt to mimic scorpions, or even the heads of small tree snakes. Seems a bit far-fetched, but who knows?

Camo - Although many dragonflies disappear when they land on a thickly-leaved tree branch, and their long, thin bodies can certainly resemble a small twig, there are very few dragonflies that possess the specific coloring required for true camouflage. The three exceptions in our area are the two pygmy darners (Harlequin and Taper-tailed Darners) and the true master of dragonfly camouflage, the Gray Petaltail. All three species routinely perch vertically on tree trunks, and have developed a **mottled, gray coloring** that truly resembles sun-dappled tree bark.

A Gray Petaltail, North America's most primitive dragonfly, perches vertically in perfect camouflage on the trunk of a large tree, probably nearby the tiny forest seep where she'll lay her eggs.

