

Skimmer family – *Libellulidae*

First Glance:

*Medium to small size, usually brightly-colored body, often has wing patches.
Frequently returns to and defends the same sunny perch
along a pond or marsh edge.*

ID tips:

Flight – varied: gliders and saddlebags fly high over open areas for long periods without perching, while most other skimmers are frequent perchers, flying from stick to stem, hunting and defending their small territories as they go. Flight is often more fluttery and bouncy than other dragonflies, with frequent stops and turns.

Hunting – mostly aerial (lots of “hawking” from plant tips), some gleaning from vegetation.

Perching – frequent (except for gliders and saddlebags). Most skimmers perch horizontally on stick and grass tips. Common Whitetails, Blue Corporals and Eastern Pondhawks prefer to perch low on flat surfaces, often on sunny pathways.

Body Type – somewhat shorter, **broadier/thicker abdomens** than other dragonfly families, but still typical dragonfly shape of long, thin bodies. Eyes are large and touching.

Wings – skimmer wings often (but not always) have **large colorful patches** and the wing base is often broader than other dragonflies

Oviposting – skimmers lay eggs by repeatedly tapping the water surface with the tip of their abdomens while hovering low over still, shallow water (ponds, marshes, pools, puddles, etc.)

General Info:

Species in N. VA – 34, 5 of which have a single record in N. VA (26 on website)

Size Range – .9 - 2.2”

N. VA Flight Period – April-December (Autumn Meadowhawks - the only species in Dec.)

Habitat Types – varied, but almost always still, sunny, shallow water, especially marshy pond edges, flooded meadows and sunny, water-filled ditches.

Notes:

- Most dragonflies that people see are skimmers – colorful, common, frequent perchers that populate the small, sunny ponds of suburbia .
- Our smallest dragonflies are skimmers (Eastern Amberwing, Little Blue Dragonlet) - meadowhawks and several of the pennants are also tiny.
- Common Whitetails, Blue Dashers, Slaty Skimmers, Eastern Pondhawks, and Eastern Amberwings (all skimmers) are probably 5 of the 7 most adaptable and widespread dragonfly species in N. VA. Common Baskettails (Emerald family) and Common Green Darners (Darner family) are likely the other two.
- Most male skimmers are highly territorial and spend much of their adult lives displaying, chasing and battling with each other.



Tony Robison

Common Whitetails

Twelve-spotted Skimmer
(male)



Eastern Pondhawk
(female)



Skimmers:

Common Whitetail
(male)



Male cerci



Female cerci

The males and females of most skimmers look very different, often like different species.

The male **Eastern Pondhawk** (see five slides from here) looks nothing like the female above – he is in fact bright blue, while she is black and green.

To make it more confusing, the juvenile male shares the female's markings. To tell juv males from females, look closely at wing markings, or the tiny appendages (cerci) at the abdomen tip. The male cerci are longer, and closer together – female's are shorter and more separated.

Needham's Skimmer



Black Saddlebags

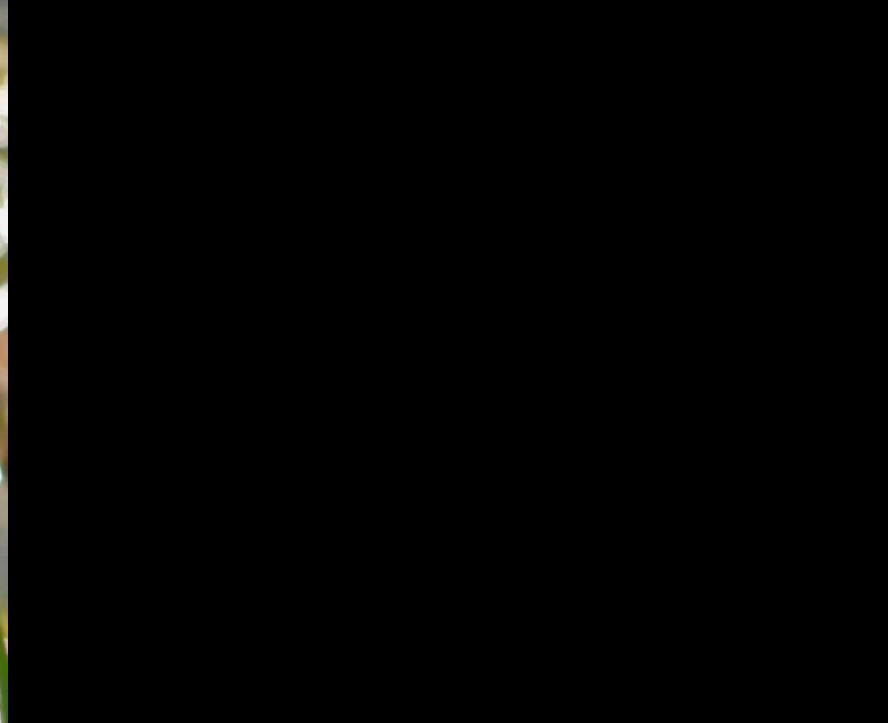


Blue Dasher
(in the obelisk position)





Widow Skimmer (male)



Widow Skimmer (female)



Autumn
Meadowhawk
(juvenile)



Autumn
Meadowhawks
(mating pair in the
wheel position)

Painted Skimmer



Slaty Skimmer



Blue Dasher



There are *many* blue skimmers. These four are males – the females look quite different.

Check out the species ID pages to learn more.

Eastern Pondhawk



Great Blue Skimmer



Adam Bucher

Halloween Pennant





Eastern Amberwing
(male)

Different skimmer species
share the same perch –
unusual, but not unheard of.

Because they are in fact different
species they often tolerate
each other's close presence.
Since they're looking for *different*
females, they are not in competition.



Slaty Skimmer

Spangled Skimmer

Needham's Skimmer

Males of the *same* species will however
often engage in fierce aerial battles as they
vie for the perfect perch from which to
scout for mates and defend their territory.

Gary Myers