

Ashy Clubtail



Ashy Clubtail (*Gomphus lividus*) – 2.0", 48-56 mm

Habitat Conservation Alert!

Flight Record:

(4/16-5/31)
Seen most
late April-
early May.

*Uncommon
to Fairly
Common*

Habitat:

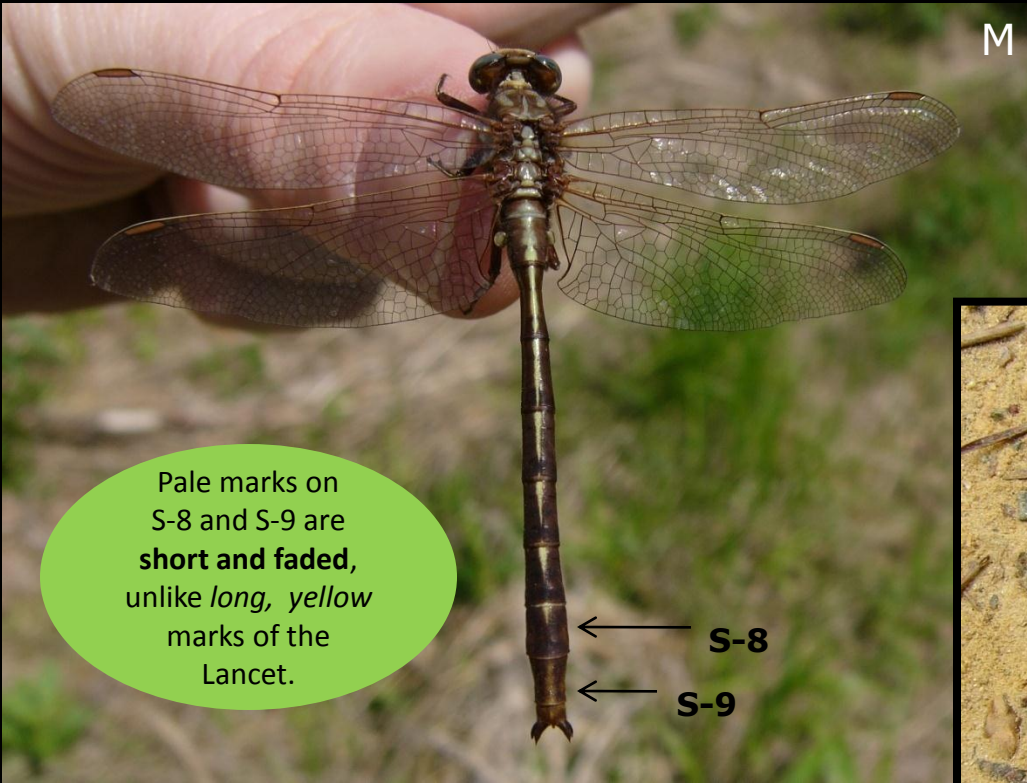
Sunny,
stable forest
streams

First Glance:

Medium,
thin, brown,
with
pale/faded
markings.
Low, weak,
flier. Often
flies in loops
on land.
Perches
frequently
and low,
often on the
ground.

Compare:

Lancet
Clubtail



Notes from the field – Ashy Clubtail:

Not as showy as a Redbud in bloom, Ashies are still a great harbinger of spring, and how I mark the start of early-season dragonflies. Their markings may be a bit subdued, but I always feel a thrill when April arrives and I find my first Ashy Clubtail.

Searching for dragonflies in spring is a wholly different endeavor than finding them in July and August. Most summer dragonflies spend their time at sunny ponds or open fields, and engage in showy displays and aerial battles – they are, in a word, *visible*. The majority belong to the showy and successful skimmer family, along with a few darners and emeralds. The spring dragonfly community is more diverse, and has a very different M.O. They are for the most part, habitat specialists, with low population numbers, secretive habits, and denizens of woodland streams, not sunny ponds. Spiketails, Petaltails, Clubtails, Darners and Emeralds are all out and about in spring. To find these species in April and May, one must spend many hours searching forest edges, woodland clearings, and the banks of springs, streams and creeks.

To find Ashies, look for clean, stable, rocky forest streams and then search out the closest sunny clearing, stream-side meadow or sunlit path. Like Common Whitetails and Blue Corporals, Ashy



Clubtails prefer to perch flat on bare-soil, fallen logs, rocks or leaf litter.

Relatively wide-spread and successful, Ashy Clubtails can still be tricky to find in Northern VA. A few great sites to observe them (and other spring species), are Prince William Forest Park, Riverbend Park, Sully Woodlands and Meadowood. Banshee Reeks in Leesburg may also be a good site to explore for Ashies, and I've seen them in the Bull Run and Pope's Head watersheds as well.

Notes from the field – Ashy Clubtail vs Lancet Clubtail:

When I think of Ashies, I think of three things: April, ground-perching, and *many* hours trying to tell them apart from the maddeningly similar Lancet Clubtail. Separating these two clubtails can be a challenge, but it is possible. It involves a combination of physical characteristics, habitat preference, and the calendar.

- 1) Ashies are tan with pale markings, while Lancets are dark brown with brighter, yellower marks. In general, Ashies are **pale and faded**, while Lancets are bright, with more contrast.
- 2) Ashies are slightly larger and more robust. Lancets are small, **short-winged** dragonflies.

An Ashy Clubtail, perched in typical Ashy habitat – a rocky stream with good current.



- 3) Look at the 8th and 9th segments of the abdomen tip. Ashies have far less yellow on top than Lancets, and **no yellow flange**. That bright yellow flange, or lack there of, is probably the best field mark.

- 4) Ashies like flowing forest streams, usually with rocks, while Lancets can be seen in small, stream-fed **ponds** and open, slow, sunny creeks and ditches.

- 5) Lastly, use the **calendar**:
April = Ashy Clubtail
June or July = Lancet Clubtail
May = could be either one
(these dates work in **N. VA.**)