

# Autumn Meadowhawk



# Autumn Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum vicinum*) – 1.3", 26-35 mm

## Flight Record:

(6/13-12/10)

Seen most  
Sept-Oct.

*Fairly  
Common*

## Habitat:

Sunny,  
shallow,  
marshy  
water,  
including  
small pools.

## First Glance:

Small, thin,  
orange to  
red. Tiny  
amber  
smudge at  
base of each  
wing. Flies  
low, perches  
often on flat  
surfaces &  
low plants.

## Compare:

other  
Meadow-  
hawks





## Notes from the field – Autumn Meadowhawk:



Juvenile meadowhawks start as pale, golden yellow (lower photos). After a few days they darken to tan and red (top photo). Females retain this two-toned coloring through adulthood, while young males (like the three pictured here) will soon become all dark. Telling juveniles of different *Sympetrum*s apart by their markings can be very difficult – best to add a combination of dates, habitat and probability. Autumn Meadowhawks are *by far* the most common and widespread, and probably what you'll see most of the time, at least in N. Virginia.

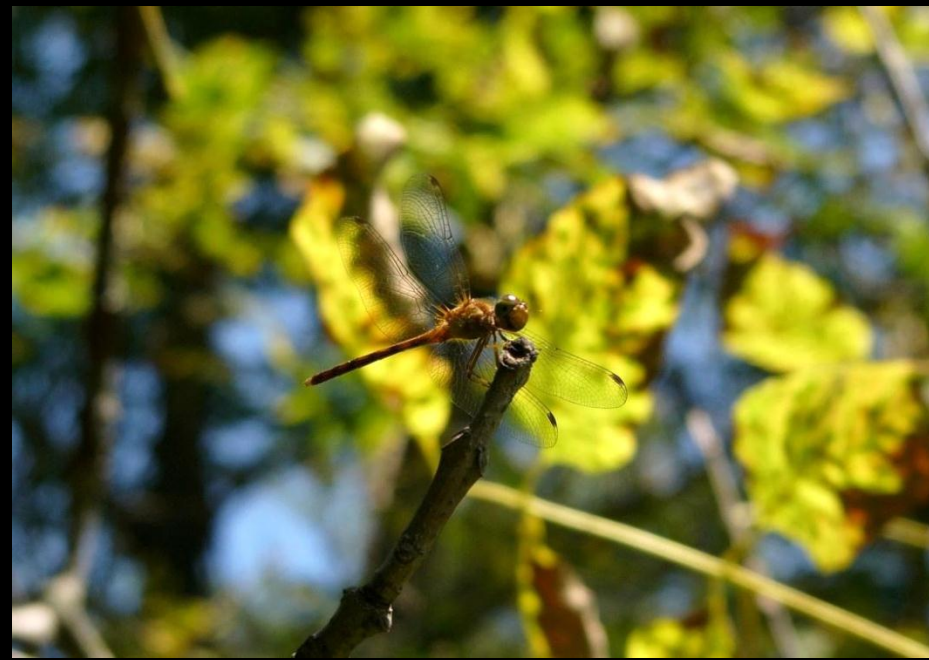


**Notes from the field – Autumn Meadowhawk:**  
(previously *Yellow-legged Meadowhawk*)

Our most common meadowhawk, Autumnns can actually be abundant at times. Hundreds of golden tenerals rise out of shallow wetlands in early summer, and bright red adults fill the same wetlands in fall. Large-scale emergences start at marshy pools in June, at which point juveniles take to the woods and grow up in sunny woodland clearings. They don't seem to reappear at ponds and marshes until fall, often staying quite late into the season, hence their name.

This *Sympetrum* is more of a habitat generalist than its cousins: Ruby, Blue-faced and Band-winged Meadowhawks. Those three have very specific habitat needs, but Autumnns are happy with most shallow, marshy wetlands. They can be found in flooded meadows, shallow vegetated ponds, sunny swamps and marshy bay edges.

Autumnns also have the longest flight season of any meadowhawk (6 months), and the latest known date of any dragonfly in N. Va. (Dec. 10). I'll never forget birding with my Dad along Quantico Creek one December, as part of Audubon's winter waterfowl count, and noticing a small flash of red near the ground.



I was shocked to see a tiny male Autumn Meadowhawk perched, and perky, among the grass. On the water in front of us were *winter* ducks (scaup, widgeon, canvasback) and at my feet was an alert little dragonfly! It made the trip for me, and reminded me what a bright, cheerful, spunky presence this species brings to fall, or even winter, when most things in nature are winding down or moving on.

This late season presence provides an important strand in our wetland food web. Not only are all those aquatic larvae providing protein packets for fish, ducks and wading birds, but migrating songbirds passing through fall wetlands get dozens of bright red energy snacks.