

Fawn Darner



Fawn Darner (*Boyeria vinosa*) – 2.6", 60-71 mm

Flight Record:

(7/2-10/12)

Peaks

August-Sept

Fairly Common

Habitat:

Streams and rivers

First Glance:

Medium size, brown. Smaller & thinner than most darners. Slow, fluttery late afternoon/evening flight, low over water, as it explores every rock and root.

Compare:

Umber and Stygian Shadow-dragons. The very similar Ocellated Darner has not yet been found in N. Va.



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Huge eyes
for patrolling
shaded forest
streams,
often at dusk

**Brown-
tinted
wings**



Dark spot
at base of
each wing &
yellow spots
on thorax



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Notes from the field – Fawn Darner:

Unlike most other darners, and in fact most dragonflies, Fawns shun open, sunny areas. They spend the day hiding in dense, shady underbrush, hanging from the branches of shrubs and young trees. Around 4PM they start venturing out to patrol their shady, forest streams, peaking from about 6PM-8PM.


Their flights during these patrols have a specific pattern, and are fun to watch. Fawns fly very low over the water, with a relatively slow, fluttery wing-beat, and usually focus on the edges and banks of the stream. What makes it interesting is that they carefully, almost obsessively, explore every nook and cranny of those stream banks, paying special attention to exposed root wads, projecting rocks and in-stream debris. Looking for spiders, damselflies and other small prey perched along stream banks, and possibly for mates as well, they repeatedly patrol up and down their stream, often into the early night.

I've also been lucky enough to watch female Fawns inserting eggs into underwater woody debris with their thin, blade-like ovipositors. They perch on rocks or branches and probe in the shallows with their abdomen tip.



The above photo is one of my favorite examples of how strange and twisted the lives of insects can be, and a funny instance of dumb luck on my part. I took this photo to get a close-up of the Fawn's spots. I later realized I'd captured, quite by accident, three tiny parasitic wasps called Fairyflies (Mymaridae).

Fairyflies (the smallest known insect), *dive underwater*, swimming with their legs and paddle-like wings, to find plants and debris where dragonflies have inserted their eggs. They then insert their eggs directly into the dragonfly eggs, and climb out of the water - adult wasps can stay underwater for 15 days as they search for eggs to parasitize! The tiny wasp larvae feed on, and pupate inside, the dragonfly egg, emerging underwater as winged adults from the now defunct dragonfly egg. The above wasps must be waiting for the female Fawn Darner to lay her eggs.



This medium-sized, partly shady stream with plenty of rocks, root wads and woody debris, is full of Fawn Darners on August and September evenings.