

# Harlequin Darner (male & female)





**Harlequin Darner (*Gomphaeschna furcillata*) – 2.2", 53-60 mm**

**Habitat Conservation Alert!**

**Flight Record:**

(4/23-5/11)  
Peaks in  
early May

*Rare*

**Habitat:**

Coastal  
plain  
swamps,  
swampy  
pools and  
nearby  
sunny wood  
edges.

**First Glance:**

Medium  
(small for a  
darner),  
dark grayish  
with lighter  
markings.  
Will fly both  
high and  
low,  
perches  
often on  
tree trunks

**Compare:**  
Taped-tailed  
Darner,  
Petailtail



M

Mature  
males have  
**green-  
yellow  
eyes**  
and  
**triangular  
abdominal  
markings of  
yellowish-  
green to  
orange**



F



Juv M

Juvenile  
males  
have gray  
eyes



F

Females have paler  
markings, gray eyes  
& thicker abdomens w/  
a **small club**



### Notes from the field – Harlequin Darner:

This seldom seen swamp denizen is unusual in several ways. Harlequins, along with Taper-tailed Darners, are alone in the Pygmy Darner genus. So named because of their size, both species are quite small for darners, about the size of a Great Blue Skimmer. In Northern VA, Harlequins appear to be confined to our coastal plain parks, and I've only ever seen them in woods off Gunston Hall Rd. Perhaps they also have small populations in other Potomac and Occoquan River swamplands. I'd place bets on sites near Bull Run, Banshee Reeks and the Occoquan River Trail. Look for this species in late April and early May, along sunny wood edges and meadows near swampy pools. Their dark coloring with bright geometric patterns, and habit of perching vertically on sun-touched tree trunks, adds to their list of unusual characteristics. Like Gray Petaltails, their coloring blends well with tree bark – you'll need to look closely to see past their camouflage.

Another odd trait – it's the female that possesses a small club. In most dragonfly species that have clubs, it's the male that has them and females that don't. Another body feature to keep an eye on is the color green. Harlequins, at least adult males, have it on their eyes and abdomens, while Taper-taileds don't. The tricky part is ID'ing females and immature males. Look for the width of the abdomen in males (Taper-tails are very noticeably thinner), and nodus wing spots on females (Taper-tailed females *usually* have a larger spot.) If all else fails, use the bridge cross vein (good luck!), and/or the calendar (see Taper-tailed pg for wing venation and calendar tips).

Although their flight season is brief (probably a week or two longer than my dates), they do emerge in noticeable numbers. After two years of fruitless searching, I finally found a thriving population of



Harlequins one bright, April morning. Resting on a log along a sunny wood-edge, my friend and I noticed several grayish dragonflies landing on nearby tree trunks. Excited, we ran over, and found a dozen+ Harlequins! We spent the day watching and photographing these enigmatic darners as they flew, perched, chased & mated along swampy wood edges.