

Prince Baskettail



Prince Baskettail (*Epitheca princeps*) – 2.9", 58-78 mm

Flight Record:
(5/30-9/01)

Peaks
July thru
mid-August

Common

Habitat:
Ponds,
lakes, bays
and slow,
sunny rivers

First Glance:
Large, thin,
dark. Wing
markings
rarely
visible in
flight.
Glowing
green eyes.
Long, fast,
repeated
patrols low
over water.
Also hunts
high over
fields and
meadows.

Compare:
None



Our only
large,
darnner-sized
dragonfly
with
patterned
wings



Flies
almost
constantly,
rarely
perches



Huge,
brilliant
blue-green
eyes,
visible
even in
flight

Notes from the field – Prince Baskettail:

This sleek, elegant dragonfly could in fact be called King Baskettail, as it is the largest member of the Emerald family. There are seven families of dragonflies in the US –Emeralds are known for their glowing green eyes (hence the family name), and their endless, acrobatic flight. Like other members of this family, Prince Baskettails rarely land and can spend many hours in ceaseless flight. Look for this powerful flier making long, repeated, low patrols over open water habitats such as lakes, ponds, canals, and sluggish river sections. This is territorial behavior, and usually performed by males, or occasionally by a female looking for a spot to lay eggs. Males maintain relatively large, linear territories, so you don't usually see more than one or two on the water at once.

You can also see Princes by walking onto a soccer field, or into a forest clearing, and looking straight up! This is **feeding behavior** (lots of tasty insects up there), and you may see several feeding together. Try doing this on a hot, sunny afternoon or early evening in July or August. From underneath you can actually see those wing markings, which are difficult to spot during their low patrols over water. This is our *only* darner-sized dragonfly with pattered wings. Coupled with those glowing, blue-green



eyes, long low patrols, and sky-high flights over summer fields, Princes are relatively easy to ID.

The only time I've seen a naturally perched Prince, is captured in the title page photo (the above photo was posed). It was a cloudy day, and I was wandering through a meadow along the Potomac River. Perched at chest height along the meadow-edge was a spectacularly posed Prince Baskettail. Without the sun's heat, flying was difficult, so he hung there, waiting for sunlight, and allowed me to take photos from just inches away. **Cloudy days** are often the best time to find and photograph perched dragonflies.