

## Spine-crowned Clubtail





# Spine-crowned Clubtail (*Gomphus abbreviatus*) – 1.5", 34-37 mm

Habitat Conservation Alert!

## Flight

### Record:

(5/13-5/31)

Peaks

late May.

Rare

### Habitat:

Sunny,  
clean, wide,  
swift, rocky  
streams w/  
boulders,  
and some  
areas with  
submergant  
vegetation.

### First

#### Glance:

Small,  
stocky, &  
bright.

Black and  
yellow.

Noticeably  
large club.

Perches on  
sunny rocks  
in middle of  
the stream.

### Compare:

Least  
Clubtail



Wide club,  
gray-blue eyes  
& yellow face



Toothed  
cerci

Broad yellow stripes  
on side of thorax



Club has 2 large  
yellow side spots



Andy Rabin



### Notes from the field – Spine-crowned Clubtail:

This small, brightly-marked sprite of clean, rocky streams is relatively rare in our area. However, its habit of picking sunny rocks in mid-stream and raising that yellow-spotted Club makes finding them a little easier. They do need relatively clean and stable streams, with lots of exposed rocks and riffles. Try exploring Bull Run or Goose Creek in mid to late May, and look for wide, sunny sections of shallow stream.

My first Spine-crowned experience included equal parts excitement, frustration, and humor. I was determined to find this species, and knew I had a small window in May to do it. After several fruitless weekends, I literally stumbled upon the teneral female to your right, minutes after she'd emerged from her larval exo-skeleton. This was great! Female clubtails are notoriously hard to find. To get a photo of her adult coloring, I had to wait for her to dry.

So, I placed my net over her and went for a walk as I waited. Then a *male* Spine-crowned appeared on a rock mid-stream, and I rushed back to get my net! Hmmm, what to do? My hat! I put my hat over the teneral female, picked up my net, and ran back to the male. He had other plans, and disappeared... as did the teneral female, who had slipped out of my hat!



The exoskeleton, or cast skin, of the aquatic larvae, left behind by the newly emerged adult.



Two tiny spines between the female's eyes give this species its name. In this photo of a teneral (recently emerged adult), the spines are tan. In a short time her colors darken, and the spines turn black.



### Notes from the field – Spine-crowned Clubtail:

I yelled, threw a rock or two, then laughed. A dragonfly in the hand is worth..... ☺ Luckily, perseverance and help from a friend combined the next weekend to capture several great photos of this bright little dragonfly.

I went back to another stretch of the same stream, with a fellow dragonfly chaser, Andy Rabin. The dragonfly gods smiled once again – there, mid-stream, was another Spine-crowned! Partly from the excitement of documenting a species that hadn't been recorded in Northern VA for 60 years, and partly to avoid me yelling and throwing rocks again, Andy bravely waded into Goose Creek himself. Using his dragonfly-whispering skills, he crept within inches of the yellow and black male, and brought back the excellent photos to your right. He also expertly caught the spunky little male, and brought him back to shore for a photo-shoot. After some great close-ups (see ID page), he was released, and flew up into the trees.

This was the first one documented in our area **since the 1940s!** Recently they've been found in Bull Run, Goose Creek and Riverbend Park. The chance to make re-discoveries like this is just one of the reasons why chasing dragonflies (or "dragon-flying" as some folks call it) can be such a fun and rewarding hobby.

