

Swamp Darner





# Swamp Darner (*Epiaeschna heros*) – 3.4", 82-91 mm

## Flight Record:

(5/14-9/03)

Peaks late May - mid July.

*Fairly Common*

## Habitat:

Still, shallow, forested

waters such as swamps and woodland pools

## First Glance:

Very large, heavy and dark.

Flies slow and powerful, low or high, often over clearings, wood edges and open fields.

## Compare:

Cyrano Darner



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Markings and blue eyes are shared by both sexes



Matthew Muir



Thin, lime-green, circular rings on the abdomen, instead of bluish, angular blotches of a Cyrano Darner



## Notes from the field – Swamp Darner:

Only Comet Darners and Dragonhunters get as large, and neither seem quite as heavy or huge-eyed. I often tell people on dragonfly walks that if they see a rhino with wings, it's a swamp darner. Slight exaggeration, perhaps, but they are pretty impressive. June is their month and the best time to see them, as they cruise, slow and purposefully, over shallow, swampy pools, or hunt high over nearby meadows. Those green rings are hard to see unless you're very close – Swamps usually appear dark and unmarked as they glide by, on wings that don't seem to move.

Cyrano Darners are similar, but less common than Swamps, and prefer streams. Cyranos rarely appear over open fields, fly lower and faster than Swamps, and have a shorter flight season.

I have many great memories from the field of this giant dragonfly, but the one that jumps to mind involves a hollow old sycamore, a sunlit boardwalk and a cloud of winged termites. I had just stepped on to the wetland boardwalk at Huntley Meadows Park, leaving the shaded forest behind, about to enter the open marsh. On the edge of forest and water, I stepped into a group of half a dozen huge Swamp Darners. They were lazily circling, over the boardwalk and around a nearby hollowed-out Sycamore, gliding in and out of bright light and afternoon shadow. Tiny termites were emerging in clouds from the depths of the sycamore, and the darners were casually feasting, plucking termites from the air as they floated around me in figure eights. After ten minutes, all termites eaten or flown away, the giant darners faded back into the flooded forest.



A cast skin of the aquatic nymph, left by the emerging adult.



Females lay eggs directly into wet wood and other debris with their blade-like ovipositors.