

Unicorn Clubtail



Unicorn Clubtail (*Arigomphus villosipes*) – 2.2", 50-58 mm

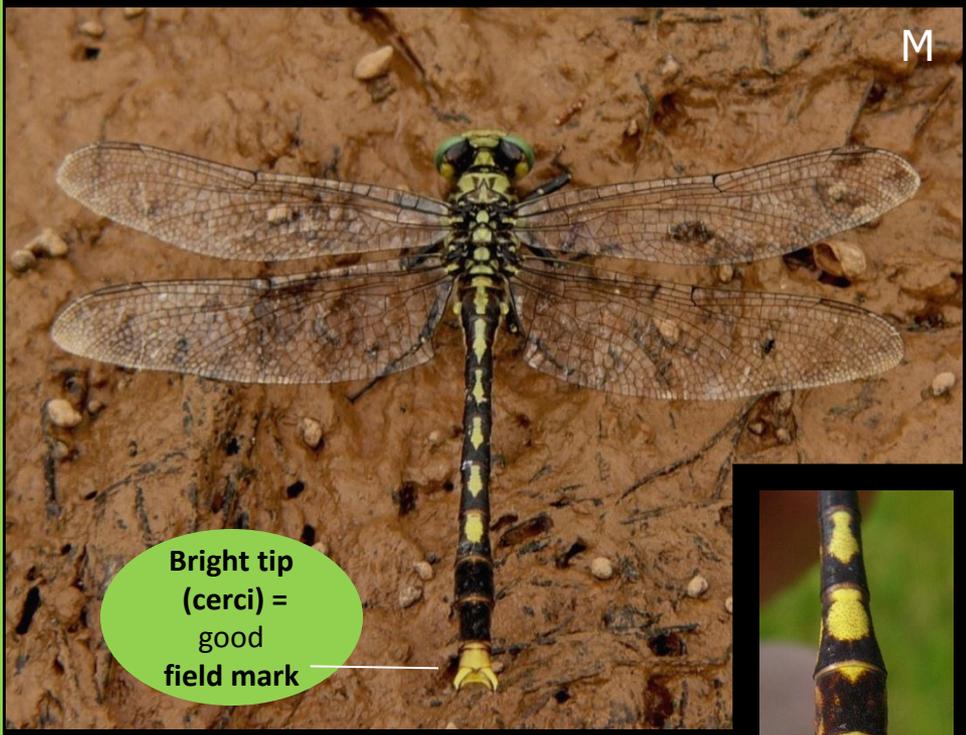
Flight Record:
(5/26-7/11)
Peaks
in June.

*Fairly
Common*

Habitat:
Shallow,
sunny ponds,
pools &
marshes w/
open banks

First Glance:
Medium, black
and
yellow/green.
Bright tip &
rusty-edged
club.
Flies short,
aggressive
patrols along
banks.
Perches often
on open
sandy/muddy
banks or low
stems/sticks.

Compare:
Common
Sanddragon



Bright tip
(cerci) =
good
field mark



Notes from the field – Unicorn Clubtail:

This is the only clubtail in Northern VA that prefers ponds and marshes, over streams and rivers. Lancet Clubtails may also visit stream-fed ponds, but Unicorns are our only clubtail that can be found in completely still, stagnant water. Look for them flying low, just above the water's surface, on short patrols that hug the shoreline. They like to perch flat on bare, unvegetated banks, so look for shallow ponds and large pools with areas of visible, bare soil along the shore. Typical storm-water detention ponds with thick stands of cattails crowding the edges are unlikely to have any Unicorns. Shallow, grass and sedge-filled ponds are more their ilk.

Those bright yellow cerci at the tip of their abdomen (used to clasp females during mating), make an excellent field mark. Coupled with their shoreline behavior, they're hard to miss when you're lucky enough to find one of their ponds, which isn't often. The specific habitat they need can be found in the ponds at Claude Moore Park, the large puddles along the dirt road that cuts through Accotink Bay Wildlife Refuge, and ponds at Occoquon Bay NWR. Sometimes you can also find them in the shallow, grassy, temporary, detention pools along roadways.



Our only Clubtail routinely seen in water still enough to grow algae.

Yellow,
unmarked
face

This Unicorn Clubtail shares a marshy perch with a bright blue Spangled Skimmer. Males of different species often tolerate each other's close presence, since they compete for different females.

Even perching on a vertical stem, Unicorns still hold a horizontal-like position, similar to their perching stance on the ground. There are seven families of dragonflies in the US. Each family, including clubtails, has a slightly different perching signature – learning to recognize these positions can be a great first step towards identification.