

Horsetail Fern.

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Odonata Survey, 20th August, 2020.

I was away at the weekend when I 'ought' to have done the survey, and since then the weather has barely been fit. Today was marginal - mostly cloudy with a breeze bordering on being too strong for dragonflies.

Consequently, I didn't see a lot, but what I saw was interesting.

I saw nothing in the Big Meadow - it was cool and quite breezy.

The Hay Meadow was better. Nothing at Cromwell's Pond; it's far too overgrown, mostly with horsetail fern.

Lucy's Pool was home to three, competing, male Common Darters (*Sympetrum striolatum*), and a couple of females arrived whilst I was watching. One perched in some brambles to observe the 'action' (and possibly pick out a mate?); the other arrived and was mated by the male which I assume was dominant as he had the 'best' perch (on the wire mesh of the 'nest-box'). Once they'd finished mating (too far off for me to get a photo - must try taking my longest lens next time) they tried to oviposit, but there was insufficient open water - they spent several minutes flying about in tandem, looking for somewhere clear enough for her to be able to 'dip' her rail in the water whilst they were flying. They were unsuccessful, and the last I saw of them they were still in tandem, with him perched on the stem of an iris(?), with her hanging below but well clear of the water.

Whilst this was going on, up to five Brown Hawkers (*Aeshna grandis*) were flying around, hunting and fighting over whose patch it was. One managed to catch a bumblebee, and looked most odd, flying around clasping a great big bee whilst it looked for a perch to hang from and eat. Unfortunately it flew to a tree branch which I couldn't access because of the copious water underfoot, so I didn't manage to photograph it. I've never seen a Brown Hawker catch a bumblebee before - though they're a favourite food of Golden-ringed dragonflies (*Cordulegaster boltonii*). I also saw a Black Darter (*Sympetrum danae*) between Lucy's Pool and Lower Sowerholme Pond, where I also saw a Brown Hawker hunting... As usual, because they can be quite wide ranging, it's hard to know whether this was a different individual to those seen earlier.

There was a female Common Darter at Anna's Pool, together with a mating pair of Blue-tailed damselflies (*Ischnura elegans*).

The cattle were in Lower Sowerholme, so I was unable to access Willow Pond. There was nothing to see at School Pond, nor in the Flora Field.

There were three male Common Darters in one of the apple trees in the orchard, and two females in another! The orchard is quite a good place, in my experience, to view (and photograph) Common Darters.

I know everyone knows, but I think I should say it too - the horsetail ferns are real nuisance. Almost all species of dragonflies, as I saw today, need open water to breed. The ponds being full of horsetail ferns is not going to help increase, or even maintain, a diverse range of odonata.

(Photographs on following pages)



Male Common Darter on Lucy's Pool.



Common Darters unable to oviposit.



Blue-tailed damselflies mating near Anna's Pool.



A male Common Darter in an apple tree in the orchard.



And another! Unfortunately, the fresh breeze meant that the females were too nervous and 'flighty' to allow themselves to be photographed.