

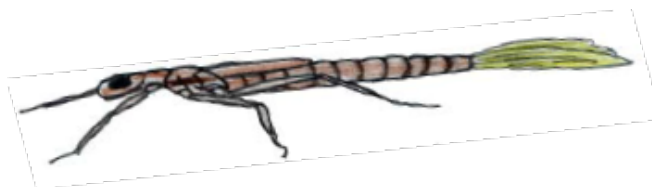
Dragonflies and Damselflies

Text and
Illustrations by
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Fourth in a series

My clearest and most recent memory of this group involves a dragonfly behaving in a very strange, erratic manner. It was mid-July on Nelson Reservoir near Alpine, and I soon realized the dragonfly was towing my fly line. I had either lassoed it or it had actually hit my fly in the air. This might be hard to believe, but Doug Benford was my witness. Some would say I had no proof, but do fly fishers lie?

Damselfly nymph

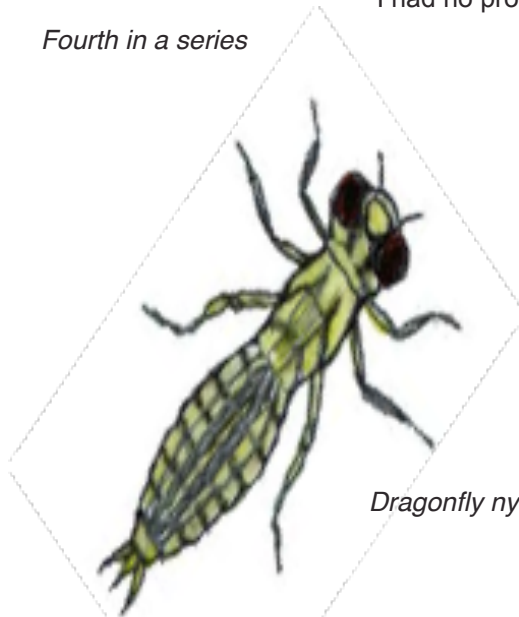


Dragonflies and damselflies are in the Order Odonata and are similar in appearance. In Arizona dragonflies are larger and stouter. Also, dragonflies hold their wings straight out, whereas damselflies fold their wings over their bodies at rest. The group engages in incomplete metamorphosis: egg, nymph, adult.

These insects have strong, biting mouthparts and are aggressive predators as nymphs as well as adults, mostly preying on other insects.

Eggs can be laid freely into the water or into the bottom substrate, or they can be laid inside water plant tissues. Here in Arizona the eggs wait through the winter and hatch out in the spring.

Dragonfly nymph

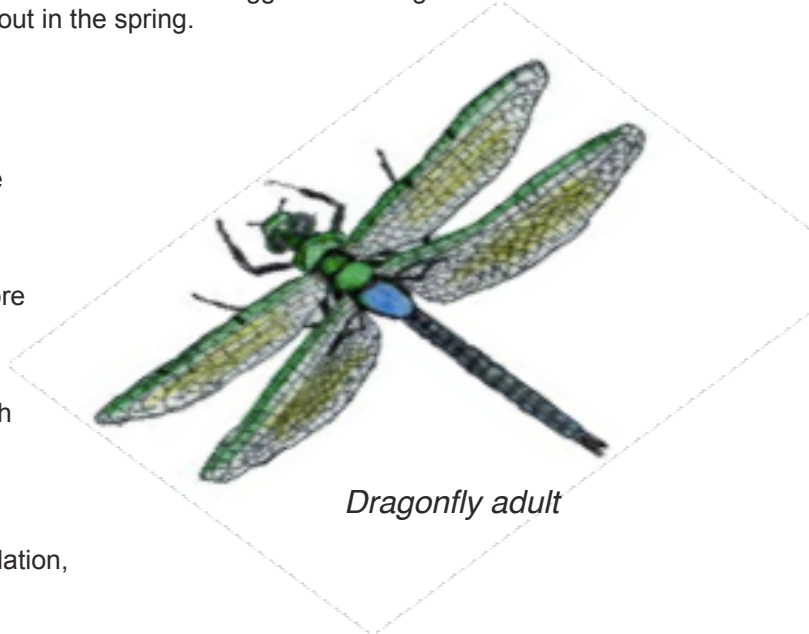


The nymphs are aquatic and are strongly carnivorous. Dragonfly nymphs walk on the bottom or use jet propulsion to move more rapidly. Damselfly nymphs swim by flexing their bodies from side to side. Generally, 12-15 molts occur through 2 summers before nymphs are ready to become adults.

Neither damsel nor dragon nymphs have tails. Damsels have 3 leaflike caudals which they use like paddles to help them move, while dragons have 3 short stubs in place of a tail (see drawings).

Most species emerge at night to avoid predation, but when it's colder they might emerge at sunrise.

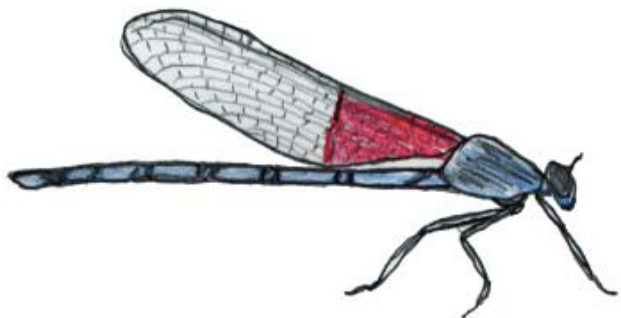
Dragonfly adult



Adults feed on flying insects which they catch on the wing. (Is that what happened on Nelson that day?) They are incredible flyers because, unlike most insects, they can flap their wings independently of each other. This allows them to go forward, backward, hover, or loop-the-loop. Some dragonflies have been clocked at 36 miles per hour for short flights. Added to their maneuverability, this makes them extremely adept predators.

Patterns for fishing damselfly and dragonfly nymphs are numerous. I like Dave Whitlock's patterns, of which there are several. Also, Gierach's Dragon Nymph, Neally's Dragon, and Kaufmann's Lake Dragon. They can be tied in sizes 4 to 12, and fished deep, in a jerky retrieve.

I have not fished adult patterns, but quite a few excellent ones exist. Try some.



Damselfly adult