SPECIES OF THE MONTH

DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES

Dragonflies (suborder Anisoptera) and damselflies (suborder Zygoptera) are a common sight at Caddo Lake, far from the water and skimming its surface. They are insects of the order Odonata, derived from the Greek word odonto meaning tooth. They are characterized by large multifaceted eyes, two pairs of strong, transparent wings, and an elongated body. While belonging to the same order, there are a number of differences that help someone distinguish between dragonflies and damselflies. In general, dragonflies are big and robust while damselflies are smaller, usually much smaller. The eyes of most dragonflies meet on top of the head while those of damselflies are widely separated on either side of the head. The hind wings of dragonflies are broader than the fore-wings, whereas the fore-wings and hind wings of damselflies are similarly shaped. In addition, dragonflies hold their wings out to the side when at rest, but damselflies usually fold their wings up over their back when at rest.

IMPORTANCE AS A GOOD BIOINDICATOR

Dragonflies and damselflies are usually found around lakes, ponds, streams, and wetlands because they breed in water and, after hatching, spend most of their lives as larvae in an aquatic environment. Thus, many ecological factors such as water pollution, flow, the amount and type of aquatic vegetation present, and the presence of fish and other aquatic predators affect their abundance and distribution. Because of their sensitivity to environmental change, dragonflies and damselflies often serve as one of the most visible indicators of the health of the ecosystems they inhabit and the water quality in the wetland areas in which they breed.

In addition, dragonflies and damselflies play important ecological roles as both predators and prey. They typically eat mosquitoes, midges, and other small insects which makes them valuable in controlling populations of harmful insects. On the other hand, birds (such as the egret and Mississippi kite), frogs, spiders, fish, and even other large dragonflies eat them. Thus, loss of dragonflies and damselflies could have a ripple effect on food webs.

HALLOWEEN PENNANT
(Celithemis eponina) is a medium-sized dragonfly which occurs across East Texas and most of the eastern United States. It is a striking dragonfly, one of the most beautiful in the country, and is hard to misidentify with its orange and black wings.

DRAGONFLIES & DAMSELFLIES AT CADDO LAKE

Among an estimated 435 species of odonates recorded in North America, approximately 238 species of odonates have been recorded in Texas. While there is no complete list of dragonflies and damselflies found at Caddo Lake, many of these picutured have been reported there.

COMMON WHITETAIL
(Plathemis lydia) is a very common dragonfly across the entire United States. The male has large black patches on clear wings with a white abdomen, but the female is quite different, lacking the white abdomen and showing a different wing pattern. This species alights on flat surfaces as much as it perches on vegetation.

FRAGILE FORKTAIL
(Ischnura kellicoti) is one of the smallest damselflies, approximately 1 inch in length, found in the area of Caddo Lake.

NEON SKIMMER
(Libellula croceipennis) is one of a group of dragonflies known as king skimmers. They are common in the summer at Caddo Lake.

RED SADDLEBAGS
(Tramea onusta) is a member of the group of dragonflies known as saddlebag gliders. They get this name from the dark band at the base of each hind wing which might look somewhat like saddlebags. The red saddlebags, which is also common at Caddo Lake, is similar but with red "saddlebags."

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

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