

The Common Darter

Last summer we built a pond in the garden, and I then waited with anticipation to see what insect life would arrive. The most conspicuous insects are of course the dragonflies, and almost immediately the first of these appeared – a Common Darter. It spent a great deal of time sunning itself on the stones around the pond edge and was later joined by many more.

The Common Darter is a small dragonfly which is very common here in the late summer and is very fond of perching on warm flat surfaces such as paths, steps and stones. The male is a rusty reddish colour and the female is a yellowish khaki with black marks.

We frequently saw this species egg-laying in the pond last year and now the first adults which grew from these eggs have just emerged. I have not seen them, but there is evidence in the form of the empty larval cases which are visible hanging on to the stems of the emergent plants. It is not necessarily surprising that I have not seen the newly emerged adults – in the first weeks after emergence they often keep well away from water as they do not want to enter into conflict with other dragonflies, or even be eaten by other, larger dragonflies, until they are fully sexually mature and it is worth taking the risk!

Of course the other reason I may not have seen them is because they have been snapped up by a passing bird – our local Spotted Flycatcher could be a likely culprit! Luckily we don't have House Sparrow in our garden – they are very adept at sitting by a pond and waiting for the smaller dragonflies to emerge. They then snap them up as they make their first flight – very unfair!

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