

Spiketail family – *Cordulegastridae*

First Glance:

Large size. Long, thin dark abdomen with yellow spots, triangles or rings. Clear wings, usually flies low and straight over small forest streams. Green or aqua eyes that touch at one point.

ID tips:

Flight – usually slow, low, and straight as they fly continuous patrols over their small streams, sometimes fast and high if escaping into tree tops.

Hunting – mostly gleaning, often high in forest vegetation.

Perching – frequently, except when males are on their long patrols. They perch at a unique angle off low vegetation, or hang from shrubs or trees when at rest (see photos).

Body Type – bright, often glowing eyes touch at a single point, long thin abdomen; darner-like body shape.

Wings – long, narrow and unpatterned

Oviposting – inserts abdomen tip in stream substrate with a sewing machine-like, up and down thrust, hovering its body vertically and perpendicular to the ground.

General Info:

Species in N. VA – 4 (all on website)

Size Range – 2.5-3.1”

N. VA Flight Period – April-August (only Tiger Spiketails are seen past early July).

Habitat Types – small streams to tiny, shallow seeps, often just an inch or two deep. Usually forested, stable and clean. Twin-spotted Spiketails appears to use slightly larger streams than our other three species.

Notes:

- These uncommon, elusive dragonflies have, in my opinion a magical, almost elven quality and are usually found in isolated corners of mature woodlands.
- Twin-spotted and Brown Spiketails can be very difficult to tell apart – use eye color and size/shape of their abdominal spots. The calendar can also help - April usually means Twin-spotted and June usually means Brown. They’re both out in May.
- Much of their hunting takes place high in the forest canopy, and they are reported to prefer small bees and beetles.
- Because their aquatic larvae live in such small, food-scarce seeps, they take the longest of our dragonflies to mature - up to 5, possibly even 8 years.



Arrowhead Spiketail



Brown Spiketail

Spiketails:

Twin-spotted Spiketail



Arrowhead Spiketail

Arrowhead Spiketail

