

Black Saddlebags



# Black Saddlebags (*Tramea lacerata*) – 2.2", 51-55 mm

## Flight Record:

(5/29-10/29)

Peaks

July-early  
September.

*Common*

## Habitat:

Sunny ponds,  
shallow pools,  
marshes and  
wide rivers.

## First Glance:

Medium, w/  
dark hind  
wing patches  
that make its  
body appear  
thicker.

Patches are  
difficult to see  
in flight. High  
flier and  
glider. Rarely  
perches.  
Acrobatic,  
bouncy,  
powerful  
flight. Hunts  
often far from  
water over  
fields.

## Compare:

Carolina  
Saddlebags

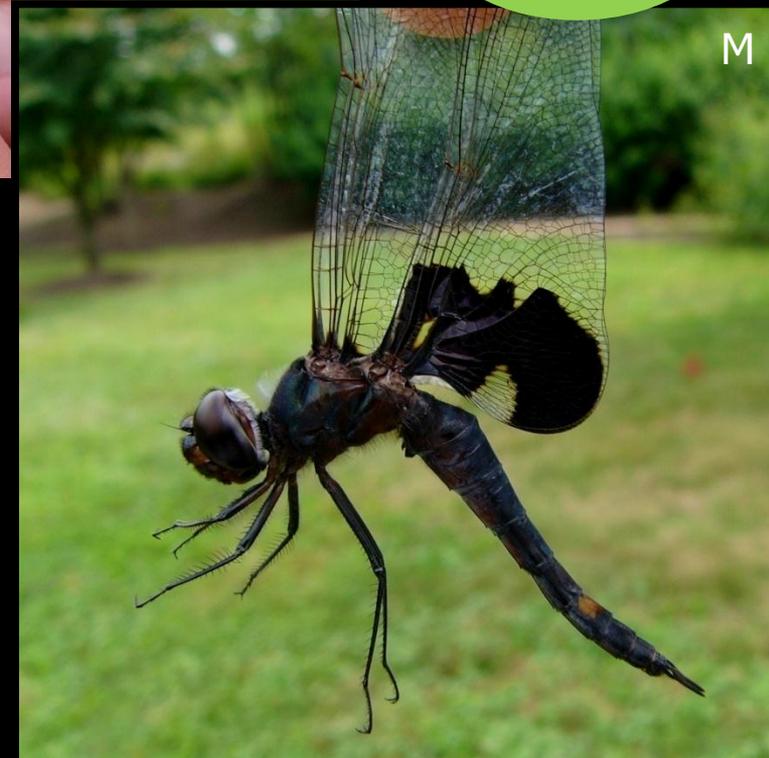


Large, dark  
rear wing  
patches

Long, broad  
wings – rear  
wings are  
especially  
broad at base



Females and  
young males  
(not pictured)  
very similar, but  
with a tan face  
and **5 pairs**  
**of yellow-tan**  
**abdominal**  
**spots**. Male  
spots fade to  
**one pair**  
(see above).



## Notes from the field – Black Saddlebags:

This high flying skimmer behaves more like a member of the emerald family, spending much of its time gliding and circling over sports fields, parking lots, meadows and marshlands. Go to a sunny soccer field on a July or August afternoon, and look up. 4PM-7PM appears to be a sort of peak for them, as far as open-country hunting. It's a great time to watch saddlebags, gliders, Clamp-tipped Emeralds, Prince Basket-tails and Common Green Darners in mixed-species swarms, as they end their afternoon with a gnat snack. Earlier in the day you can watch this species' characteristic bouncy flight as it patrols much lower, along marsh and pond shores, looking for mates and rivals.

The first time I saw a Black Saddlebags up close, I was surprised by the beauty of their inkblot-like wing patches. Deep, iridescent purple, these markings appear almost liquid in their richness. I imagined how many people miss this sight, as they walk across a parking lot, with saddlebags flying high and unnoticed above them. How lucky was I to come across one perched for the evening in a tall grass meadow. Dusk and dawn are just about the only times you'll see this species sitting still, long enough to admire those beautiful wings.



Even from a distance, this species' rear wing patches are diagnostic. This one perches on the tip of a tree sapling in one of the large meadows of Huntley Meadows Park, taking an uncharacteristic break during hours of high-flying hunting on an August afternoon. One of several dragonfly species that migrate every late summer and fall, we know very little about *why*. Some scientists, including those at **The Xerces Society** ([xerces.org](http://xerces.org)), have chosen Black Saddlebags as one of four species to study for answers to the migration question.