

# Blue Faced Meadowhawk



Dragonflies of N. Va. – Kevin Munroe, 2012

**Blue-faced Meadowhawk** (*Symptetrum ambiguum*) – 1.4", 36-38 mm

**Habitat Conservation Alert!**

**Flight Record:**  
(6/06-10/12)  
Peaks  
Sept-Oct.

*Rare*

**Habitat:**  
Temporary  
pools with  
sedges,  
wetland  
grasses,  
and often  
mosses,  
including  
sphagnum.  
Usually in  
woods.

**First Glance:**  
Small,  
bright red & black  
(males), tan & black  
(females).  
Perches low  
and often.

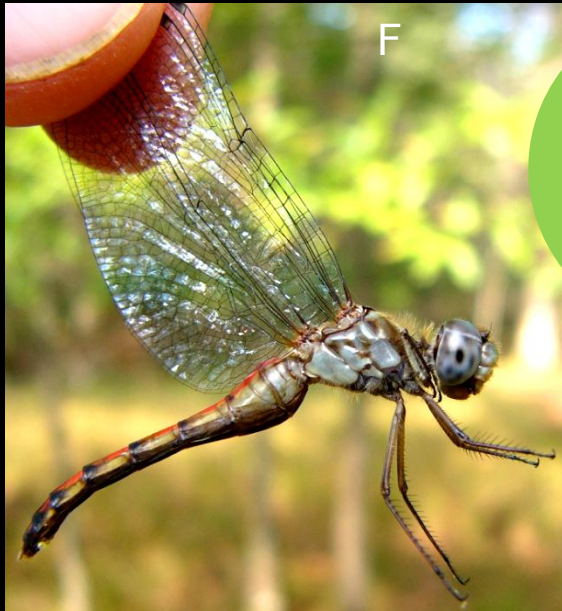
**Compare:**  
other  
Meadow-  
hawks

M



Our only  
meadowhawk w/  
**black rings**  
**across**  
**top**  
of the abdomen,  
and **gray** on the  
thorax.

F



**Females:** red,  
tan and gray,  
and **more**  
**black** than  
other female  
Symptetrums



M

**Both**  
sexes have  
**light blue**  
faces.



### Notes from the field – Blue-faced Meadowhawk:

Although black rings over the top of the abdomen make this one of the easiest meadowhawks to ID in our area, it is in fact the rarest and hardest to find.

The first time I saw this elusive and beautiful forest sprite, was one of those perfect October afternoons you never forget. I played hookie from work just to search for this species. After spending half the day combing one of our coastal plain parks and criss-crossing through the woods, I came across a series of sunny clearings with patches of highbush blueberry and clumps of yellow-green sedge. A tiny, glowing flash of red caught my attention, so small I was sure it would disappear.

The red dot landed on a branch tip and when I crept close, it turned to face me down and raised its tooth-pic sized abdomen in a territorial threat display. This was *his* sunspot, and he swiveled his one inch body to face my six feet, setting himself against the intruder. I stood back, thrilled to see other tiny red flashes fly in and out of the sunny clearing. Over the next hour I watched half a dozen Blue-faced Meadowhawks zip, dive, perch, display, battle, mate and lay eggs, all in a dry clearing without a drop of water. After their very busy hour, they disappeared up into the trees. That was 2005 - it was 6 years before I saw one again.





This rare and brightly-colored dragonfly has a fascinating reproductive strategy. Although I've seen them lay eggs in shallow temporary pools, they'll also oviposit *on land*. The pair picks out a shallow depression, usually along a wood-edge or clearing they believe will fill with water, but is dry at the time. The female then drops her tiny eggs (encased in a dry membrane) into sedges, mosses and other moist-soil plants that grow in their tiny dry-pond. The eggs roll down to the ground, where they sit dry, until rains fill the woodland puddle, often months later. Eggs then hatch in early spring.

This is one of the very few true vernal pool dragonflies in Northern Virginia. If you're familiar with vernal pool amphibians, this is the **Marbled Salamander** of the dragonfly world, laying its dry eggs in fall and gambling on spring rains.

Look for them in woodlands or nearby meadows known to have vernal pools; if you know where wood frogs, spring peepers, and Ambystoma salamanders can be found, you're got a good place to start looking for this elusive species. Take a walk on a sunny day in late September thru mid October. Look for very shallow, swampy pools, or low forest clearings – both need to have enough sun to grow thick clumps of sedges and other wetland grasses. Then sit back and wait for tiny, attitude-filled flashes of bright red to appear, and possibly face you down with a challenging blue stare.

