

# Carolina Saddlebags



Dragonflies of N. Va. - by Kevin Munroe, 2012



# Carolina Saddlebags (*Tramea carolina*) – 2.0", 48-53 mm

## Flight

### Record:

(5/31-9/28)

Seen most  
July-August.

*Fairly  
Common*

### Habitat:

Shallow,  
sunny,  
vegetated  
ponds

### First Glance:

Large, red,  
w/ pinkish-  
red rear  
wing  
patches.  
Strong flier,  
often high,  
rarely  
perches.  
Bouncy  
flight.

### Compare:

Red  
Saddlebags  
(a western  
stray - see  
next page)



Rear wings  
have a  
large red  
patch – rest  
of wings  
are clear

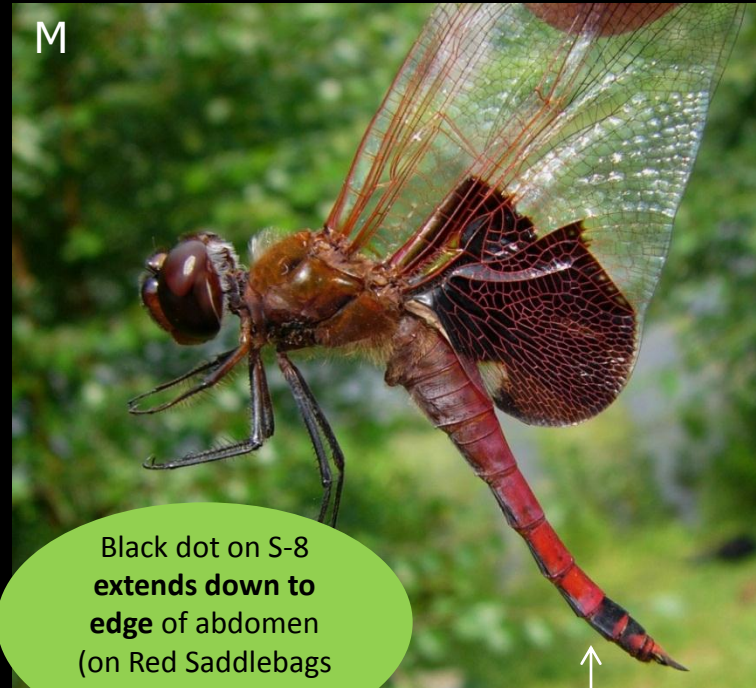


Purple-  
blue  
metallic  
face  
(Red  
Saddlebags  
have a red  
face)



Females &  
immatures  
are duller  
red to tan

Judy Gallagher

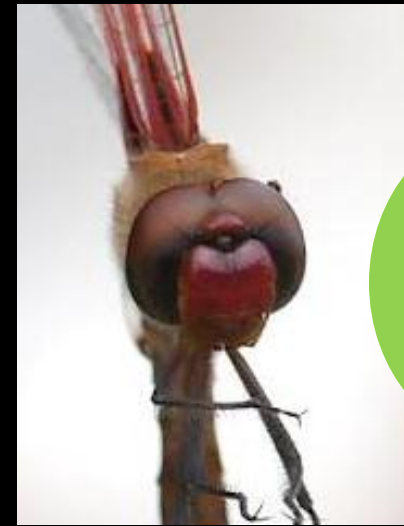


Black dot on S-8  
**extends down to  
edge of abdomen**  
(on Red Saddlebags  
it's just on the top)

S-8 ↑

# Red Saddlebags (*Tramea onusta*) – western stry

Subtle and subjective, but the clear “window” on the rear wings is more **rounded** on Red Saddlebags, more *triangular* on the Carolina 😊



Compare this **red** face to the Carolina's **purple** face

All photos on this page taken by Matthew Muir. Thanks Matt!

← S-8

Notice the **black dot on S-8** is only on the top - it does **not extend** down the side on Red Saddlebags, as it *does* on the Carolina



S-8 ↑



### Notes from the field – Carolina Saddlebags:

One of the boldest and brightest colored dragonflies of Northern Virginia, this crimson-red species makes quite an splash when it appears on one of our small ponds or marshy pools. Despite being very similar in appearance to the Black Saddlebags, Carolinas are more specific in their habitat needs and occur in much smaller numbers, at least in our area. While Black Saddlebags can be found at most ponds, lakes and even a few rivers, Carolina Saddlebags appear to stick to shallow, thickly vegetated ponds and marshlands. They're powerful fliers (one of only a few species that routinely migrate hundreds of miles), so they can wander almost anywhere, including parking lots and urban lawns. However, they breed and set up territories at far fewer wetlands than their darker cousins. For every one Carolina Saddlebags, I've probably seen thirty of the Black.

Whenever I think of this species, it brings images of the many Reston dragonfly counts I've been on. Standing on the edge of Bright Pond or the ponds at Fannie Mae, the count group and I list the many blue, black, green and brown species that zip by. When all of a sudden a big, brilliant red flash of long, broad wings bounces into view, and then zooms off out of sight. "What was that?! Did you see the color on that thing?!" *That*, was a Carolina Saddlebags, and they do tend to shake things up.

This photo shows the small, slightly triangular-shaped clear window at the base of the dark wing patch on a **Carolina Saddlebags**.



The very similar **Red Saddlebags** (above photo is a Carolina) is a western species whose breeding range does not include N. VA. However, a champion traveler, it has been seen in MD and VA, including right here in Northern VA. So although we don't appear to have a resident population of Reds, their migration and dispersal routes bring them here, probably every summer - so keep your eyes open!