

Common Green
Darter
(purple coloring
caused by low temps)



Common Green Darner (*Anax junius*) – 3.0", 68-80 mm

Flight Record:

(3/14-11/24)

Peaks
May-June &
Aug-Sept

Common to
Abundant

Habitat:

Prefers
marshy,
shallow
ponds, but
uses almost
every fresh
water
habitat.
Hunts over
open fields
and roads.

First Glance:

Large, light-
colored.
Powerful,
fast, high
flier, glider &
patroller.
Migrates in
fall swarms.

Compare:

Comet
Darner



Mature
males have
bright blue
coloring

All ages & sexes:
green thorax
and a
black & blue dot
on top of their
"nose"

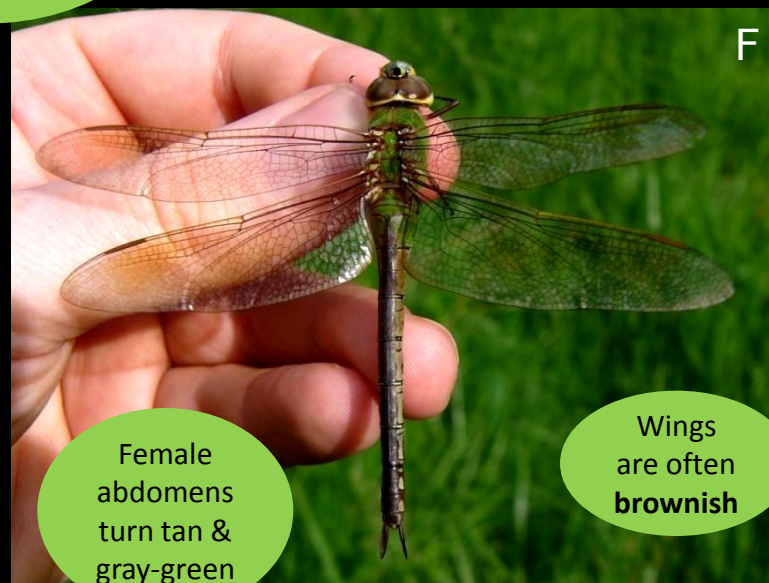


Mating
pair in
"wheel"
position



Young:
brick-red to
pinkish-
brown
abdomens

Juv M



Female
abdomens
turn tan &
gray-green

Wings
are often
brownish

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Notes from the field – Common Green Darner:

This is truly one of the world's most adaptable, and successful dragonfly species. Found in all 50 states, every Canadian province, and south to Honduras - it appears to have conquered near every habitat. Although shallow, sunny, vegetated pools and marshes are their favorite haunt, I've seen them in N. Virginia's swamps, rivers, lakes, sunny streams, storm-water ponds, fields and parking lots. A true habitat generalist, this darner can be found almost anywhere. Equally impressive is the length of its flight season – the first N. VA dragonfly to appear (3/14), and one of the very last (11/24) to survive before winter's cold.



That early date is a bit deceptive. It was indeed seen in N. VA, but that's not where that darner was originally from. Common Greens seen in our area in early spring are in fact *migrants* from points south. They emerge in the Southeast and fly north, arriving *here* late March thru May. After their long flight, they mate, lay eggs and die. Their young emerge in July and August. Congregating in large swarms, this 2nd generation begins flying south in September. They lay eggs that fall, after arriving in their southern destinations, and die. When their young hatch in March, they fly back to N. VA and it starts again – a two generation migration. Look for swarms, often over 100, of south-bound Common Greens gathering in tall grass meadows and marshlands in late August and September. I've seen several hundred gathering in swirling, circling drifts over local wetlands. To complicate things, there are also local populations! But my favorite September memory of migrating darners comes from Runnymede



A female injects eggs into an underwater grass stem with her blade-like ovipositor, while the male holds on to protect her from other males.

Notes from the field – Common Green Darner:

Park, in Herndon, VA. It was September, and the park's annual NatureFest was about to begin. Volunteering at the meadow station, I was prepping for the day's activities. As I walked down the meadow path, darners were everywhere, perched by the dozens in tall clumps of peach-gold Indian Grass. Everyone who strolled down this path was treated to the spectacle of at least one flushed, rising darner per stride, creating a cloud of wings and colored abdomens by the end of each walk. I brought friends back the next day to see the gathered swarm, but the darners had moved on, flying south to give birth to the next generation.



This six-legged migrant was plucked from a mist-net meant for migrating raptors in Cape May, NJ.



Migrant flights that include spring and fall mornings can get chilly – Common Greens deal with this by having dark-colored platelets in their blood that rise to the surface when it's cold, darkening their abdomen color, therefor attracting more sun. On bright, hot days, those dark platelets sink, and the abdomen turns bright blue again, now *reflecting* light. The purple abdomen on the male to the left (and title page) indicates a cold mature male. The deep purple lets you know it's not simply a pinkish-red juvenile male. Look for this stunning purple coloring during cool weather, mornings, or as in this instance, the golden light of a September evening.

Notes from the field - Common Green Darner:

Blue, reddish, purple, brownish gray – the abdomen colors can really vary, and get confusing. So don't worry about them. Focus on the green thorax. That's where the name comes from, because young or old, male or female, cold or hot, they all have bright green thoraxes. The other ever-present field mark is the black and blue bull's-eye on top of their "nose" (see title page) – it's the best way to tell Comet and Common Green Darner females apart, since both lack the bright abdomen colors of the male.

Regardless of their sex or age, Common Green Darners (CMDs) are powerful fliers and predators. Not only will those wings power them through multi-state migrations, but they'll also carry them across oceans. Common Greens don't live in Great Britain or Tahiti, but they've been found on both Islands, somehow find-

ing their way across great salty expanses. Equally impressive predators, Common Greens have supposedly been seen eating hummingbirds. Although that seems unlikely, they certainly catch and consume large insect prey, including the tasty Springtime Darner in the above photo. And of course they spend many hours consuming gnats and mosquitoes.

I once watched a dragonfly dodging fine, but steady raindrops on a cloudy evening, as it chased its gnatty dinner over and around a small meadow. True sun-worshippers, dragonflies simply don't fly in the rain. But this was a CMD, and they live to push boundaries.



Mature females
have tannish-gray
abdomens.