

Cyrano Darner





# Cyrano Darner (*Nasiaeschna pentacantha*) – 2.8", 62-73 mm

Habitat Conservation Alert!

## Flight Record:

(5/14-7/16)

Peaks  
late May  
thru June.

Uncommon

## Habitat:

Large to medium,  
clean  
forested  
streams w/  
sunny  
clearings.  
Also small,  
swampy  
and/or  
marshy  
ponds.

## First

## Glance:

Large &  
chunky.  
Strong, low,  
deliberate  
flight.  
Repetitive  
patrols.

## Compare:

Swamp  
Darner



**Female:**  
thicker, w/  
less bright,  
but similar  
markings

### Notes from the field - Cyrano Darner:

One of my favorite dragonflies, the Cyrano isn't quite like other darners. There is of course that wonderfully large "nose" (hence the name), something I can relate to. It is however more than that. This dragonfly is often described as slightly "strange" or "odd", and I'm always excited to see one. What makes it different? Several things. First, I've never seen one flying high over a field or meadow like most other darners, and they never feed in groups, like Swamp or Common Green Darners. They stick to forest streams and swampy wetlands, flying low and usually alone. Their low patrols over forested waters are almost OCD-like in their repetitive nature – back and forth, over the same relatively short route, with wings often held at a slight upward tilt. Woe to any dragonfly that wanders into their territory during these mechanical patrols. I've seen Royal River Cruisers, almost ½ an inch longer, hit hard and chased away.

Cyranos are heavy, almost chunky, and built more like a Dragonhunter (clubtail family) than a typical darner. They hunt more like clubtails as well, gleaning large insect prey off plants, rather than picking gnats and other flies out of the air. A Cyrano-Dragonhunter confrontation would be something to see; an event that must occur, as both species hunt in similar habitat. Like Dragonhunters, Cyranos have a taste for other dragonflies, and are skilled at catching them. The blurry, lower right photo was my poor attempt to document a Cyrano eating a Great Blue





### Notes from the field – Cyrano Darner:

Skimmer in the tree tops above a stream behind my house. The Great Blue (largest of the skimmers), was perched on a sunny branch-tip over a stream, as they often are. Out of nowhere a heavy, dark dragonfly torpedoed into the skimmer, knocked it off its perch, and lifted it into the shady tree tops. I watched, and tried to photograph, as it ate the skimmer headfirst. The head is always eaten first – you don't want your dinner biting back.

The first time I was lucky enough to see a Cyrano Darner up-close, was after a spectacular catch by my dragonfly buddy, Tony Robison. I'm pretty good at finding dragonflies, but Tony is the true net-pro. I remember him perched on a large, fallen tree overhanging a stream being patrolled by a heavy, female Cyrano. The log was slippery and rotten, but Tony somehow mustered enough balance to perform a karate-kid-like jump, and netted the speedy female as she flew underneath. It's the only female I've ever seen (previous page, lower left), and an impressive insect to have in-hand. After a few photos she flew straight up into a tall, leafy Sycamore (upper right).

The only other time I've seen a Cyrano up close, started with an unscheduled swim. I'd been trying to photograph a male Cyrano for years, and was determined to succeed this particular June. I spotted one circling over a large forest pool, and tried to get closer. I stepped into what I thought was shallow water, and plunged chest-deep into the cold pool. Luckily I thrust my camera above my head in time,



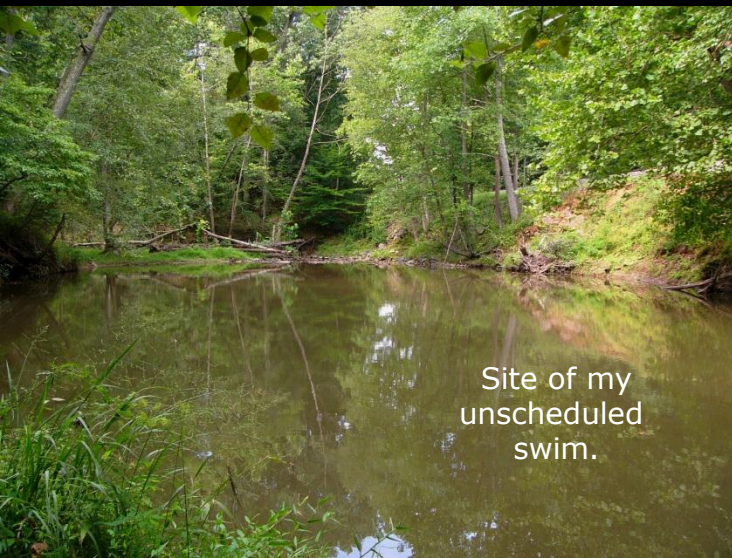
but my wallet, cell-phone and clothes were soaked. After several choice words, and a bit of splashing, I dried off and climbed a nearby railroad bank to try my luck on the other side. After some uncoordinated slips and scrambles among loose rock and blackberry, I stumbled upon quite a scene. A large, sunny, marshy clearing surrounded by hilly forest, cut in half with a wide, slow section of stream. Rhythmically patrolling, back and forth, glowing in the sun-



## Notes from the field – Cyrano Darner:

light, were two Cyrano Darner males. Other sightings of Cyranos on the wing had been fleeting glimpses, but these two were on-territory, focused on the job at hand, and put on a wonderful display.

On return visits I saw as many as three Cyrano males, more than I've ever seen at one time of this usually solitary and territorial species - testament to the quality of this particular habitat (right photo).



Site of my  
unscheduled  
swim.

