Lancet Clubtail

Dragonflies of N. Va. – Kevin Munroe, 2012
Lancet Clubtail (*Gomphus exilis*) – 1.7”, 39-48 mm

**Flight Record:**
(5/11-7/06)
Peaks in late May thru June
*Uncommon to Fairly Common*

**Habitat:**
Sunny, marshy streams and small stream-fed ponds.

**First Glance:**
Small, thin, brown dragonfly with yellow marks. Yellow on side of male abdomen tip often visible. Patrols low along water’s edge. Often flies in loops when on land. Perches often, on ground/logs.

**Compare:**
Ashy Clubtail, Sable Clubtail

Both sexes have **blue eyes.**

Yellow marks cover length of S-8 thru S-9, opposed to the Ashy, whose marks are much shorter, or absent

Noticeable **bright yellow flange on sides of S-8 & S-9** (male and female), while Ashy has almost no flange, and less bright yellow
Notes from the field – Lancet Clubtail:
I spent several years looking for this species along rivers, and only ever found one. Shady forest streams didn’t reveal any Lancets either. I eventually stumbled upon several healthy populations of Lancet Clubtails around slow, sunny sections of streams and adjoining stream-fed small, shallow ponds. They appear to do very well in stable, sluggish, sunlit streams with marshy banks, emergant vegetation and pond-like backwaters.

The Bull Run, Popes Head and Cub Run watersheds all have what this species needs. Spend a May or June afternoon walking the sunnier streams at Manassas Battlefield Park or Sully Woodlands, and you’ve got a good chance of spotting this small clubtail. Look for them flitting along stream banks and landing flat on logs, pathways and in-stream debris.

Even from a distance, you can get a sense of the yellow abdomen flange. This is an important field mark, as it separates Lancets from the similar Ashy Clubtail. Lancets also have bluer eyes, brighter markings, and prefer slower, sunnier waters than Ashies.

Like their similar cousin, the Ashy Clubtail, Lancets often fly in a series of loops, possibly as a means of confusing would-be predators. This behavior is a good way to recognize these two species. To tell them apart, see the ID tips listed on the pages of both species, especially “Notes form the field” for the Ashy.

Bring your camera – once they’ve perched, they are relatively tame and easy to approach.