Needham’s Skimmer
**Needham’s Skimmer** (*Libellula needhami*) – 2.2”, 53-57 mm

**Flight Record:**
(6/01-9/26)
Peaks in July-August.

**Fairly Common**

**Habitat:**
Marshy ponds, pools.

**First Glance:**
Large.
Orange-red abdomen (male), yellow & black abdomen (female).
Both have orange-tinted wings. Long, low flights over field and water; perches less than other *Libellulas*.

**Compare:**
Golden-winged Skimmer, Yellow-sided Skimmer (female)

- Golden-winged Skimmers have black tibias
- Hind leg’s 2nd segment (tibia) is tan, w/ black spines
- Golden-winged face (Golden-wings have an orange face)
- Reddish face (Golden-wings have an orange face)
Needham’s Skimmer \textit{(Libellula needhami)}

Juv F

Black line on abdomen – both sexes, all ages

F

Golden-winged Skimmer and Yellow-sided Skimmer \textit{Juv} F

Pale “wolf snout” marking on side of thorax. Golden-winged Skimmer and Yellow-sided Skimmer \textit{Juv} “snout”.
Pale “wolf snout” marking on side of thorax. Golden-winged and Yellow-sided lack “snout”. This mark fades in adults, both male & female.
Needham’s Skimmer (*Libellula needhami*)

On mature males, 1st half of Costa Vein (between Nodus and body) only slightly darker than 2nd half.

On young males, 1st half of Costa Vein is noticeably darker than 2nd half.

On females, (young and old), 1st half of Costa Vein is black, 2nd half yellow.
Notes from the field – Needham’s Skimmer:
This dashing summer dragonfly, a member of the king skimmer genus, makes quite a splash at the shallow, marshy wetlands it prefers. Relatively skittish, it spends more time on the wing and less time perching than other king skimmers. Look for Needham’s at thickly-vegetated marshes, grassy pools, shallow plant-filled ponds, and marshy ditches. I don’t think I’ve ever seen one at a typical storm-water detention pond – they like wetlands with lots of plants, and water just a few inches deep.

The very similar (some would say almost identical) Golden Winged Skimmer (Libellula auripennis) has also been seen in Northern VA, although I haven’t yet had the privilege. In Giff Beaton’s field guide, “Dragonflies of Georgia”, Mr. Beaton states that the only consistently reliable field mark to tell the two apart is the “wolf-snout” marking on the side of the thorax - Needham’s have it, Golden-wings do not. In my experience the Needham’s appears to be far more common in our area, and they probably account for more than 75% of the Needham’s/ Golden-wings seen in Northern VA.

The wetland boardwalk at Huntley Meadows Park is probably the first place I saw a Needham’s, and one of our area’s easiest sites to see them. I’ve also seen dozens at a time, almost swarming, on the marshy bays and expansive lawns of Quantico Marine Corps Base.

Is this a Needham’s or Golden-winged?
Hard to tell. Even from a distance the bright orange coloring narrows it down to those two species. However, to tell them apart, you’ll need to pull out your binos and look for wolf-snouts, costa viens, tibias and shades of face color – good luck! 😊

I have yet to find a Golden-winged Skimmer in Northern VA, but they have been documented in Fairfax County by several sources, including Odonatacentral.com, Huntley Meadows Park, and Jim Waggener’s Audubon Society surveys. I haven’t created a separate page for them yet, but I describe all their differences on the preceding Needham’s ID pages.

Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Meadowood Special Recreation Management Area, Bles Park and Huntley Meadows Park are all good sites to look for both species.