

Royal River Cruiser



Tony Robison

Royal River Cruiser (*Macromia taeniolata*) – 3.3", 75-91 mm

Flight Record:
(6/17-9/10)
Seen most July-August.

Uncommon to Fairly Common

Habitat:
Rivers, bays & large sunny streams

First Glance:
Very large, black w/ yellow spots. Flies straight, long, low patrols over water/ paths, & sometimes hunts high over meadows. Larger, slower & heavier than Swift Cruiser.

Compare:
Swift River Cruiser



Lots of spots – **no large area of black**. Also *lacks* the broad yellow *abdominal club-band* of the Swift River Cruiser.

Huge blue-green eyes, long legs & **single thoracic side stripe**.



Lacks the abdomen club of other Cruisers

Notes from the field – Royal River Cruiser:

One of our largest dragonflies, Royals fly fast, low patrols over open water and sunny pathways. It appears to prefer slower water that its cousin, the Swift River Cruiser. Most of the Royals I've seen have been over marshy bays, sluggish sections of river backwaters, and once at a large, slow, sunny stream. In our area, Royals are less common than Swifts, and seem to prefer the coastal plain over the piedmont, although I did see one cruising over a sunny stream in Clifton, well into the Piedmont. Dyke Marsh and Occoquan Regional Park, both on our coastal plain, are two of the best sites to find and watch this large, colorful species.

Royals **lack** the abdomen club and wide sections of black found on the Swift. They also tend to fly slightly slower than Swifts, although still fast enough to make pursuing dragonfly chasers dizzy. Lastly, Royals are larger than Swifts (by almost ½ an inch), although using size in the field as the dragonfly in question flies by at 30 mph can be a challenge. The Royal's preference of bays and marshy river sections, over the fast-flowing rocky waters frequented by Swifts, may be an easier way to tell these two similar species apart. Royals are also slightly more colorful - all those yellow spots start to stand out with careful observation and experience.



My dragonfly buddy, Tony Robison, takes a few close-ups of this beautiful male as it catches its breath, after an expert catch, also by Tony. A dozen or so shots later and he flew away, up into the trees of Dyke Marsh.

Try to exercise caution and control when catching dragonflies, especially **cruisers** and **emeralds**. Species in these two families are built somewhat more delicately than most dragonflies, and over-exuberant net swings can end in unfortunate injuries to these beneficial insects. Better to err on the side of caution and miss, than to stop one of these colorful mosquito-eaters from flying.