

Ruby Meadowhawk



Ruby Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum rubicundulum*) – 1.4", 33-37 mm

Habitat Conservation Alert!

Flight Record:
(7/02-8/31)
Peaks in July.

Uncommon

Habitat:
Shallow,
temporary,
marshy
pools, often
in or
adjacent to
forest

First Glance:
Small,
bright red
(males),
tan-orange
(females).
Frequent
percher,
often low &
w/ raised
abdomen.

Compare:
other
Meadow-
hawks



Tan face -
the Cherry-faced
Meadowhawk
has a *reddish* face



Notes from the field – Ruby Meadowhawk:

The most difficult of Northern Virginia's meadowhawks to ID, Rubies are also quite uncommon in our area. I'm only aware of 5 sites in Northern VA where they've been seen - at four, only one or two individuals have been observed. This comes in part from their preferred habitat: fishless, shallow, vegetated, marshy pools and puddles (not ponds) with unpolluted water, usually in wooded settings such as a forest edge, swampy woodland or floodplain forest. In-tact habitats of this specific description are few and far between in our area, and when they do exist contain many places for a tiny dragonfly to hide from dragonfly geeks like myself. Look for them in July and August (although they can be seen into fall), in before-mentioned haunts, especially in the southern and western corners of Northern VA.

Telling this species from other meadowhawks can be a challenge. The abdominal black triangles separate it from the Autumn; lack of large wing patches from the Banded-winged; lack of black abdominal rings from the Blue-faced. If we could stop there, life would be good, and simple. And we almost can – those four species are the only *Sympetrum*s that regularly breed in Northern VA, and the only four I've seen after 12 years of surveys.



However, as of 2012, one Cherry-faced Meadowhawk (2003) and one White-faced Meadowhawk (2010) have been seen in our area. Telling Ruby, Cherry-faced and White-faced Meadowhawks apart can be very difficult (see njodes.com for the best ID tips). Suffice to say that of the three, Rubies are by far the most likely in Northern VA, and probably the only one of those three species you'll ever see in our area.

Notes from the field – Ruby Meadowhawk(cont.):

Even though I've only seen this species a few times, one of those was in fact exceptional, and one of my favorite dragonfly experiences of all time. In 2009 I spent several months exploring a section of the Bull Run watershed in western Fairfax County. A mosaic of streams, meadows, seeps, shallow ponds and swampy woodlands combined to create a sort of dragonfly Shangri-La, full of many hard-to-find species. On an afternoon



in July, after several hours of following Least Clubtails and Dragonhunters through clean, rocky streams, and wading into marshy meadows in search of Double-ringed Pennants, I found myself on an unfamiliar dirt trail.



As it snaked between a wide section of stream and floodplain forest, it brought me to an open, sunlit, marshy clearing full of old tree stumps and wetland vegetation. I left the trail and waded into the marsh, my nature geek radar thinking I'd stumbled in to a very special spot. I stood for a few moments to look around and soak it in. A flash of red caught my eye, and drew me deeper into this hidden marsh. The scarlet flash was a Ruby Meadowhawk, and it wasn't alone.



Notes from the field – Ruby Meadowhawk(cont.):

By total and wonderful accident, I had waded into the middle of a Ruby emergence. This small marsh, surrounded by swampy, floodplain forest had everything this species needed, supporting a thriving population of this scarce *Sympetrum*. Tiny meadowhawks were floating and rising out of the glowing green vegetation all around me, landing on me, my camera, and peppering plant stems with wings and color. The marsh was raining dragonflies, only this rain was flowing up, out of the marsh and into trees and sky. I stood in the mud, and watched them rise and disperse in the afternoon light. When I pulled my shoes out of the marsh and walked back to the trail, Rubies were still raining up; out of the clear water of this wet-land gem.

