

Shadow Darner



Shadow Darner (*Aeshna umbrosa*) – 2.9", 68-78 mm

Flight

Record:

(8/14-11/15)

Peaks
Sept-Oct.

*Fairly
Common*

Habitat:

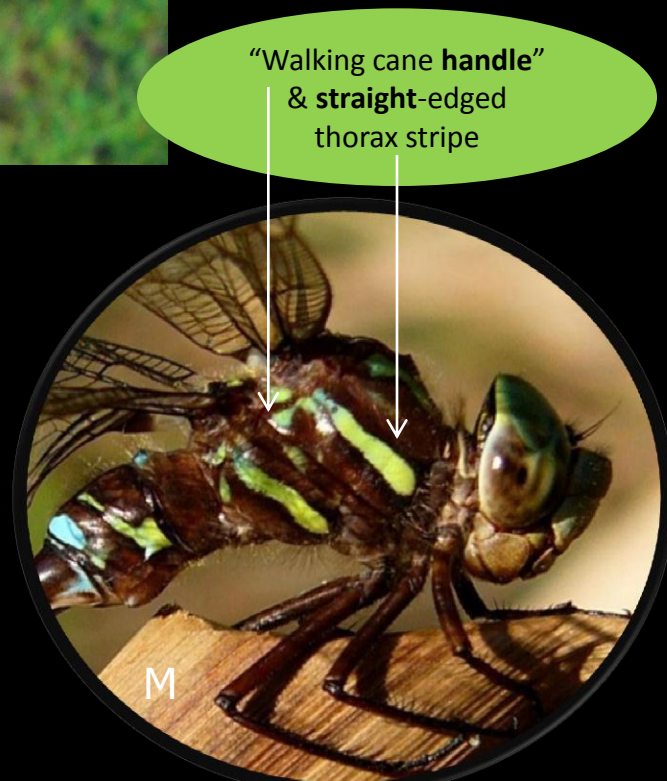
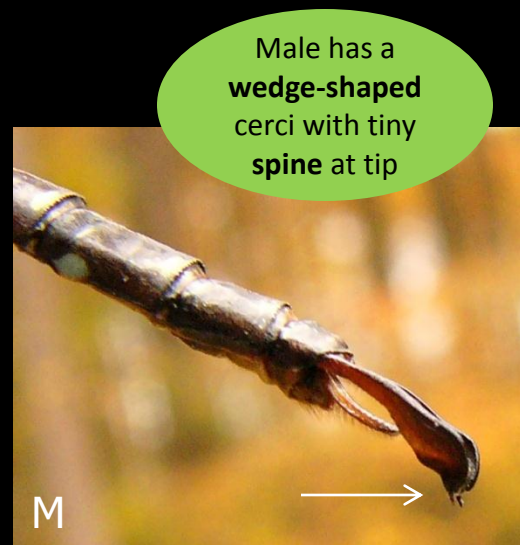
Forested
streams and
swampy pools

First Glance:

Large, brown.
Repeated,
low, slow
patrols along
paths, wood
edges and
forested
wetlands.
Often flies in
the shade, on
cloudy days
and evenings

Compare:

Swamp
Darner, Fawn
Darner, Mocha
Emerald. This
is the only
mosaic darner
(*Aeshna* sp.)
in N. Va.



Notes from the field – Shadowdarter:

One of my favorite dragonflies, this species defies the norms of its order and prefers to fly on evenings and cloudy days – a darter of the shadows. Relatively common in Northern VA, it haunts most of our forested streams and swampy wetlands. Although the earliest shadowdarters can supposedly be seen in our area as early as June, I've never seen one before mid-August. They are an insect of Autumn, peaking in September and surviving well into November, way past most of their sun-loving, warm-weather cousins.

Mosaic Darters (the genus *Aeshna*) can be one of the most difficult dragonfly groups to ID. It's a large genus, with many very similar and variable species. Telling them apart can involve subtle, subjective and detailed marks on the thorax, abdomen base and reproductive organs. Luckily, or sadly, depending on your perspective, Shadowdarters are the only *Aeshna* found in Northern VA – so far. Green-striped Darters, also an *Aeshna*, are in range and have been seen nearby in MD. Although no record of them exists in our area (and I've spent countless hours searching for them), I imagine it's only a matter of time before one shows up. They're slightly larger, more colorful, have notched thorax stripes, and lack the cerci spine of



To warm themselves when it's cool or cloudy, dragonflies often practice wing-wirring – the insect version of shivering.

our Shadowdarter. In addition, they peak a little earlier, in late July and August, although they can also be seen into fall. Keep your eyes open – maybe you'll be the first to find one!

For now, the enigmatic, subtly-colored Shadowdarter, with its preference for fall evenings and shadowed wood-edges, is our sole representative from the *Aeshna* genus. Look for this unique species flying low patrols along wide forest paths and forest borders in parklands with nearby streams. Lake Fairfax, Long Branch Nature Center and Huntley Meadows are all great sites to search, but try starting with your local stream-valley park.