

Springtime Darner
(female)



Springtime Darner (*Basiaeschna janata*) – 2.4", 50-67 mm

Flight Record:
(4/15-6/12)
Peaks
late April-
mid May.

*Fairly
Common*

Habitat:
Sunny
streams

**First
Glance:**
Medium,
thin,
brownish.
Often has
amber
sheen to
the wings.
Repeated
patrols low
over the
water. Also
hunts high
over sunny
meadows
and
clearings.

Compare:
Stream
Cruiser,
Spiketails

M



Blue
markings
rarely visible
during flight



Often
perches **low**
on sunny
stems

M



Amber
wing
sheen



Two
thoracic
side
stripes

F

Notes from the field – Springtime Darner:

This well-named darner is indeed a creature of the spring, scarce by June 1st, and gone by the official start of summer. Late April and May are their time to zip around our watersheds, cruising up and down small, sunny streams. Most of our spring dragonflies are habitat specialists, and can be hard to find in your typical suburban watershed. This species however, is more widespread than most of its spring cousins. It still takes a little time and perseverance to find, but most of our streams, even the much beleaguered Difficult Run, can turn up several of these relatively adaptable darners.

When I've seen them, they've been flying low over the water as they patrol up and down small to medium sunny streams. They do seem to prefer sun to shade, and can also be found hunting over sunlit meadows - occasionally even stream-fed ponds and canals. On cooler days, often in April, I've seen them perched on plant stems in fields and forest clearings, and have been lucky enough to get several relatively close shots.

Their amber wing-sheen can really help with ID when they're flying above or level, and the sun hits their wings. Stream Cruisers and spiketails, similar dragonflies that share the same basic habitat and season, have clear wings with no visible colored sheen. The first time I saw Springtimes was over a riverside meadow. I'll never forget the sun glinting off their wings, as close to a dozen swirled over the tall grass, chasing midges, and each other.



The above photo is one of my favorite action shots, although I doubt the Springtime Darner enjoyed it. I watched a female Common Green Darner swoop down out of a tree and snatch its cousin out of the air, then land to devour its large meal. In minutes, a few discarded wings were all that remained.

Great sites to watch Springtimes are Riverbend Park, Reston, Sully Woodlands and Prince William Forest Park.