

Swift River Cruiser



Swift River Cruiser (*Macromia illinoiensis illinoiensis*) – 2.8", 65-76 mm

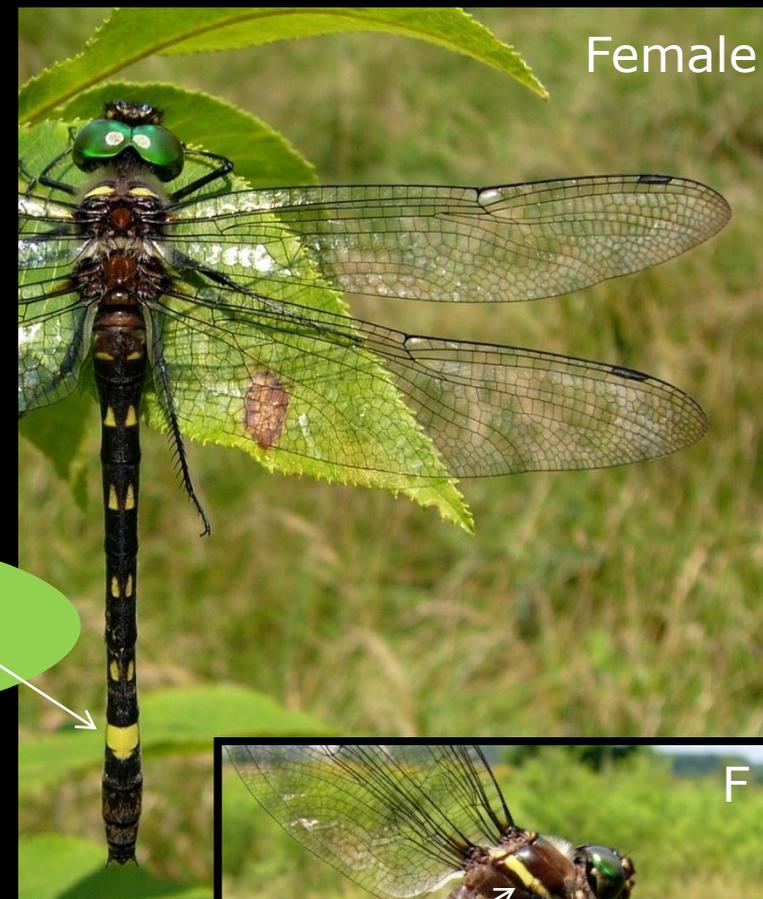
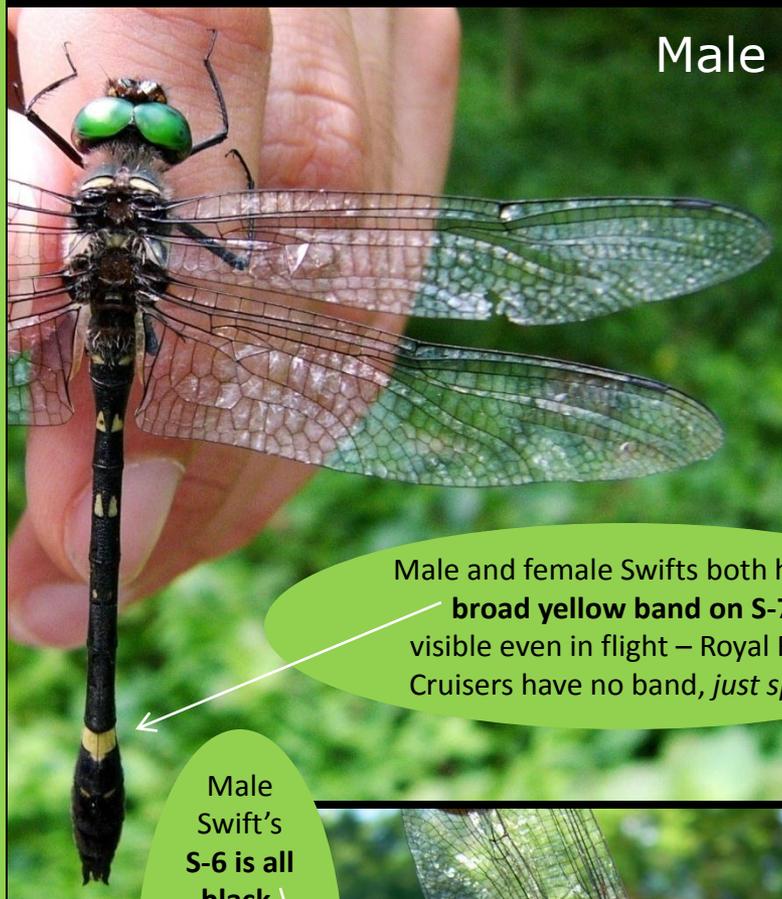
Flight Record:
(5/22-9/10)
Peaks
mid June-
early Aug

*Fairly
Common*

Habitat:
Rivers and
large, sunny,
streams

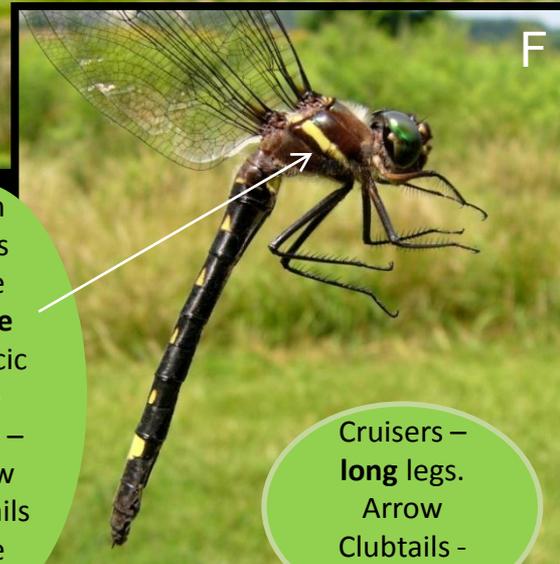
**First
Glance:**
Large &
black. Thin
abdomen w/
noticeable
club on
male. Huge,
green eyes.
Very
fast, strong,
straight flight
up & down
rivers, or
high over
meadows.

Compare:
Royal River
Cruiser (no
club), Arrow
Clubtail



Male and female Swifts both have a **broad yellow band on S-7**, visible even in flight – Royal River Cruisers have no band, *just spots*.

Male Swift's **S-6 is all black**, while the Royal's S-6 has *large yellow spots*



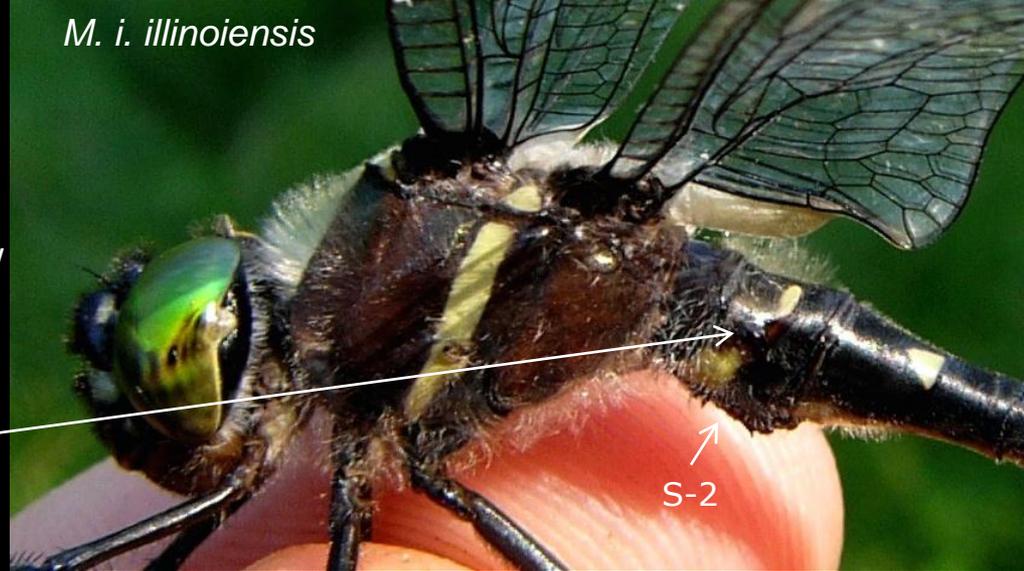
Both sexes have **single** thoracic side stripe – Arrow Clubtails have **two**

Cruisers – **long** legs. Arrow Clubtails - **short** legs.

Swift River Cruiser (*M. illinoiensis illinoiensis*) vs. Allegheny River Cruiser (*M. alleghaniensis*):

The Allegheny River Cruiser (**not** pictured) has to my knowledge never been seen in N. Va., but it is in range. Wow, these two appear almost impossible to tell apart! One field mark is the side-view of the yellow marking on S-2. In the male Allegheny it is entire – in the male Swift it is broken by a black bump called an auricle (only possessed by males and used during mating). *Macromia illinoiensis illinoiensis* is the only Macromia with black auricles. Another field mark is the broad yellow band on S-7. It wraps around the whole segment on the Allegheny – on the Swift it does not. Good luck!

M. i. illinoiensis



Confusing Cruisers in Range,
but Not Yet Seen in N. VA: Allegheny and Southern Swift

“Northern” Swift (*M. i. illinoiensis*) vs. “Southern” Swift (*M. i. georgina*):

These two sub-species used to be called the Illinois and Georgia (not pictured) River Cruisers– now they’re both called Swift.

Both sexes of *M. i. georgina* have yellow abdominal marks all the way to S-8 and vertical yellow stripes on the front of the thorax.

M. i. illinoiensis lacks yellow on S-6, and only has horizontal stripes on the front of the thorax, no vertical stripes (see left photo). To my knowledge, *M. i. georgina* has not been found in N. Va. However, it does appear to be in range...and they do inter-breed, so who knows what you’ll find 😊

M. i. illinoiensis



Notes from the field – Swift River Cruiser:
(previously *Illinois River Cruiser*)

Telling River Cruisers apart can appear very confusing – however, in N. Va. it really doesn't have to be. Only two species have been seen here: Swift (Northern form) and Royal. There are three simple ways to tell the males apart in the field (females are trickier and need to be viewed close up). Male Swifts have a noticeable club, a visible band on S-7 and a large stretch of black abdomen with no spots. Male Royals have no club, no yellow band on S-7 and they do have spots down most of their abdomen. In addition, Royals are noticeably larger– however, judging size in the field can be tricky.

Watching Swift River Cruisers in the field is a treat – they're Olympic athletes, even by dragonfly standards. Believed fastest of the dragonflies, they can fly up to 40 mph.

Watching one patrolling his territory, jetting down the center of a sunny river a few feet above the water, you almost expect to hear him break the sound barrier. A flash of his yellow abdominal band and brilliant green eyes, and he's gone. His linear patrols are long, but regular – just wait a few minutes and he'll be back for another pass. They also hunt for hours high over meadows and ball fields. Watch them as they zip, dip and dive circles around other feeding dragonflies.



As fast as they are, a sturdy spider web can still stop them in their tracks. The above female was caught in an orb weaver's web on the edge of a meadow off the Potomac River. Find a sunny clearing along a river, take a late afternoon walk in July, and look up. Hopefully you'll see a cruiser or two, gnat hunting, high above those the spider webs.

They may also substitute rivers for wide, sunny paths during their patrols and can be seen flying low and fast over the ground, patrolling wide meadow paths or sunlit old roads.