

Twelve-spotted Skimmer



Twelve-spotted Skimmer (*Libellula pulchella*) – 2.1", 52-57 mm

Flight Record:

(5/14-10/13)

Peaks
July-early
September

*Fairly
Common*

Habitat:

Shallow
ponds,
marshes &
vegetated
pools

First

Glance:

Medium.

Showy,

butterfly-like

black &

whitish blue
wing spots.

Strong,
gliding flight.

Perches

often, on tips
of reeds and
branches.

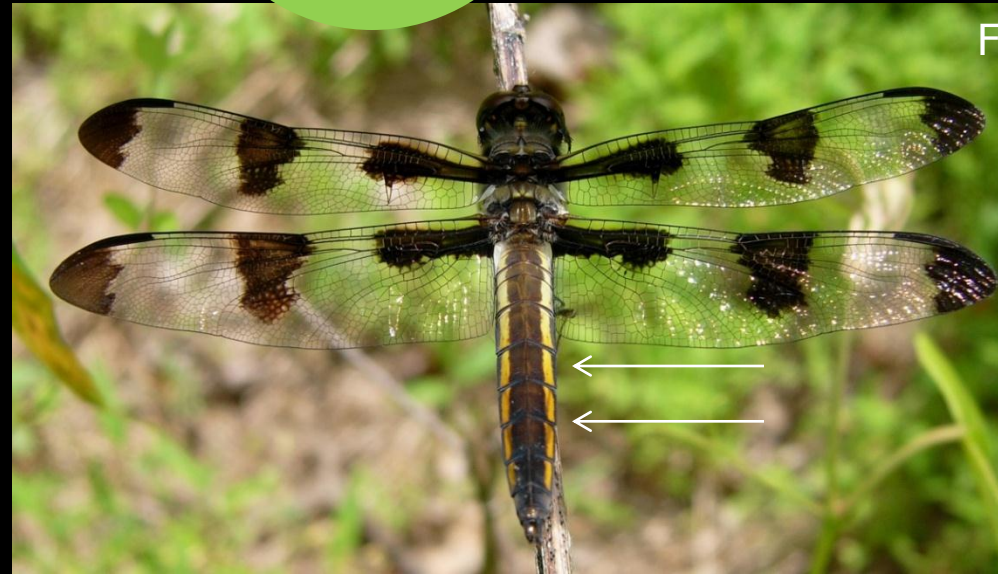
Compare:

Widow
Skimmer,
Common
Whitetail



Young males and
females have
straight/parallel
yellowish
abdominal stripes
- female Common
Whitetails have
angled/slanted
abdominal stripes

Older males
develop a
waxy blue
powder called
pruinescence



Notes from the field – Twelve-spotted Skimmer:

One of the most dramatically patterned dragonflies, Twelve-spots are named for their black wing spots - 3 on each wing. However, it's the white-blue spots that make them such an awesome site. Although wide-spread and found in most Northern VA watersheds, it's unusual to see more than a few at any one site. A little more picky in their habitat needs than many of our skimmers, you're unlikely to see them at your typical storm-water detention pond. They prefer shallow, marshy wetlands, usually less than a foot, and often just a couple inches deep. The few times I've seen half a dozen of so at once have been in wet meadows with shallow pools, or large, marshy puddles along mowed utility easements. Look for them from late July to early September in open, sunny areas with shallow, vegetated water.

The males are unlike any other dragonfly in our area, but the females can easily be confused with female Common Whitetails. Twelve-spots are larger, with longer wings, but size can be tricky in the field. The easiest way to tell the two females apart are the short, pale stripes on the edge of their abdomens – Twelve-spots have *straight* abdominal stripes, while Common Whitetails stripes are *slanted*.



One of my favorite dragonfly photos (I use it as my screen saver) is the one above. It was taken at one of our area's best sites for shallow, marshy wetlands - Accotink Bay Wildlife Refuge. After a long hot day walking the refuge in August, I was tired, covered in burs and bramble scratches, and hadn't found any of the species I'd been looking for. Just then, I happened to look up and catch the site of a high-flying Twelve-spot, hunting for gnats up in the sky like a harlequin-patterned swallow. It stopped to rest on the tip of a tall pine, and I pointed my camera straight up. Those spots against an August sky made the whole day worth it, and more than memorable.