

Rediscovery of the Western Pondhawk in the Lower Mainland

by Rex D. Kenner & Robert A. Cannings

The Western Pondhawk (*Erythemis collocata* [Hagen]) is a dragonfly with a range restricted in Canada to low elevation ponds in the warmer parts of southern BC (Cannings and Stuart 1977) where it has been identified as a species of possible conservation concern (Scudder 1996). The species is medium-sized for a dragonfly; the body is about 4 to 4.5 cm long. Mature males are essentially all blue with dark-blue eyes, a green face and clear wings (for colour pictures of this and the other species mentioned below, see Paulson 1999; 2000). Females and immature males are mostly green with black markings on the abdomen. Western Pondhawks tend to perch low, often on floating algal mats or on the ground (Dunkle 2000). In BC, mature male Western Pondhawks can only be confused with Blue Dashers (*Pachydiplax longipennis*). The Blue Dasher is only slightly smaller and mature males of both species have blue abdomens; however, Blue Dashers have green and brown banded thoraxes, turquoise eyes, white faces, and wings that are amber near the base. Blue Dashers tend to perch on the tips of vegetation above the ground, with their wings forward (Dunkle, 2000).

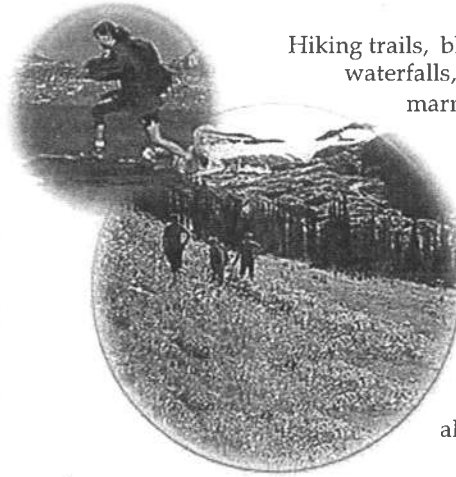
The Western Pondhawk has been collected at a number of locations in southern BC, as documented by the collections and databases of the Royal BC Museum and the Spencer Entomological Museum (UBC) and the Ministry of Environment, Lands and Parks' Conservation Data Centre (BC CDC 2000) – Vancouver Island: Thetis Lake, Florence Lake, Long Lake and Goldstream, all 1937; Crofton Lake, 1972; Prospect Lake, 1984; Pike Lake, 1988; Decoy Pond near Pike Lake, Gardiner's Pond (N. Saanich), Uplands Park (Oak Bay), Hamilton Marsh (Qualicum), Beaver Lake (Saanich), all

1996; and Nanaimo, 2000; the Gulf Islands: Thetis Island, 1952; Bodega Ridge Fen (Galiano Island) and Haggis Farm Pond (Saturna Island), both 1996; the Sunshine Coast: Ambrose Lake Ecological Reserve (1989) and Triangle Lake Park (1996); the Lower Mainland: Agassiz (1926); Vancouver and Chilliwack (both 1941); and the south Okanagan (oxbows at north end of Osoyoos Lake, several records 1985-2000). It was not found in the Lower Mainland, however, during surveys in 1996 (Kenner 1996). The Western Pondhawk is "quite uncommon" in northern Washington, known only in Okanogan County and, even there, it is common only in the hot lowlands at the southern edge of the county with a few isolated records farther north (D. Paulson, pers. comm.). In Washington the known flight period is May 10 to September 19 (Paulson 1999). Before the new records described herein, the dates for flight records for BC ranged from June 13 to August 13.

On September 7, 1999, one of us (RAC) stopped at Cheam Lake Wetlands Regional Park, located just north of Highway 1 east of Chilliwack (Exit 135), and observed and photographed a mature female Western Pondhawk resting on the path. Not only was this the first record for this species in the Lower Mainland in 58 years but it extended the known flight season in BC by almost a month.

In the early afternoon of August 2, 2000, we both visited the park. It was sunny with some high cirrus clouds, about 25°C with a light SW breeze. We observed many male Western Pondhawks chasing each other over the water near the edges of the lake. They often landed on the floating algal mats or bits of wood. We saw pairs mating and several females ovipositing alone,

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dipping their abdomens in the water. On August 8, Ian Lane visited the park and photographed several males. On August 10, a small group of us visited the park and again observed a large number of males defending territories and several females ovipositing. In addition, an exuvia (the larval skin left after the emergence of an adult) was found. On September 25, RAC again visited the park and saw one mature female; that sighting further extends the known flight period in BC.

Cheam Lake is a restored wetland. The lake was drained in the 1950s, so that its marl bottom could be extracted, and then refilled following the construction of a dam by Ducks Unlimited and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans in 1992 (Knopp 1996). Thus, the Western Pondhawks now found at Cheam Lake must be descended from immigrants, and that strongly suggests that other previously overlooked populations must exist in the Lower Mainland or northern

Washington.

Since 1996, Western Pondhawks have been included on the provincial Red List (candidates for threatened and endangered status). The discovery of a breeding population at Cheam Lake, along with the other recent sightings listed above, suggest that the Western Pondhawk is less threatened than was previously thought and it has now been moved to the provincial Blue List (vulnerable) (S. Cannings, pers. comm.; BC CDC 2000).

On August 10, 2000, Yellow-legged Meadowhawks (*Sympetrum vicinum*) emerged en masse at Cheam Lake; hundreds of exuviae covered the lakeside vegetation and boardwalk, and general dragonflies were everywhere. This species has a similar distribution to the Western Pondhawk but is apparently more abundant; it is also ranked as a Blue-listed species according to the Conservation Data Centre (BC CDC 2000).

Other odonates recorded at Cheam Lake include: Common Green Darner (*Anax junius*), Canada Darner (*Aeshna canadensis*), Blue-eyed Darner (*Aeshna multicolor*), Paddle-tailed Darner (*Aeshna palmata*), Shadow Darner (*Aeshna umbrosa*) (very large numbers of exuviae, August 2 and 10), Dot-tailed Whiteface (*Leucorrhinia intacta*), Eight-spotted Skimmer (*Libellula forensis*), Four-spotted Skimmer (*Libellula quadrimaculata*), Black Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum danae*), White-faced Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum obtrusum*), Western Meadowhawk (*Sympetrum occidentale*), Northern Bluet (*Enallagma cyathigerum*), Pacific Forktail (*Ischnura cervula*) and Western Forktail (*Ischnura perparva*).

Although the list of dragonflies and damselflies for Cheam Lake is not long, it is based on very few visits. As more observations are made, the list will grow. Cheam Lake Wetlands Regional Park will prove to be very good for dragonflies as well as for birds (Knopp 1996).

These sightings show the high value to wildlife (in the broader sense) in restoring wetland habitats. However, such good results cannot be obtained in the absence of nearby populations that can act as sources for immigration. Thus, it is vital that existing wetlands also be protected.

Acknowledgements

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Rex Kenner is member of the VNHS and volunteers at the Spencer Entomological Museum at UBC. His review of three recent dragonfly guides (including Dunkle (2000) and Paulson (2000) referenced above) begins on page 65 of this issue. He can be reached by mail at 5560 Linscott Court, Richmond, BC V7C 2W9 or by e-mail at kenner@zoology.ubc.ca ☺