

Dragonflies of the Ottawa-Gatineau Region

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Species Profile 2

The Stream Cruiser (*Didymops transversa*)

Family: Macromiidae



Female Stream Cruisers have thick abdomens and lack the prominent club at the tip that we see in the male.

I first heard the name Stream Cruiser from an odeing friend while looking for early spring dragonflies at the Nortel Woods in Ottawa's west end. The area in question is a typical mixed forest with shrubby areas and meandering trails – not the habitat I would have expected for an odonate with the name of Stream Cruiser. Though I saw quite a few dragonflies that day that were new to me at the time, we did not find a Stream Cruiser. The name did pique my curiosity, though. It's a name that conjured up images of a dragonfly flying rapidly over streams, and indeed many authors say that they do this. However, my experiences with this species were to be somewhat different than accounts in field guides.

ID Hints

- Mid-size dragonfly, brownish, single whitish stripe on the side of the thorax, cream markings, wide tip to the abdomen
- Most often seen flying low over pathways and trails and even roads

My first encounter with the species was on a shady forest trail at Morris Island. I caught a glimpse of a fairly large, brownish dragonfly flying a few feet above the path and keeping ahead of me – a darter, I remember thinking. It was very obviously following the contours of the trail.

It landed several times and I was

able to identify it as none other than *Didymops transversa*, the Stream Cruiser. Since then I've seen this species quite often and annually, and forest paths have proven to be as reliable a place to see them as anywhere. In fact, though I've spent a lot of time in the last few years exploring various streams and creeks in our region, I've never actually seen this species cruising a stream. I think it could just as easily have been named the Trail Cruiser.

Should you be lucky enough to encounter these creatures, a little bit of patience can be rewarded as individuals of this species will not only “hang up” after reasonably short flights, but will generally allow a fairly close approach. When one settles, note its extremely long legs. You will also observe that it often perches on the diagonal.

A male Stream Cruiser in the typical diagonal pose. Note the very long legs of this species and the single cream stripe on the side of the thorax.



Though they appear mostly brown in flight (males and females are very similar), they have several identification features that stand out. On the male, the claspers (the terminal appendages males use to hold on to females) are white. You can see this even in flight. The only other dragonfly in our region with white claspers is the Eastern Pondhawk, but it does not resemble the Stream Cruiser in any other way.

The other notable feature is the single broad thoracic stripe. Our only other local species with a single broad stripe on the side of the thorax is the Swift River Cruiser, but its single stripe is yellow and there are other bright yellow markings on the body. Though not brightly marked, I find the brown, black and cream tones of the Stream Cruiser to be quite attractive. The males also display a widening to the end of the abdomen, much like the club that most club-tails sport. This feature explains why some people may confuse this cruiser for a clubtail.



A male Stream Cruiser. Note the flaring of the abdomen tip which is referred to as the club.

With some experience, this species is quite recognizable, but not so for a beginner. Earlier on in my odeing career, I would often encounter brownish dragonflies cruising along the banks of creeks and streams. They never seemed to land, hence prohibiting me from seeing them up-close. I assumed they were Stream Cruisers. Informal chats with others reinforced this suspicion.

I was soon to have one of those “aha” moments. I had seen quite a number of these brown dragonflies quite late into September and early October and I was curious about their flight season. So I did some checking on the OFNC website for Stream Cruiser flight seasons and I found that they were mostly gone by mid-July. It suddenly dawned on me that my unidentified dragonfly had to be something else. So, I decided to catch one and ID it myself.

Armed with my net, I found a suitable rock to sit on in the middle of a stream and waited . . . and waited. Finally, my quarry showed up, and after a few lame attempts at netting it, I was able to swing with success. As soon as I retrieved the buzzing biter from the net I knew it was not a Stream Cruiser. It was *Boyeria vinosa*, the Fawn Darner. Mystery solved! At a glance and in flight, it's easy to see how one can mistake these two species, but their behaviour is so different that I now look back and wonder at this misidentification.

When and where to look for a Stream Cruiser

In my experience, Morris Island Conservation Area is the most reliable place to find this species. Their flight season is late May to late July, though they're more easily found in June. I'd target the third week in June as a best bet. The Sugar Bush Trail near the Visitor's Centre in Gatineau Park is also a very good place to find the Stream Cruiser.



The eyes of Stream Cruisers will become greenish when mature.

A note on catching dragonflies

Using a net to capture any living creature is not something that should ever be done lightly. I myself am a somewhat reluctant user as I feel I'm capable of identifying most species of dragonflies in the field or later by studying photographs. However, some species are exceedingly hard to differentiate from similar species and this may necessitate the use of a net. In my opinion (there are those who disagree), if done properly, it is not an activity that causes harm to the dragonfly. Having said that, the attachment of the head to the dragonfly body is extremely fragile and this should be taken into consideration before attempting to catch dragonflies in a net.

Possible Confusables

If you get a good look at the Stream Cruiser, it's hard to really confuse it with any other species. The other local cruiser, the Swift River Cruiser, is also brownish but it has a bold yellow stripe on the side of the thorax and bright yellow abdominal markings. As I noted previously, the Fawn Darner is also brown and it certainly has the habit of cruising along streams. However, it has two bright, almost luminescent, spots on the thorax (rather than a single stripe), its flight is slower and its hunting style more methodical.



← A Fawn Darner showing the bright spots on the side of the thorax unlike the single stripe of the Stream Cruiser.

A female Swift River Cruiser. →
Though somewhat similar, note the bright yellow markings.

