

# Dragonflies of the Ottawa-Gatineau Region

Article and photos by Chris Traynor

## Species Profile 9

### The Eastern Pondhawk (*Erythemis simplicicollis*)

Family: Libellulidae



*A female Eastern Pondhawk showing how well they can blend in to wetland vegetation.  
Note her short, white appendages at the tip of the abdomen.*

The Eastern Pondhawk is likely familiar to anyone who has spent a good deal of time naturalizing in our local wetlands. It is a common species, fairly approachable and interesting to watch. It is well known as being one of the most active predators of other smaller dragonflies and seems to have an appetite that few other odonates possess. The pondhawk is a wait-and-pounce predator, darting out from the vegetation to catch passing insects. It does this efficiently. Fairly aggressive, it will often chase other dragonflies from its preferred perches when not in hunting mode.



Few other species show as marked a difference in the sexes as the Eastern Pondhawk, with the males being a distinct powder blue colour (at maturity) and the females and young males being a vibrant green.

← A male pondhawk showing the powder blue colour of maturity. This blue is a waxy substance that forms on the mature male pondhawk and is referred to as pruinosity. Note the white appendages at the tip of the abdomen.

To confuse the issue, young males look very much like females, but they will go through one of the more colourful transitions of our local odonates. You may find the male pondhawks to be all green, all blue or a combination of the two. They are very striking when they are in transition.

### ID Hints

#### Female:

- Green body with a bright green face
- Short, white appendages at the tip of the abdomen
- Large ventral spike near the tip of the abdomen

#### Male:

- Body matures to a pruinose light powder blue
- Green face
- Long, white appendages at the tip of the abdomen



↑ A male in transition showing both the green of immaturity and the blue pruinosity of a mature male. Note also the heavy water-mite load under the abdomen (circled). This is quite common in dragonflies that live in places with still water.





← *An immature male looks very much like a female. Note the longer white appendages at the tip of the abdomen.*

### When and Where to Look for Eastern Pondhawks

Ponds and lake edges and quiet bays are the preferred haunts of this species and you should not have any trouble finding them at places like Morris Island, Petrie Island, Shirley's Bay and any wetland of a similar nature. The females, however, blend in very easily with reedy, shoreline vegetation and I find that I find them most often when they fly away at my approach. Luckily, they are a fairly approachable species if you move slowly and will often sit still for a nice photo session.

Eastern Pondhawks start flying in our region in mid-June and though most are gone by September, you can still find them lingering into the middle of that month. I find their numbers at their best in July.

I have found pondhawks in the early morning and in the late afternoon, so any time of day would be suitable for locating them. Like most odonates, they are most active in the sunshine.

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*Pondhawks are variable in how they perch. You will see them sit horizontally on logs and rocks and also perch diagonally; on some occasions, they will even "hang up" like the darner family. They consistently take low perches.*



## Possible Confusables

The mature male pondhawk is distinct in our region and hard to confuse with other species, but it is possible he could be confused with the much smaller Blue Dasher when viewed from behind. There are, however, some easy distinctions. The first is size: the Eastern Pondhawk is much larger than the diminutive Blue Dasher. Although the two species are often found together in the same habitat, the bright green face of the pondhawk will always distinguish it. Additionally, the pondhawk is one of the few species that has white appendages at the tip of the abdomen.



↑ *When viewed from behind, the pruinose abdomen of the Blue Dasher is similar to the pondhawk – but the dasher is a very tiny species.*

The other possible confusable, and I noted this in T&L 55(2), is the Slaty Skimmer.

Only the males could possibly be confused with each other but the Slaty Skimmer, as its name implies, is a slate blue-grey colour and not the powder blue of the pondhawk.

Similar species to the female Eastern Pondhawk are few, with the Rusty Snaketail being the closest match. Both have a green thorax, some brown markings on the abdomen and a green face. However, the Rusty Snaketail's abdomen is noticeably clubbed at the end and does not have the white appendages that the pondhawk has. Also, unlike the pondhawk, their eyes are widely separated. Their habitat preferences are quite different as well, with the Rusty Snaketail being found along rocky streams and mid-sized rivers. The Rusty Snaketail is also very rare in our region and most likely to be encountered only with a deliberate search.

↓ *Though it shares the green face and green thorax with the Eastern Pondhawk, the Rusty Snaketail is rarely encountered in our region.*

