

# Dragonflies of the Ottawa-Gatineau Region

Article and photos by Chris Traynor

## Species Profile 12

### The Crimson-ringed Whiteface (*Leucorrhinia glacialis*)

Family: Libellulidae



*Male Crimson-ringed Whiteface.*

Whitefaces are small members of the skimmer family (Libellulidae) with, as you may have deduced from the name, white faces. In our region, we have five species that one could reasonably expect to find. Four species require some effort to locate and one, the Dot-tailed Whiteface, is one of our most common local odonates. Of the five, there is surely none more striking than the Crimson-ringed Whiteface.

When seen up close, there are few dragonflies more attractive than this species. Famed author James Needham, who wrote what many deem to be the bible of dragonfly study, *Dragonflies of North America*, described the species as “A ruby red and jet black species, in life and at maturity one of the most beautiful of Odonata” and likened the face to that of fine china. (Needham et al. 2014). I agree!

As is often the case, the female is more subdued in appearance. Like all the female whitefaces, she is mostly a darkish yellow and black species with some yellowish markings dorsally on the abdomen. The females can be hard to find perched. I have managed to photograph exactly one female over the years and the records for this species in our region on iNaturalist (and the records are sparse) are all of males. *L. glacialis* is the largest of the whiteface species locally though this is not always noticeable in the field unless a smaller member of another species is at hand.



*A mating pair of Crimson-ringed Whitefaces.*

Crimson-ringed Whitefaces often perch on the ground, especially in the early parts of the day before they’ve really warmed up. Later on they can be found on vegetation. They are reasonably approachable for a dragonfly and it is up close that you will notice the striking red colour.



*Male  
Crimson-  
ringed  
Whiteface  
warming  
up in  
the sun.*

## ID Hints

### Male:

- Marbled brown, black thorax
- Bright red between the wings and the upper abdomen
- Shiny black abdomen, usually unmarked

### Female:

- Mostly darkish black
- Yellow thorax
- Thin yellow dorsal markings on the abdomen



*Male Crimson-ringed Whiteface:  
Note the bright red body and shiny black abdomen.*

*Female  
Crimson-  
ringed  
Whiteface:  
Note her thin  
abdominal  
markings.*



## When and Where to Look for Crimson-ringed Whitefaces

Like most species of whiteface, the Crimson-ringed Whiteface is an early summer species. They can be found from mid-May to mid-June. My latest date for this species was the 25<sup>th</sup> of June, so the window for seeing this special dragonfly is rather limited.

This is an uncommon dragonfly in our region (Bracken & Lewis) and records are sparse from both sides of the Ottawa River, so this is not an easy dragonfly to find. Historically, the Bill Mason Outdoor Education Centre has been the best spot, but since I haven't seen it there in a few years, it may no longer be a reliable location. There have been some sporadic sightings in Gatineau Park, but they are few and far between, so consider yourself quite lucky to sight the Crimson-ringed Whiteface.

## Possible Confusables

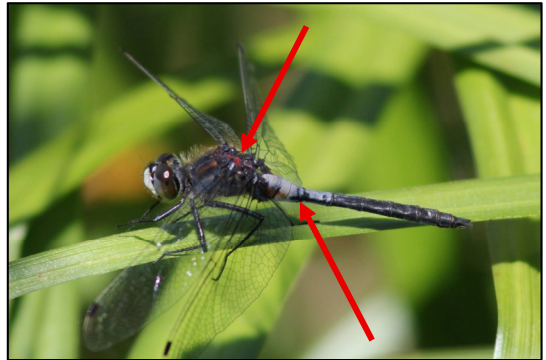
Of our five local whitefaces, two can be confused with the Crimson-ringed Whiteface. The Hudsonian Whiteface is a somewhat smaller species, not quite as brilliantly red and with fairly broad dorsal markings on the abdomen. Like the Crimson-ringed, it is also an uncommon species in our area.

The Belted Whiteface is similar in size and has red on the thorax between the wings or waist; this species was once called the Red-waisted Whiteface. The red can approach the Crimson-ringed for brilliance but it is not nearly as extensively red. The Belted Whiteface also has a fairly shiny black abdomen, but this species tends to form a grayish pruinosity on the body. Crimson-ringed Whitefaces do not develop this trait.

In dealing with the possible confusables, you will note that I only touched on the males. The females of the five species of whitefaces in our region are all very similar and as a general rule they should be examined in the hand to reliably determine their species. The proximity of identifiable males to any female whiteface should give the observer a fairly good expectancy that the female present will be of the same species...but not always!



*Male Hudsonian Whiteface. Note the slightly duller red and the broad markings on the abdomen. Photo by Gillian Mastromatteo.*



*Male Belted Whiteface. Note the red colour only between the wings and the waxy grey pruinosity at the base of the abdomen.*

## Literature Cited

- Needham, J., M. Westfall, and M. May. 2014. *Dragonflies of North America*. 3rd ed. Scientific Publishers, Gainesville, Florida, 2014.
- Bracken, B., and C. Lewis. 2008. A Checklist of the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Ottawa-Gatineau. *Trail & Landscape* 42(3): 115-131.

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