

Dragonflies & Damselflies (Odonata)

Dragonflies (Anisoptera) and damselflies (Zygoptera) are closely related insects of the order Odonata. All are large distinctive insects often spotted flying close to their breeding sites in lakes, streams and rivers during summer months. The lifecycle of these insects has two phases: a larval and a mature phase. The larval or immature animals spend up to two years under water where they prey upon tadpoles and other water creatures; they themselves are also preyed upon by other invertebrates and fish. The adults catch their insect prey 'on the wing' and using their bristly forelegs. Like all insects they have two pairs of wings, however, dragonflies and damselflies can control each pair independently which makes them very skilful fliers - they can hover and even fly backwards. They also have very good eyesight with up to 30,000 facets in each of their compound eyes. Male Odonata are very territorial and can often be seen 'patrolling' the boundary of their particular stretch of river or lakeshore. They often congregate in large groups awaiting the arrival of females, who usually only visit the water to lay their eggs, either into the leaves of aquatic plants, or sometimes directly onto the water surface.

Dragonflies are larger and more robust than damsels and also tend to be stronger fliers. They can be identified from damselflies in that they hold their wings horizontally when at rest while damsels hold theirs vertically.

There are 22 types of dragon and damselfly that are known to breed in Ireland and up to 10 other types have been recorded here as 'vagrants', blown in from Britain on the wind. The common blue damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) is found around the edges of Cumeenadillure lough, and several other species such as the Keeled Skimmer Dragonfly and Emerald Damselfly have been recorded from the valley. Males are more brightly coloured than females and different types are identified from the different colours and patterns on their long tail-like abdomens which are made up of segments, much like the body of an earthworm.



Male Banded Demoiselle. Damselflies hold their wings closed when at rest.



Male Common Blue Damselflies can be seen near Cumeenadillure Lough

Dragon & Damsel flies recorded from Gleninchaquin

Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*) Damselfly
Common Blue Damselfly (*Enallagma cyathigerum*)
Common Hawker (*Aeshna juncea*) - Dragon
Common Darter (*Sympetrum striolatum*) Dragon
Keeled Skimmer (*Orthetrum coerulescens*) Dragon