

Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve

Dragonflies Recorded in Manor Woods Valley

2017-2022



Prepared by Peter Loy-Hancocks

Manor Woods Valley Group



1. Introduction and Methodology

Manor Woods Valley Group member, Peter Loy-Hancocks, collate reports and records covering the period 2017 to 2022, of dragonflies (which include damselflies in the context of this report) in Manor Woods Valley Local Nature Reserve. Sources of reports and records included a Manor Woods Valley Group volunteers related WhatsApp group, Bristol Regional Environmental Records Centre (BRERC) open access records, iNaturalist and iRecord online recording records, National Biodiversity Network atlas (NBN) publicly available online records and British Dragonfly Society online records.

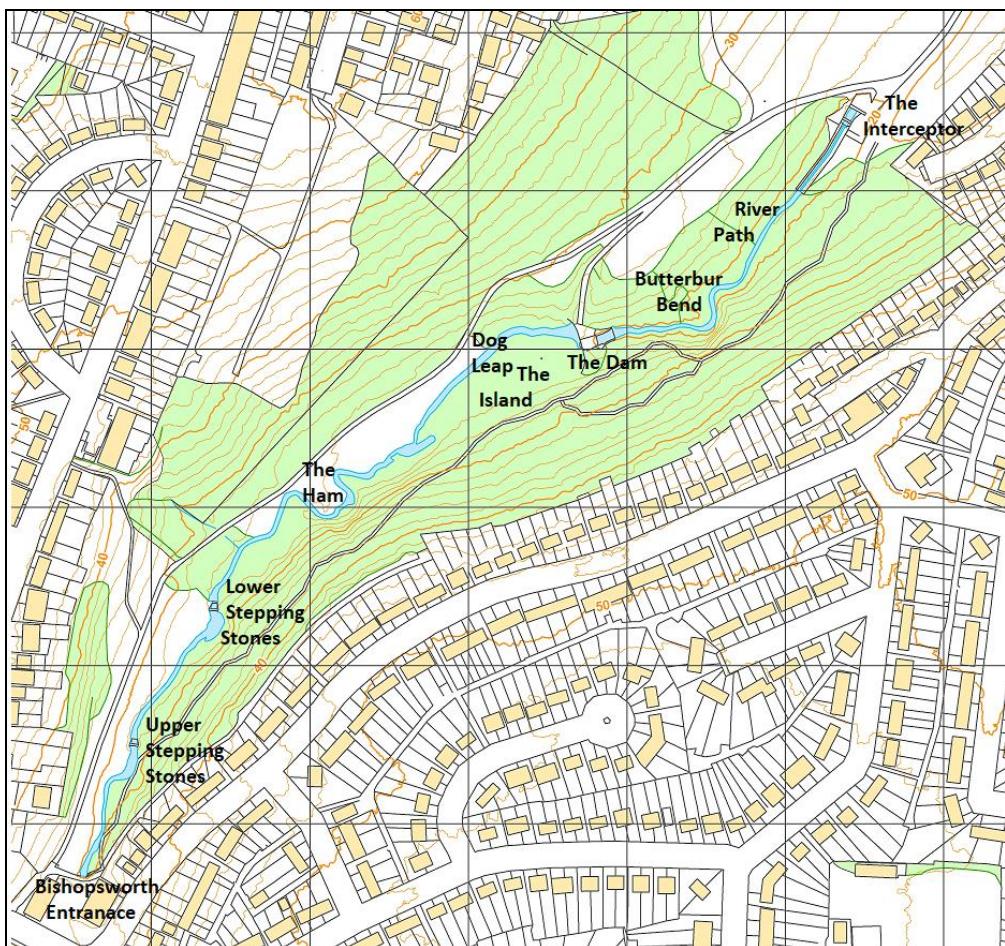


Figure 1: The Malago, place names within Manor Woods Valley

2. Results

Eight species of dragonflies were recorded in Manor Woods Valley during the period 2017-22. These are Beautiful Demoiselle, Large Red Damselfly, Azure Damselfly, Common Blue Damselfly, Blue-tailed Damselfly, Southern Hawker, Broad-bodied Chaser and Common Darter.

3. Discussion

The UK has forty-six species of dragonfly that have well-established breeding populations and migrant species that have been recorded regularly since 2000, the latter often attempting to establish temporary breeding populations.

About thirty species have been recorded in the wider Bristol region. Some of these have specific habitat requirements and therefore would not be expected to occur in Manor Woods Valley; however as adults, all dragonflies are relatively mobile species, sometimes being encountered some distances from they're preferred breeding habitat. This is how dragonflies colonise new sites, or spread across, and even to, this country as global warming makes larger tracts of the UK attractive to them.

Approximately twenty species have been recorded with the general vicinity of Manor Woods Valley, and as such have the potential to be encountered there.

Of the species recorded in Manor Woods Valley:

Beautiful Demoiselle; a large metallic damselfly with fluttering, butterfly-like wings, that occurs mainly along streams and rivers, particularly those with sand or gravel bottoms. The bulk of the population is spread across Wales and south-west England. Most usually seen near the Dog Leap and the Dam in Manor Woods Valley.



Large Red Damselfly; the most common red damselfly. Occur in most wetland habitats, but avoids fast flowing water. It is common and widespread across Britain.

Azure Damselfly; a common and widespread damselfly preferring small ponds and streams, and at the edges of larger water bodies. Very common throughout England, Wales, and the lowlands of south/central Scotland.





Common Blue Damselfly; this is one of the most common damselflies in the UK. It occurs in most waters and on large lakes where it is usually the most abundant species. It is widespread throughout the whole of Britain.



Blue-tailed damselfly; a small dark damselfly with a coloured tip to the abdomen. It is found in a very wide range of lowland habitats including brackish or polluted water where it may be the only species present. Abundant throughout Britain.



Southern Hawker; this is a large, inquisitive dragonfly that prefers non-acidic waters. It breeds in water line vegetation in well-vegetated small ponds, often garden ponds. It hunts well away from water and may be found hawking woodland rides. The species has become increasingly common in recent decades across most of southern England, and Wales.

Broad-bodied Chaser; a very broad, 'fat' dragonfly that is usually found at ponds and small lakes. It is common throughout Wales and southern England.



Common Darter; this is the most common darter species. It inhabits ponds and other still, stagnant or even brackish waters. They are frequently found at small garden ponds. They frequently occur away from water, resting on the tops of plants in woodland rides. This species is generally abundant across the British Isles.

Most of the species that have been recorded utilise a range of habitats, but, with the exception of the Beautiful Demoiselle, a need for relatively still water in which to breed is noticeable. Whilst the Malago is generally a shallow, relatively fast flowing, watercourse, in a few places within Manor Woods Valley it is deeper and slower flowing. These latter places include one or the other side of the Island (which side depends on which 'braid' the Malago follows at any given time), the Dog Leap, upstream of the Dam and upstream of the Interceptor. Common Darters and often seen egg-laying in some numbers at the Dog Leap and upstream of the Interceptor.

It is possible that none of the breeding attempts by species that favour still water, are successful in the Malago within Manor Woods Valley. It could be that larvae are washed away during flood events. If this is the case, the egg-laying adults could originate from nearby garden ponds, being attracted to the Malago when the water is relatively slow flowing; this being the condition that prevails throughout much of the summer.

Crox Bottom - Manor Woods Valley's 'sister site'

A number of species that have not been recorded in Manor Woods Valley, have been recorded in the sites nearby 'sister site', Crox Bottom, through which the Pigeonhouse Stream flows. All of these species may occur, but have simply not been reported, in Manor Woods Valley.

The Banded Demoiselle is closely related to the Beautiful Demoiselle, but prefers slow-flowing lowland streams and rivers, with muddy bottoms. Several stretches of the Malago within Manor Woods Valley have this characteristic.



The White-legged Damselfly occurs along slow-flowing lowland streams and rivers, and sometimes on canals or ponds.



Migrant and Brown Hawkers are closely related to the Southern Hawker and have the same habitat preferences and lifestyles.



The Emperor Dragonfly is mostly associated with large, well vegetated ponds and lakes, but may be found over canals and slow-moving rivers. The female lays her eggs in floating pondweed.



The Ruddy Darter is very similar to the Common Darter and has similar habitat requirements.

All dragonflies are predators. As both larvae and adults they will eat anything they can subdue. While young larvae feed primarily on zooplankton, mature larvae feed on other macroinvertebrates and sometimes even small fish. They catch their prey either by stalking it or waiting in the sediment and ambushing whatever comes along. As adults they continue to prey on other insects, such as mosquitoes, or even their smaller relatives in the case of the larger hawker dragonflies.

Dragonflies themselves are a valuable food source for fish in their larval forms and birds as adults.

Dragonflies range from very sensitive to very tolerant of stresses such as low dissolved oxygen that are caused by pollution. Dragonflies that are sensitive to pollution are those that wait, burrowed in the sediment, to ambush their prey, where oxygen is first depleted when nutrient pollution occurs. Damselflies are moderately tolerant of pollution.

4. Conclusions

About half (eight) of the dragonfly species that could potentially occur in Manor Woods Valley have actually been reported as being seen there. Many (six) of the other species that might be expected to occur, have been recorded in the neighbouring, and similar, site of Crox Bottom and so may simply have been overlooked in Manor Woods Valley.

With the exception of the two Demoiselle species, the other species that have been recorded, or potentially occur, in Manor Woods Valley, favour relatively still water for successful breeding.

This report does not represent a comprehensive survey of dragonflies in Manor Woods Valley. Formal survey work would very likely reveal the presence of more species than have currently been recorded.

Only sightings of adult dragonflies are included on this report. Surveys for dragonfly larvae would confirm that breeding was actually taking place.

All photos in this report © Peter Loy-Hancocks. Photos not taken in Manor Woods Valley.