

Golden-ringed dragonfly – factsheet



The golden-ringed dragonfly is one of the largest British dragonflies and you are unlikely to confuse it with any other British species.

Identification

Both sexes are similar, their black bodies conspicuously marked with yellow bands and their legs marked with a dash of yellow. Their large eyes are bottle green in colour.

The female has a slightly longer body – around 85-88mm, with an ovipositor (egg-laying tube) projecting from the end of her abdomen.



Female ovipositor (egg-laying tube) – seen from the side

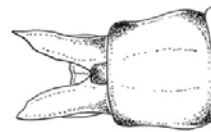


Female ovipositor (egg-laying tube) – seen from above

Males are slightly smaller – body length 72-75mm - and have small forked claspers, which they use to secure the female when mating.



Male forked claspers – seen from the side



Male forked claspers – seen from above

The average wingspan for both sexes is about 100mm. Wings are clear but may take on an orangey brown hue in aged individuals. They are strong, agile, rapid flyers and fearsome predators, capable of taking large insects such as beetles, wasps, bumble bees or even other small dragonflies and damselflies but their diet is usually made up of small flies and midges.

Distribution, habitat and behaviour

Golden-ringed dragonflies are widespread across much of Britain but tend to favour the north and west, being scarce or absent from much of central and eastern England. The first individuals appear in late May and can be seen on the wing until the end of September but they are most often seen in July and August.

On maturity, males will adopt short stretch of stream (about 100 metres long) and patrol back and forth, just above the water surface. They are aggressive to other males but will attempt to breed with any visiting female, mating on vegetation away from the water. Both sexes can be seen far from water and are often found in woodland rides as they hawk for insect prey but they are not normally found on large rivers or lakes. They are especially characteristic of hilly, moorland habitats up to an altitude of 1,500 metres or so.

After mating, the female departs alone to oviposit (lay her eggs) whilst hovering in flight, stabbing her long ovipositor – with a sewing machine needle-like action - into the mud or sand of a streambed in shallow water – low-flowing gravelly streams and drainage channels of less than two metres wide and just a few centimetres deep are preferred.

After hatching larvae live partially buried in silt with just their head and tip of abdomen showing. They are superb ambush predators and may lie in wait for several weeks before darting out to seize their prey. They take two to five years to develop depending on water temperature and prey availability. When ready for the next stage of its lifecycle, the larva will leave the stream at night and climb up the vegetation before beginning its transformation into an adult dragonfly.