

DAMSELFLIES



Damselflies are members of the Odonata suborder **Zygoptera**. With about 3,000 species worldwide in over 20 families, and several hundred across North America, dragonflies are represented by at least 60 species in the Mojave Desert region.

Damselflies share common features with their close cousins, the dragonflies, such as large heads and compound eyes, four independently moving membranous wings, legs developed for catching prey on the wing, and a life cycle of egg-aquatic larva-adult. However, damselflies differ by being smaller, have slimmer abdomens, and their eyes are **separate** from one another on the outer edges of the head. Even more noticeable in the field, damsels also differ in one conspicuous regard: at rest, most hold their wings **closed vertically** above their bodies.

Nymphs are voracious predators, feeding mainly on insects. This larval phase is the longest stage of their life, lasting several years through a dozen or more molts.

Family CALOPTERYGIDAE (Broad Wings)

American Rubyspot (*Hetaerina americana*)



Clark Co. Wetlands Pk; NV



Ash Meadows NWR; Nye County; Nevada



Measurements:

Average: Length: 2.5" Wing Span: 4"

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

large size; transparent wings with **dark basal patch**; 2-toned red-green eyes; green to brownish abdomen; (m) deep red head; red thorax with yellowish stripes; colorless wings with **bold red** basal patch; (f) green or coppery thorax; basal **wing patch less bold** than male and extends along leading edge of wings

Notes:

common; diurnal/crepuscular; usually found near water (lakes, streams, swamps, etc.) throughout most of US, e CAN and south through MEX; adults prey on small flying insects (mosquitos, flies, etc.), while nymphs eat aquatic insects

Mojave presence: native; spring into summer

Comments:

Uncommon in the Mojave, "rubies" are usually seen perched on vegetation near a source of water. I have only encountered a couple in the region. The male at the upper left found a nice stem to use while surveying his environment at the [Clark County Wetlands Park](#) in July of 2020. Later that same year, the male in the primary photo contended with an old flower bud at the [Ash Meadows National Wildlife Preserve](#). I have not seen any since.

Family COENAGRIONIDAE (Narrow Wings)

Vivid Dancer (*Argia vivida*)



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV



Mt. Potosi; Spring Mtns; NV



Mt. Potosi; Spring Mountain Range; NV



Mt. Potosi; Spring Mtns; NV



Corn Creek; DNWR; NV

Measurements:

Average: Length: 1.25" Wing Span: 2.5"

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; colorless wings with dark veins; black stigmas; thick, black, **urn-shaped** central thorax band; thinner, pinched (sometimes broken) black **humeral** (shoulder) bands; black bands and triangular marks on abdomen; (m) vivid **blue body**, paler on tip of abdomen; blue eyes, black pupils; (f) tan (gynomorphic) or light blue (andromorphic) body; central thorax band split down middle; whitish eyes, dark pupils

Notes:

common; diurnal; found in shaded or wooded areas near water in w NA; females deposit eggs on vegetation just below surface of water; adults prey on small flying insects, while nymphs eat larvae of aquatic insects

Mojave presence: native; late spring into summer

Comments:

Summer is the season for love in the Mojave for vivids, such as demonstrated by these busy couples at Mountain Springs by Potosi Mountain west of Las Vegas in July of 2019. Note the different colors of each left-hand pair, and the andromorphic female in the right-hand pair.

Zy3



Family COENAGRIONIDAE (Narrow Wings)

Powdered Dancer (*Argia moesta*)



CCWP; Las Vegas, NV



CCWP; Las Vegas, NV



Clark County Wetlands Park; Las Vegas, NV



CCWP; Las Vegas, NV



Measurements:

Average: Length: 1.3" Wing Span: 3"

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; colorless wings with dark veins; dark stigmas; 3 **thin, straight, black stripes** on thorax; thin black and white bands lining abdominal joints; gray eyes; (m) **blue body**, almost white in older males (**pruinose**); paler on tip of abdomen; **white stripes** on sides of thorax; (f) tan (gynomorphic) or lt. blue (andromorphic) thorax/body

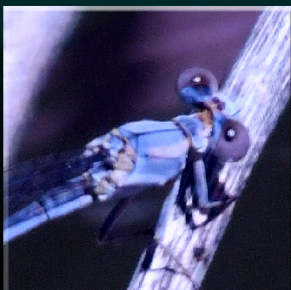
Notes:

common; diurnal; found near riparian areas of NA from e CAN, across US (except nw states), south into MEX; females deposit eggs on vegetation just below surface of water while still attached to male; adults prey on small flying insects; nymphs eat aquatic insects

Mojave presence: native; summer

Comments:

These common damsels have blue bodies like most zygopterans, but telling the genders apart in the field can be a challenge when the female is andromorphic (male-like). Males have white and black stripes on the thorax (left); females, just thin black stripes (right).



Zy4

Family COENAGRIONIDAE (Narrow Wings)

Variable Dancer (*Argia fumipennis*)



Corn Creek; Desert Nat'l Wildlife Refuge; NV

Corn Crk; Desert NWR, NV

Measurements:

Average: Length: 1.3" Wing Span: 3"

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

medium size; colorless to smoky wings; dark stigmas; 3 black stripes on thorax (**central**: thick, **straight**; **humeral**: thin, **forked**); black asymmetrically shaped abdominal bands facing towards thorax; (**m**) **purplish** body/abdomen; tip of abdomen bluish; purple eyes; (**f**) **brown** thorax/abdomen; tip of abdomen tan; brown eyes

Notes:

common; diurnal; found in riparian areas mainly in the NA, becoming less common in the interior western US states; 3 subspecies (black, smoky, violet); females deposit eggs on vegetation just below surface of water while still attached to male; adults prey on small flying insects; nymphs eat aquatic insects

Mojave presence: rare; summer to fall

Comments:

Variables are rare in the Mojave. I spotted the female above at Corn Creek in the **Desert National Wildlife Refuge** in Southern Nevada in July, 2020. So far, she is the only one I've seen in the region. Of course, animals don't know where they're not supposed to be, so any wetlands area in the desert can offer glimpses of uncommon to rare specimens. Up close and in well lit conditions (not always possible), notice the **forked humeral** (shoulder) stripes characteristic of the species.

Family COENAGRIONIDAE (Narrow Wings)

Familiar Bluet (*Enallagma civile*)



Mtn Springs; Mt. Potosi; NV



Mtn Springs; Mt. Potosi; NV



Mountain Springs; Mt. Potosi; Clark Co.; NV



Duck Creek; CCWP; NV



Duck Creek; CCWP; NV

Measurements:

Average: Length: 1.3" Wing Span: 3"

Distinguishing Field Characteristics:

small size; colorless wings; ; 3 black bands on thorax central thorax (thick, central band flanked by thinner **uniformly thick bands**); (**m**) **blue body**; very **pale blue tip of abdomen**; blue eyes, black pupils; **dark stigmas**; thin black bands on abdomen; (**f**) white to gray (sometimes bluish) body; split central thoracic band; whitish eyes, dark pupils; **white stigmas**; wide black strips on dorsal side of abdomen

Notes:

common; diurnal; found near water (ponds, streams, marshes, etc.) throughout most of US, s CAN; female deposits eggs on vegetation just below surface of water while male guards her; adults prey on small flying insects (mosquitos, flies, etc.); nymphs eat aquatic insects and plant material

Mojave presence: native; summer

Comments:

Bluets are common summer denizens of riparian areas in the Mojave region. However, for some reason, males--like the ones shown here at Mountain Springs in the pass over the Spring Mountain Range between Las Vegas and Pahrump, NV, in July of 2019--seem to be more commonly seen than females. Perhaps the girls are just shy! The ones above were photographed at **Clark Co. Wetlands Park** **Zy6** in June, 2020.