

What lies beneath

At the dragonfly morning at Orlandon Kilns last month, there were unfortunately not many dragonflies to see. A few Large Red and Azure Damselflies, plus some nice Beautiful Demoiselles on the stream but no Chasers or Emperors. It has been noticeable that this year that no Emperor Dragonflies (really big chaps!) have emerged from the pond – usually there are up to 10 large empty larval cases attached to the plants to show that they have emerged.

So we did some pond dipping instead. The pond dipping was most interesting – as well as the usual small mayfly and damselfly larvae, there were two kinds of larger larvae which were quite voracious – they started to eat the rest of our catch! Thumbing through the ID books and Google searches identified them as the larvae of both Great and Lesser Diving Beetles. And, staring into the depth of the pond for any length of time, you could see good numbers of them swimming around – some of the Great Diving Beetle larvae were huge – about 2” long and were swimming through the water in a rather creepy undulating fashion. Although we have had the pond since 2006 this is the first time I have seen these creatures in the pond. Though perhaps I should have realised – there was an adult Great Diving Beetle in the moth trap earlier in the year.



*Lesser and Greater
Diving Beetle Larvae*

So, I thought, perhaps this is the reason for the lack of dragonflies?? I had previously assumed that it was due to the poor summer last year, which meant that few eggs were actually laid, as dragonflies need good weather to fly, mate and lay eggs. But perhaps it could be that these fearsome Diving Beetle predators have eaten all the young dragonfly larvae. Or, thinking about it again, it could be that the poor summer meant few dragonfly larvae, themselves fearsome predators, to eat the Diving Beetle larvae, which is why there are so many of them this year. All I know is that it is pretty scary down there with everything eating everything else!

And it just goes to show how difficult it is to disentangle cause and effect in the natural world.