

BOOK REVIEWS

Damselflies of the Northeast. 2004. *by* Ed Lam. Biodiversity Books, Forest Hills, New York. 96 pp. ISBN 0-9754015-0-5. \$20 US.

Once in a while a landmark resource guide is produced. Ed Lam has done just that with his excellent new guide to the adult damselflies of northeastern North America. While many guides have been produced recently for Odonata (dragonflies and damselflies), none have managed to take the advances that have occurred within the realm of bird field guides and adapt them to this group of insects – until now! Unfortunately, however, it only covers one half of the order – the Zygoptera or damselflies. This suborder is, however, the one that provides the most grief and frustration for those beginning to learn how to identify Odonata.

The guide itself is relatively small and compact, measuring 5.5 by 8.5 inches, with a total of 96 pages and could, therefore, be easily carried in the field. It covers 69 species and subspecies of damselflies and is fully illustrated with more than 300 detailed paintings, drawings and photographs. The text is well written and the illustrations are nothing short of spectacular! They are so detailed that they have a photographic quality to them.

The guide begins with an introduction to damselflies, followed by a nicely written overview of their life cycle. Next, a richly illustrated, two-page spread covers all of the adult anatomical features, including wing venation, relevant to species identification. A wonderful section entitled “Species Identification” acts as a “how to” for species identification at three levels: in the field, in the hand, and under the microscope. Also included in this section are useful tips on how to catch and collect damselflies. Finally, within the introductory section, two pages provide information on how the species accounts are organized.

The species accounts themselves are well organized and attractively laid out with a full page dedicated to a single species. The illustrations include a dorsal view for males (complete with accurate wing venation – no small task!) and lateral views for both sexes. When necessary, additional lateral views illustrate different colour forms or mature versus immature individuals. Illustrations (some black and white, others in colour) are also provided, when necessary, to illustrate features such as male or female genitalia, or more detailed patterns of the head, thorax or abdomen. Key markings and features are indicated by lines pointing directly to the feature with a short description (e.g., “segments 8-10 completely blue”). Each species account contains a general description of the damselfly (complete with measurement ranges in both inches and millimeters) along with notes on its habitat, distribution and status. At the bottom of each page, a section provides detail on similar species – an indispensable feature for a field guide. Icons for each species (and sex), indicate whether it can usually be identified by binoculars, requires a hand lens, or if it a microscope is needed – this is a unique and useful feature of this guide. A silhouette is also featured providing the actual size of an average specimen. Finally, a range map is provided for each species, indicating known distribution to the county level.

Each of the three families, and most of the genera within the family Coenagrionidae (pond damsels), begin with a page introducing the family or genus and is accompanied by a photograph or two and an excellent overview of the group.

Within the genus *Enallagma* (American bluets), many females can only be reliably identified by examining details of their thorax (mesostigmal laminae) under a microscope or with a powerful hand lens. While many books and guides in the past have chosen to ignore this, Lam rises to the occasion and provides the user with an appendix illustrating these features.

Although this is, in my opinion, the best guide ever produced on the subject, it does have some faults. As far as the production is concerned, some pages are already becoming loose on my copy. Although I find it hard to put the book down, I can't say that it's been extensively used and I fear what effect a few trips in the field will have on it. I'm also disappointed in the coverage depicted in the range maps. Strictly from an Ontario perspective, it's unfortunate that the extreme southwestern tip of the province has been cut off and that more of northern Ontario is not included. From a broader Canadian perspective, the map could have been extended to the east and the north to encompass all of the Maritime Provinces and northern Quebec without having to add any species. A user from Nova Scotia or Newfoundland may not realize, for example, that the guide is actually fully applicable to their area. Along the same lines, the area of coverage could have been extended west to include Michigan, all of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin and northwestern Ontario with the addition of only two species (*Argia plana* and *Coenagrion angulatum*, the latter of which is the only Ontario species not featured in this guide). I realize that a cut-off has to be made somewhere but I think that the area covered could have been greatly increased with minimal effort.

Users from Ontario also need to be aware that Smoky Rubyspot (*Hetaerina titia*), illustrated on page 22 of the guide, does not have extensively dark wingtips in this part of their range. Rather, the dark tip on the wing is barely discernable. "Our" form is not illustrated nor is it mentioned in the text. In fact, the only mention of variation is that males may be MORE extensively marked in dark brown on the wing than is illustrated. This is unfortunate and will surely confuse many users from this part of their range – possibly leading them to misidentify Smoky Rubyspots as American Rubyspots *Hetaerina americana* (a closely related, but more common species that shares many characteristics).

The above faults are minor in the big picture. As stated earlier, in my opinion this book is the best guide ever produced for Odonata. Ed Lam has raised the bar considerably within the realm of Odonata field guides. This guide deserves a place both on the bookshelf and in the field bag of anyone with an interest in damselflies. Amateur naturalists with an interest in learning the damselflies, who have been either intimidated in the past by the technical nature of scientific treatments or frustrated with the lack of sufficient detail in the available field guides, will find that this is the guide they have been waiting for. Experienced entomologists and odonatologists will also find this book to be a wonderful and informative resource. Now we just need a companion volume for the dragonflies!

Further information on this book, including samples of the illustrations and species accounts, and how to order a copy can be found at: <http://homepage.mac.com/edlam/book.html>

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