

July 2009

Incredible Insects Dragonflies

When standing near a pond, it's almost impossible to



ignore the brightly colored insects zooming past you or perched on a twig overlooking the water. Before dragonflies can zip through the air, they begin life underwater.

Adult dragonflies lay their eggs in the water or on vegetation just below the surface. When the eggs hatch, *nymphs* emerge. These immature insects look very



different from the adults. They have a spring-loaded jaw that flies out to catch passing prey. When threatened by a predator they shoot water out of their back end to propel themselves to safety. Gills allow them to obtain oxygen from the water. As the nymphs grow, they shed their *exoskeleton*, or hard outer skin.

Finally, after spending a month to a couple of years underwater, the nymph climbs out of the pond onto a dock, cattail, or twig and sheds its exoskeleton one last time. As the adult dragonfly emerges, it dries and stiffens its wings and prepares to begin the cycle again.



Did you know?

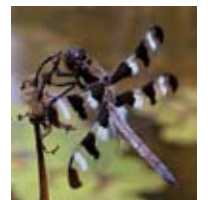
Dragonflies rest with their wings open while **damselflies**,



their smaller relatives, rest with their wings closed.

The tandem flying often seen in dragonflies is mate guarding. The male already has or soon will mate with the female. By holding on to her until she lays her eggs, he is assuring that no other males are allowed to mate with her until that batch of eggs is deposited.

Some dragonflies are capable of reaching speeds of 25 to 35 miles per hour.



Some males guard territories around the pond. If you enter their territory, they may come over and see what you are.

Dragonflies cannot sting and do not bite. But they do eat a ton of mosquitos.

Visit the Information Desk for program information.