

## SCIENCE in the Park

# Dragonflies and Damselflies

Order: Odonata

Predator

Native to Virginia



Could there be a more fascinating creature than the dragonfly? The life cycle of dragons and damsels moves between the aquatic (egg and larval stages) and the terrestrial (adult) worlds. Larger species can have life spans of up to 5 years, mostly spent as a developing larva in a water environment. Adults live from a few weeks to a few months and are ferocious predators, eating anything they can catch. They ardently defend their territories and have a unique mating position known as the 'wheel' or 'heart'. Many birdwatchers have accidentally become dragonfly enthusiasts, because of the beauty and easily observed behaviors of these unusual insects.

## Fun Facts

- The first dragonflies appeared 300 million years ago, 100 million years before the dinosaurs.
- Fossil records show that early dragonflies were the largest insects to have ever lived, with wingspans of almost 2 1/2 feet!
- There are at least 195 species of odonates in VA. In JR Park, 56 species have been recorded - 16 damselflies, and 40 dragonflies.
- Male odonates can scoop out a sperm packet from a prior mating and deposit his, to ensure that his packet will be the one used by the female.
- These aerial acrobats have been studied by the US Navy and numerous researchers to unlock the mysteries of flight. They can reach speeds of up to 60 mph.