

# BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—*from Head Naturalist Clinton*

## Baskettails

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The months of June and July are primetime for dragonfly and damselfly diversity in the Sax-Zim Bog. Many of the odonate species found in our area are flying during these months and it can be a great time to start looking closer at these winged predators of the sky. Our Bogdiversity Thursday post today will consider a group of dragonflies with interesting names, but also really cool biology! Today, we will take a closer look at the Baskettails!

In the Sax-Zim Bog, we have documented four species of baskettail: Common, Spiny, Beaverpond, and Prince Baskettails. These species are especially obvious on the landscape when they first emerge! Baskettails tend to have mass emergences, meaning that thousands of these dragonflies emerge at the same time from their nymph stage. Quite literally, they can fill the sky! This emergence is usually also sequential, with Beaverpond Baskettail being the first species to emerge (sometimes in mid-May!), followed a week or so later by Spiny, then Common, and finally Prince Baskettail towards the end of June and into July.

Baskettails are part of the Emerald dragonflies in the family Corduliidae. Members of this group of dragonflies have dark bodies, with brightly colored eyes. When looking at their eyes, it might make sense to call the group emeralds, but why name these dragonflies "baskettails?" For this answer, we need to consider female baskettails! While many odonates lay their eggs one by one in the stalks of vegetation or release blobs of eggs all at once by touching their abdomens to water, baskettails hold onto their large mass of eggs with their forked subgenital plates. This sort of has the appearance of a basket. When released, their eggs remain connected in a long strand that looks a little bit like small strings of toad eggs!

Like many emeralds, baskettails prefer acidic, boggy conditions and small streams or ponds for most of their life cycle. They may range far from water when foraging or dispersing, but they eventually will breed in areas with slow moving water. Prince Baskettail is perhaps the exception to this rule, as these impressive dragonflies like larger lakes and even rivers.

More information about these subtly beautiful dragonflies with the images below.

(Photos below by Head Naturalist Clinton)



Prince Baskettails are impressive! They are large, showy, and incredibly fliers. Usually, these dragonflies forage high above the ground, with time spent hanging in the air, adjusting with the wind as it blows. They often prove to be one of the most difficult dragonfly species to catch due to this behavior!



Beaverpond Baskettail is the earliest emerging baskettail in our area and are usually the only baskettail flying at the start of the season. The claspers of the male have two points, making them fairly easy to ID.



Spiny Baskettails are the "middle" emerger of the three smaller baskettail species. They have a distinct, downward pointing tooth on the claspers of the male. Their eyes are usually a lovely bright shade of blue, compared to the greener or browner eyes of Common and Beaverpond Baskettail.



Common Baskettails, though they can be quite common, are usually no more abundant than the other small baskettails. In the air, this species typically has large, dark patches at the base of the hindwings, which is a trait not usually shared by other baskettails.