



# Dragonflies in Catalonia

Dragons, damsels, and other wildlife in north-east Spain

Saturday 9 – Saturday 16 June 2012

(8 days)

*Our annual dragonfly trip to the Iberian Peninsula with Mike Lockwood, President of the highly active Catalan Dragonfly Study Group, is now a firm favourite on our tour calendar. We hope to see around 35-40 species, as well as a wealth of orchids, raptors and butterflies – and volcanoes! – in this highly varied north-eastern corner of Catalonia.*

Dragonfly surveying is still in its infancy in the Iberian Peninsula, but in recent years groups in Extremadura, Valencia, Andalusia, Menorca and Catalonia are finally beginning to study this fascinating group of insects in greater detail. In Catalonia the group Oxyastra is pioneering the creation of a dragonfly database and atlas. In all, 69 species of dragonfly have been recorded in Catalonia and this week's trip will be dedicated to finding the maximum species richness in the pre-Pyrenean area of La Garrotxa, in the environs of La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park.

The main habitats are grouped around the valley of the river Fluvià, the only major undammed river in Catalonia. Here fly four species of Gomphidae (English names follow Dijkstra and Lewington): Yellow and Western Clubtails and Large and Small Pincertails, as well as Western Demoiselle, Orange and White Featherlegs, and the Orange-spotted Emerald, now sadly extinct in Britain but fairly common in Catalonia.

In still-water habitats away from the river, the associated odonate fauna is more varied, and we'll be looking to separate the common Mercury Bluet from the other two similar Mediterranean species of 'blue' damselfly – Dainty and Mediterranean Bluets – and catch up with good numbers of Norfolk Hawker, Scarce Chaser, Lesser Emperor and Scarlet Darter. We should also just be in time to spot the first of the scarcer summer species such as Black Pennant, Blue-eyed Hawker, Small Spreadwing and perhaps even a migrating Vagrant Emperor.

Aside from the dragonflies, we'll be taking at least a day out to visit a higher upland area, where our target will be the flower-rich montane meadows graced by gentians and orchids, as well as a number of drier limestone meadows with a wealth of heaths, ringlets, fritillaries and blue butterflies. And at some stage, we also hope to gaze skywards to spot passing Griffon Vultures, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Honey Buzzards and Black Kites amongst the raptors, and elsewhere Bonelli's, Subalpine and Sardinian Warblers, Cirl and Rock Buntings,

Firecrest, Red-backed and Woodchat Shrikes, Alpine Swift and Crag Martin.

## Itinerary

**Day 1:** We take a scheduled flight London-Barcelona and transfer to our hotel Olot and, if time permits, will have a chance for a walk to the nearby wood of La Moixina for our first dragonflies and butterflies.

**Days 2-7:** During our stay we'll be alternating trips in the environs of Olot in the La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park and along the river Fluvià, with sorties further afield in an attempt to track down scarcer species.

We will follow the river Fluvià downstream from Olot, walking its banks where we see fit to search for the clubtails and featherlegs mentioned above, as well as Orange-spotted Emerald, Southern Skimmer, Scarlet Darter, Iberian Blue-tailed damselfly (*Ischnura graellsii*) and the first spreadwings of the year (*Lestes* spp.). Black Kites, Golden Orioles and Short-toed Treecreepers will add to our enjoyment!

At Banyoles we will spend a whole day at the famous Estany de Banyoles, one of the largest natural lakes in the Iberian Peninsula. Mike has been surveying the dragonflies of this site since 2006 and its 40 species to date make it probably the most species-rich site in the Iberian Peninsula. We should catch up with all its specialities – Scarce Chaser, Norfolk Hawker, Black Pennant and Violet Dropwing, which mix in with a multitude of commoner species such as Copper Demoiselle, Goblet-marked Damselfly, Red-veined Darter, and Southern, Keeled and Black-tailed Skimmers.

We will head towards the coast in Alt Empordà if it has rained sufficiently for the temporary pools to fill up and give us a chance for Migrant Spreadwing and Blue-eyed Hawker, although the bird life of this region, with Bonelli's Eagle, Red-rumped Swallow, Roller, Tawny Pipit, Black-eared Wheatear, Woodchat Shrike and Orphean Warbler will be hard to resist. We will also make an excursion further



inland from La Garrotxa to track down the third of the difficult Mediterranean damselflies, Mediterranean Bluet.

Another exceptional site we will visit is Can Jordà in the La Garrotxa Volcanic Zone Natural Park near Olot. Here, we will enjoy separating Dainty, Mercury and Azure Bluets, along with Goblet-marked and Small Red-eyed Damselflies, a confusion of darters and chasers and a possibility of three emperor species together. If time permits (or weather dictates!), we will also have the chance to enter into one of the local extinct volcanoes and walk on its lava flow.

On one day we will leave the dragonflies in peace and head into an upland area with montane meadows full of black vanilla, frog, burnt-tip, fragrant and greater butterfly orchids, woods that hide Solomon's seals and bird's-nest orchids and cliffs with Pyrenean and livelong saxifrages and the delicate purple flowers of *Ramonda myconi*. The butterflies will be at their best at this time of year: Berger's Clouded Yellow, Cleopatra, Short-tailed, Provençal Short-tailed, Adonis, Mazarine and Escher's Blues, Sloe, Spanish Purple and Ilex Hairstreaks, Southern White Admiral, Meadow, Violet and High Brown Fritillaries, Chestnut Heath, and many, many more.

**Day 8:** We return to Barcelona and, if time permits, will make a quick visit to the lagoons at Sils, just off the motorway.

## TRIP DETAILS

**ACCOMMODATION:** We stay in a medium quality hotel in Olot, with some dinners in local restaurants.

**PRINCIPAL LEADER:** Mike Lockwood

**NUMBERS:** Max. 12 clients

**PRICE:** £ 1,595

**Single supp.:** £ 145

**Deposit:** £ 300 per person

The price per person includes return scheduled flight from London – Barcelona/Gerona, airport taxes, 8 nights' accommodation, all meals, transport and the services of the leaders.

The price excludes holiday insurance, drinks, and other personal expenses.

\*For an ex-flight cost of the tour (Barcelona or Gerona/Barcelona or Gerona) please deduct £ 125 per person from the tour cost.



Western Clubtail and (right above) Scarlet Darter with Broad-bodied Chaser (Photos: Martin Fowler/Nature Portfolio)