

Ruby meadowhawk dragonfly

Sympetrum rubicundulum

Later this summer be on the lookout for one of Chicago's most voracious predators, the Ruby meadowhawk dragonfly. They start their life in ephemeral ponds and other spring season backwaters. Larvae have huge jaws and are voracious predators, eating aquatic insects, zooplankton, amphipods, and other small creatures, and even the occasional small fish. Adults emerge in late June to early September.

The symbol for Friends' 40th anniversary celebration, the ruby meadowhawk is an important indicator of improving water quality because it spends its first life phases under water as egg then larva and its adult stage hunting from above.

The ruby meadowhawk is a smaller-than-average sized dragonfly with a body length of only 1.3 inches. They are in the family of skimmer dragonflies, meaning they hunt other flying insects while skimming the surface of the water. They are strong fliers and are able to move each of their four wings independently. Compared to a mosquito, meadowhawks combine the speed of a jet plane with the maneuverability of a helicopter.

The ruby meadowhawk is distinguished by a yellow-brown face, brown to dark-red abdomen with black lateral stripes, black legs and dark wing veins. Adult females have a yellow-brown appearance, while males have bright red markings and can be difficult to distinguish from the cherry-faced meadowhawk.

Ruby meadowhawks are found from the northern Great Plains to the Atlantic. They prefer temporary ponds and marshes and are found occasionally at larger lakes and slow-moving rivers. The season to observe these fascinating creatures is coming. In a few short months be on the lookout for an emerging larva or get out your binoculars and scan the waters for a flash of red.

