



Friends of Thorn Creek Woods

# Thorn Creek News

Summer 2020

## Dragonflies and Damselflies

From time to time, we feature articles covering various life forms of Thorn Creek Woods to remind you that we have a lot more to see than just trees and wildflowers. In this small essay, we feature Dragonflies and Damselflies. We know everyone has seen them darting about the woods, but are not sure that everyone recognizes the great diversity of these insects. Dragonflies and damselflies are without a doubt the most elegant creatures in the class Insecta. Their large size, resplendent colors and ceaseless activity make them an especially intriguing group. Adults are rather simple in design with an exceedingly long abdomen, four elongate netted wings, huge bulging compound eyes and a short antenna. This general description fits both insects with the damselfly differing from the dragonfly in that the abdomen is much more slender and wings may be folded to the side when at rest. The dragonfly, on the other hand, has wings that remain like those of a conventional airplane in a fixed position when the insect is at rest. Both are tied to aquatic habitats in that they must return to water to reproduce, and lead dual lives with the first stage as an aquatic nymph, and the second as an active flying adult often ranging far from the water.

One of the most delightful aspects of these insects is the variety of color and pattern seen in adults. They are as variegated as any of the birds or butterflies. Almost any combination of color is likely from rich magenta to exotic blues, from emerald green to blue-green, from crimson reds to shades of orange and brown. They may be painted with spots and stripes or other geometric forms.

Both belong to the Order Odonata, which means “toothed”, and have been around for at least 250 million years, stemming from the Pennsylvanian where they were large, sometimes with a wingspan of over two feet. Odonatas have declined considerably in size, but are still large enough to easily attract attention. Speaking of attracting attention, their method of mating in which they form essentially a circle, often while flying, is also a rather unique phenomenon among insects. This may last for a few seconds or for many minutes.

A few of the species that we have seen in Thorn Creek include the Green Darner with a green thorax and blue abdomen; Comet Darner with green thorax and bright red abdomen; Swamp Darner with a combination black and green striped thorax and abdomen; and, the Swamp Darner, a mostly black creature.



Clubtails are represented by the Dragonhunter, black and yellow in coloration with strong patterns and the Black Shouldered Spinytail, which is a black and green patterned insect.

Other species include our most common, the Common Whitetail with white abdomen and large black spots on the wings; Painted Skimmer, which is largely orange-brown with orange wing netting; Great Blue Skimmer with small black wing spots; Eastern Pondhawk, a mainly blue insect with green eyes; and, the Banded Pennant, blue-black with many black wing spots.

These are but a few of the many species we have seen in Thorn Creek. Since none of us are experts, we may not be exactly right in their identification

but we know we are blessed with quite an array. Two of the best places to make observations of our dragonflies and damselflies are at the Prairie Sampler in front of the Nature Center and on the trail as it moves into the floodplain near the bridge. Good hunting.

-Jim Marzuki, reprinted from Thorn Creek News, July 1997

## Dragonfly Watching

When finding birds becomes more a chore than a pleasure, as in early summer when trees are fully leafed out and the migration is largely over, many birders turn their attention to insects. Butterfly watching, of course, has long been popular. One of the early Peterson Field Guides (from 1951), for example, was *Butterflies and Moths* with hundreds of hand-colored drawings. The most recent comprehensive guides are the *Butterflies through Binoculars* series by Jeffrey Glassberg, two volumes, eastern and western, with photos and descriptions of all North American species. Dragonfly watching now has its own *Dragonflies through Binoculars*, including color photos, descriptions and range maps (but no keys) for all 307 species found in North America. A better choice for a field guide to local dragonflies, I think, is the *Color Guide to the Common Dragonflies of Wisconsin*, pocket-sized, with excellent photos, and treating most of the common species of northeastern Illinois.



The second indispensable element in dragonfly watching is the binocular itself. Here we are talking about close-focusing binoculars (8 feet or less), which allow one to observe the perched dragonfly, or one in flight if you are adept enough, as if it were in the hand. Descriptions of various styles and makes of binoculars now regularly include close-focus distance, together with traditional information on field-of-view and magnification.

-Jon Mendelson, reprinted from introduction portion of Dragonflies article in Thorn Creek News, Fall 2010



## August at Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve

Thorn Creek Nature Preserve trails are open to the public and visitors are urged to adhere to the state's guidelines for their safety and the safety of others.

Thorn Creek Nature Center will remain closed to the public. The previously scheduled public programs are canceled, but see our webpage [www.tcwoods.org](http://www.tcwoods.org) for programs offered. Also see the websites for Forest Preserve District of Will County [www.reconnectwithnature.org](http://www.reconnectwithnature.org) and Village of Park Forest [www.villageofparkforest.com](http://www.villageofparkforest.com).

Members of the public must continue to help limit the spread of COVID-19 by practicing social distancing of at least 6 feet as recommended by health authorities. We encourage the use of face masks when social distancing isn't possible. Wear a face covering when inside the nature center or when outside and unable to maintain 6-foot social distancing.

Our Naturalists continue to work at the nature center and from home. April is working one-on-one with volunteers for trail projects, nature center cleaning and other projects. She can be reached as usual by phone and email: 708-747-6320 and [thorn\\_creek@att.net](mailto:thorn_creek@att.net).

The Commission resumed meeting, via zoom in June, and the Friends Board met under the Central Park shelter.

We miss you and hope you are well. We urge local members to visit the preserve trails. It's been a particularly lovely spring and summer. Come visit!

## Be a FRIEND OF THORN CREEK WOODS

\_\_\_ Membership \$20 \_\_\_ Organization & Business \$50 \_\_\_ Life Membership \$200

☐ New Member \_\_\_ Renewing Member \_\_\_

\_\_\_ I'd like to help as a volunteer at Thorn Creek Nature Center, please call me.

\_\_\_ I am donating \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the **Thorn Creek Woods Capital Fund** for improvements in the Nature Center building & in the Preserve.

In memory of \_\_\_\_\_ In honor of \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ I am donating \$\_\_\_\_\_ to the **Jim Marzuki Memorial Fund** - to make a difference in Thorn Creek public programming.

\_\_\_ I am donating \$\_\_\_\_\_ to **Friends** general purposes.

\$\_\_\_\_\_ Total Enclosed

Name \_\_\_\_\_

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E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

Make checks payable to: FRIENDS OF THORN CREEK WOODS, Box 159, Richton Park, IL 60471



Annual Renewal Date is May 1st

## Sounds of Insects Hike



Sunday, August 2

Rain date: Sunday, August 9

6:30-8:30 p.m.

Ages 18 and older.

Free! 9 registrants maximum.

Registration required by Monday, July 27

Join us as we venture out on the trail at dusk listening for musical and mechanical insect sounds. Many insects become more active as the sun goes down. We'll listen and learn the distinct sounds of common local species and why they make these sounds.

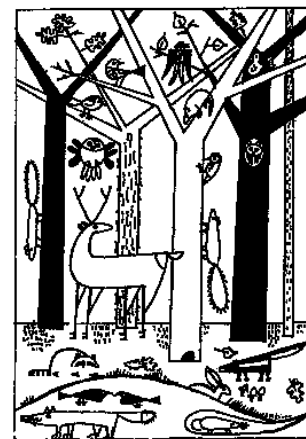
Meet in front of nature center. Please bring your own hand sanitizer, face mask, binoculars, water bottle and be prepared to follow the social distancing of 6 feet.

## Friends Board

Friends of Thorn Creek Woods Annual Membership In-Person Meeting is canceled. The Board plans to have mail-in ballots to elect officers.

In the meantime, we are looking for more voices on the Board. We meet every third Monday at 10:30 a.m. If you would like to attend, just call the nature center to verify where the meeting will be held in these COVID-19 times.

Do come to meetings or contact the nature center with any questions, ideas, concerns or offers of help.



Please note that  
the Audubon Society  
no longer collects stamps

Friends of Thorn Creek Woods  
Box 32  
Richton Park, IL 60471

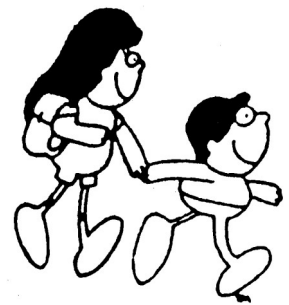
Renew Now!

Newsletter editor:  
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## Visiting Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve

The Commission is urging members of the public to adopt all outdoor recreation safety measures recommended by the state as they visit Thorn Creek Woods Nature Preserve.

- Bring alcohol-based hand sanitizer (containing at least 60 percent alcohol) and face coverings.
- \* Practice social distancing by keeping at least 6 feet of distance between yourself and others.
- Stay home if you are sick or feeling any symptoms, such as fever, coughing, troubled breathing, and/or flu-like symptoms.
- \* Visit alone or with members of your household.
- \* Stay local; visit preserves that are closest to where you live.
- \* If you arrive at a preserve and crowds are forming, please return another time/day to visit.
- \* Cover your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throw the tissue in the trash. If you don't have a tissue, cough or sneeze into your upper arm/elbow.



For information on the coronavirus contact your County Health Department.