

# Dragonflies of the Ottawa-Gatineau Region

Article and photos by Chris Traynor

## Species Profile 11

### The Eastern Least Clubtail (*Stylogomphus albistylus*)

Family: Gomphidae



*Male Eastern Least Clubtail*

The Eastern Least Clubtail is the smallest member of the Gomphidae family (the clubtails) in our region. An exotic looking creature, it is the only representative of its genus in our region and in Eastern North America. Like several others species that I've profiled, this is a very difficult dragonfly to encounter without a deliberate search, but one that is certainly worth the effort, as it is a most attractive and interesting dragonfly.

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Though locally scarce (Bracken & Lewis), this little gem can be found with some effort in the right habitat. I have only encountered them on small or mid-sized streams with a decent current. Streamside vegetation is also a habitat preference. The males are most often encountered sitting on small rocks directly in or beside the stream. From these rocks, they patrol up and down their territory. The females are seen only rarely as they tend to frequent the trees and other streamside vegetation.



*These clubtails can be as small as damselflies. Here, a male Eastern Least Clubtail rests next to a Powdered Dancer (*Argia moesta*), one of the region's largest damselflies.*

Eastern Least Clubtails can be difficult to see with their cryptic markings and are easily spooked by human presence. However, as is often the case, if you remain still and take up a position by a rock in the stream, you may very well be rewarded by this clubtail returning to its perch. I was quite pleased to have one land on my camera one time, facing me directly. Their large eyes lend them a very pleasing expression face to face.

As you might expect from a small dragonfly, they can also be put off by the passing of larger dragonflies. They fly fast and very low over the water in such cases and head for the trees and shrubs close by, making them a difficult catch. They are very hard to keep track of in flight, and I have yet to see this species predated by other dragonflies. They seem to tolerate the presence of other odonata of similar size, and I've seen them in the company of damselflies and the Mustached Clubtail (*Gomphus adelphus*), another smallish species that also likes to sit on protruding rocks in the water.

The males and females are very similar in appearance, with a few differences. Females have much thicker abdomens and have a clubless appearance. The males have very thin abdomens, making the flare of the club rather more noticeable. It is still, by average clubtail standards, a small club.

The males and females both have white appendages at the abdomen tip, but those of the males are larger and more easily seen. As well, the females tend to have slightly thicker yellow rings on the abdomen.

*Female; note the much thicker abdomen.*



### ID Hints

Female:

- Boldly marked in black and yellow
- Heavily striped thorax
- Black abdomen with yellow rings
- Bright green eyes

Male:

- Coloured like female
- Much thinner abdomen
- White appendages



*Obelisking male; note the very thin abdomen and the white appendages at the tip of the abdomen.*



*A young male with blue eyes.*



↑ A freshly emerged teneral.  
Photo by Mary Ann Perron.

## When and Where to Look for Eastern Least Clubtails

*Stylogomphus albistylus* is a true summer dragonfly. I start seeing them in mid-June and throughout July, but by August their numbers have certainly dwindled. I've seen them early in the morning and in the late afternoon, so any time of day is a good time to look for them as long as the sun is shining. True sun lovers, they will do a vanishing act when the cloud cover rolls in.

Eastern Least Clubtails are found more easily on the Quebec side of our region. They are most readily found on smaller streams with a sandy or rocky substrate. Streams that have overhanging vegetation are also favoured. As well, exposed rocks in the stream will make finding this species easier as they are virtually impossible to find when sitting in vegetation.

On the Ottawa side, they have been found along the Mississippi River at Blakeney Rapids (the small streams that cut in from the river here are worth a check) and they are also found near Arnprior at Waba Creek.

## Possible Confusables

For now, there really is no species in our region that could be confused with the Eastern Least Clubtail. Its tiny size and striking appearance are unique. However, the Northern Pygmy Clubtail (*Lanthus parvulus*) is very similar. Though in a different genus now, years ago these two species were both in the genus *Lanthus*. This was changed in the last century (Needham et al. 2014). The Northern Pygmy Clubtail has not been recorded in Ontario yet, but has been found within a few hundred kilometres in Quebec and may someday be found in the Ottawa-Gatineau district.

## Literature Cited

- Needham, J., M. Westfall, and M. May. 2014. *Dragonflies of North America*. 3rd ed. Scientific Publishers, Gainesville, Florida, 2014.
- Bracken, B., and C. Lewis. 2008. A Checklist of the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Ottawa-Gatineau. *Trail & Landscape* 42(3): 115-131.