

Bar-winged Skimmer



Bar-winged Skimmer (*Libellula axilena*) – 2.3", 60-62 mm

Flight Record:

(6/06-8/13)
Seen most mid-June thru mid-July

Uncommon

Habitat:

Sunny, shallow, marshy pools, puddles.

First Glance:

Large, blue (male) to brown (female), w/ dark stripe & dark head. Checkered wing edges. Perches often on tall stems.

Compare:
Skimmers:
Great Blue & Slaty



M

Powder blue on base of hind wing, black abdomen stripe, & black bars/spots along wing edge & base



M

Dark eyes – Great Blue Skimmer has green eyes



F



F

Female has dark face spot – Great Blue Skimmer does not



F

Notes from the field – Bar-winged Skimmer:

One of our less common skimmers, this dragonfly has relatively specific habitat needs. It prefers very shallow marshy pools in the full sun. If there's enough water for fish, it's too deep for Bar-winged Skimmers. And of course shallow pools in the full sun tend to quickly evaporate and dry up, so stable populations in Northern Va. are few and far between. The similar Great Blue Skimmer also likes shallow water, but is much more common. One reason being that they can handle partly shady forest pools and forest swamps, both too dark for Bar-wings. Bar-wings appears to be slightly more common in our coastal plain parks (near Mason Neck and Accotink Bay), although I also found a decent population in western Fairfax on a marshy power line easement with several large, sunny puddles.



The resemblance to Great Blue Skimmers, at least in mature males, is superficial. When I first saw photos, I wasn't sure if I would be able to tell the males apart in the field. But the first time I saw one on a sunny June morning flying over a marshy pool, it jumped out as being unlike any skimmer I'd seen. The combo of light, powdery blue and multiple, black markings (especially the dark head and black abdomen stripe) are unique among N. Va. dragonflies. Immatures and females are much harder. Bar-wings of both have a dark face spot, while Great Blues have all white faces. Learn and compare their field marks to Slaty Skimmer females and immatures as well.