

common whitetail

Plathemis lydia

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Arthropoda
Class: Insecta
Order: Odonata
Family: Libellulidae

ILLINOIS STATUS

common, native

FEATURES

As its name suggests, the common whitetail is one of the most common dragonflies and is widespread throughout North America. Males have dark brown eyes, face, and thorax, with two pale, faintly indicated strips on the sides. The abdomen is white or pale blue, (appearing dusty in mature individuals) with a wide black band near the tip of the tail and black streaks at the wing base. In mature individuals, this is paired with white markings at wing bases. Females have brown eyes, face, and thorax with two white to yellow stripes on the sides. Females have a brown abdomen dotted with white to pale yellow spots then lines taking diagonal direction along the sides. Females have three dark spots on each of their wings, distinctly different from the streaks on male individuals.

BEHAVIORS

Most perch on the ground, rocks, and logs, usually low and in the open when away from water. They capture small insects passing by in flight. Males perch at the waterside or fly back and forth along the shore. They are strongly territorial and aggressive to other male whitetails. Females visit mating sides every few days. Mating occurs briefly in flight for around three seconds. The male guards the female while she lays 25 to 50 eggs with each tap, tapping the water near floating vegetation or in mud. They like lakes, ponds, or slow streams, either natural or man-made. The larvae tolerate many conditions but thrive in mud bottoms of lakes/ponds/streams. They are found throughout Illinois. They range all across North America, from the Atlantic to the Pacific Coast, north into British Columbia, south to the border, and even into east Mexico. There are some population gaps in arid western states.

ILLINOIS RANGE



female

© Mary Kay Rubey



male

© Mary Kay Rubey



Aquatic Habitats

lakes, ponds and reservoirs; rivers and streams

Woodland Habitats

none

Prairie and Edge Habitats

none