

# BOGDIVERSITY THURSDAY



—from *Head Naturalist Clinton*

## Whiteface Dragonflies

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With the recent rain and less-than-wintery conditions in the Sax-Zim Bog, Head Naturalist Clinton has been thinking about warmer times and the insects that comes with it! While we are likely to not have a very snowy holiday season this year, there is perhaps a chance for us to wish for a different kind snowy-white. Let's take a look at a small group of dragonflies, one of our earliest to fly in the Spring... the Whitefaces!

Dragonflies in the genus *Leucorrhinia* are called the whitefaces. These small skimmers have a very bright white frons, which is the term for the front of the dragonfly's face. As skimmers, these dragonflies have somewhat wide, longish wings that they use to patrol ponds, lakes, and slow-moving streams. Hudsonian and Dot-tailed Whitefaces are perhaps the 3rd or 4th species of dragonfly or damselfly to emerge in the Spring in our area.

Whitefaces look very similar to one another and can be very tricky to ID without closer inspection! Globally, there are 14 species in the genus *Leucorrhinia*, all of which are found in the Northern

Hemisphere. They are well adapted to cold conditions, with a few species found at the northern limits of Russia, Canada, and Norway! We have documented four species in the Sax-Zim Bog, with a 5th species likely to occur that just hasn't been documented well yet.

Like all dragonflies and damselflies, whitefaces spend most of their life in their nymph stage. Some species of dragonfly (like Dragonhunter) might spend as long as 7 years in their nymph stage to fly as adults for a couple of months at the most. Since whitefaces are smaller dragonflies, they may be on the wing as adults for a month or more. As nymphs, whitefaces (and most skimmers) are referred to as crawlers. Their nymphs have short, wide bodies, with long, spindly legs they use to crawl along the bottom of slow moving or still bodies of water. Usually, this means small, roadside ditches or ponds.

As adults, whitefaces are quite active and are fun to watch from your local boat landing or high perch above a roadside stream. They often make brief patrols, chasing other dragonflies out of their territories. Males might be seen fighting over territories, or over females that are looking to mate and lay eggs. While their territories are not usually very large, they often overlap with a number of other whitefaces!

Whitefaces are perch hunting species, meaning, they don't actively fly around seeking out prey. Instead, they prefer to spend time on one perch, waiting and watching for passing insects.

When a target is found, they making quick, fast flights to capture their prey.

More information on these stunning little dragonflies can be found with the photos below!

(Photos by Head Naturalist Clinton)



Belted Whiteface is one of the larger whitefaces in our area. This species is quite common along the edges of highly vegetated ponds and lakes. It looks quite similar to Frost Whiteface and can be ID'd by looking at wing venation!



Dot-tailed Whiteface reaches its northerly limits in our area! This species, however, can be found around the edges of most lakes in the Sax-Zim Bog. A handsome species, Dot-tailed Whiteface gets its name from the bright yellow spot towards the tip of the abdomen of the nearly all black males.



Frosted Whiteface might not be a terribly spectacular looking dragonfly, but it is a species quite unique to our area. Much more limited in its distribution than its relatives, Frosted Whiteface is only found around the Great Lakes Region and the boreal type forests of New England!



Hudsonian Whiteface is a common species of bogs and cold water in Minnesota. This is one of our smaller species of dragonfly in the state and is one of Head Naturalist Clinton's favorite dragonflies.

They have beautiful red wing veins that cut through the dark hindwing triangles at the base of the hindwings of this species.