

Outings and Events Stories

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Dragonflies & Damselflies hike

by: *Charlie Haynes: Georgia ForestWatch member*



I never cease to be amazed at what goes on in the grass. When I was a kid my father told me to never come to him and say I was bored. He said that with a magnifying glass I should be able to learn and entertain myself for hours on end... and he gave me a magnifying glass. I still have it, like a talisman. I worked for years at universities, commercial businesses and as a self-employed photographer and graphic designer, weaving in nature study when time allowed. Some years, there was little time to "go out," so my nature "walks" entailed settling in my backyard or anyone's backyard. There's always stuff to see. It's fun to keep a little list of the things that pop up when you're just taking the garbage out or watering the plants.

Now, a bit retired, my wife and I are able to go on trips under the auspices of Georgia ForestWatch and of our own making.

After all, Georgia is an amazing state for nature lovers, from the mountains to the sea. It's not difficult to make up a trip to any of the state parks, wildlife preserves or national wildlife areas and it always gives us something to look forward to.

Recently we went to the Chattahoochee River National Recreation Area, at Johnson Ferry Road for a walk with Giff Beaton, author of *The Dragonflies and Damselflies of Georgia and the Southeast*, sponsored by Georgia ForestWatch, specifically to see, learn about and identify

Odonates; Dragonflies and Damselflies. A trip with Giff is like no other. I always come home fired up to learn more. We had a lack of sun and the dragonflies were reluctant to show themselves but we shifted gears and started in on wildflowers, turtles, birds, spiders, butterflies, and flies.



Beaton explained that dragonflies and damselflies are not able to regulate heat internally on their own and it takes a while for them to "warm up" for flight and hunting. Early in the day, intermittent sun means intermittent sightings and that described our situation the day of the outing. Conversely, if the sun gets too hot, they can be found in the shade under leaves and on the shady side of rocks and trees because they can't tolerate the rise in body temperature direct sunlight brings. They're at work all the time, hunting, laying eggs and staying just out of the reach of photographers.

In every tree, bush and tuft of grass there are lives unfolding, most often without our knowledge and certainly without our help. Anyone can start a study of any part of one and spend the rest of their life never getting it all. I study spiders wherever I am. There is never a shortage of material whether I'm in downtown Atlanta, in the mountains of Italy or in the salt marsh on the Georgia coast.

More than likely, no one reading this needs to be told much about nature, so this is about being a part of something always bigger than ourselves, however small the individual participants. It's a real pleasure to have taken this trip together.