

Confirmation of *Austrophlebia costalis* (Southern Giant Darner) in Victoria

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Abstract

Austrophlebia costalis (Tillyard, 1907) is an enormous dragonfly (Odonata: Telephlebiidae) endemic to the east coast of Australia. Previously it had been recorded “not much further south than the Bega area” (G. Theischinger, pers. comm.) so this discovery extends its range by approximately 100km into eastern Victoria.

This article discusses the discovery and my observations at the currently only known site in Victoria for this species.

Discussion

I first visited this site, the Wingan River at Boundary Track, Croajingolong National Park (37.690°S, 149.492°E) in January of 2009. This section of the river is mostly rocky with large, deep pools separated by short rapids. It is a picturesque, warm-temperate rainforest valley dominated with *Tristaniopsis laurina* (Kanooka or Water Gum).

During visits in previous years a very large, light-brown, swift-flying dragonfly was observed. The probability that this was indeed *Austrophlebia costalis* (Southern Giant Darner) seemed high but conclusive evidence eluded me. Instead, *Austrocordulia refracta* was serendipitously discovered at the site last season (24 December 2011) – very rare in Victoria.

It was observed that the males of this unknown dragonfly patrolled around the edge of the large pool, most interested where there was debris such as logs. Therefore on this trip (24-27 January 2013) I based most of my time where large and small semi-submerged logs lay, rather than at the rapids (where crossing the river is easy but which they tended to ignore).

I was rewarded by seeing numerous flybys of males, particularly in the mornings and evenings of warm days. From a distance I also observed an ovipositing female. On a cooler day with a morning and afternoon rain-shower these dragonflies appeared more often throughout the day and it was then that I was able to finally photograph one of these creatures from close quarters. Sitting on a log beside the river with my feet resting on another, semi-submerged log a female landed beside me and went about her business. I also recorded a video of this: <http://youtu.be/MoUVLilzPwQ>



Austrophlebia costalis ♀, 27 January 2013, Wingan River, Croajingolong National Park

There were at least 4 individuals sighted, as three males were observed simultaneously and of course there was the female ovipositing. In my estimation there were probably 3-4 males and one or two females active at the site.

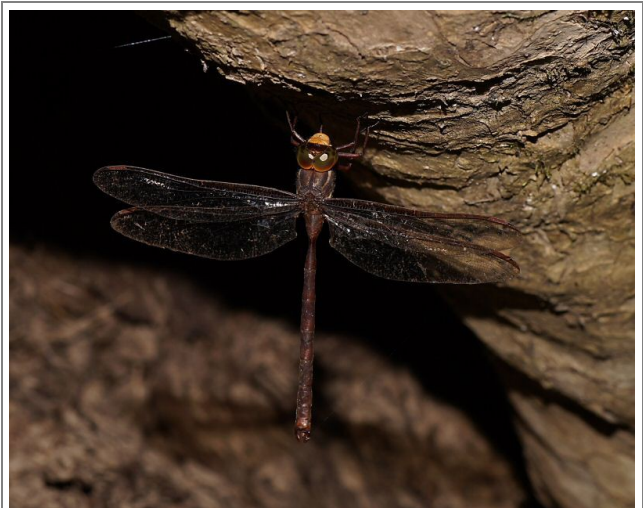
Males seem to be attracted to red, as indeed these insects themselves are predominantly red-brown in color. After a little rain I was by the river with my bright-red umbrella leaning up against the bank. The males tackled this several times, presumably distracted by the color and attempting

to grasp a female that wasn't actually present. They did also seem to pause at a rusty pipe where I spent most of my time.

Other *odonata* sighted personally at this Wingan River site are: *Austroaeschna pulchra*, *Austroaeschna unicornis*, *Austroagrion watsoni*, *Austroargiolestes icteromelas*, *Austrocordulia refracta*, *Austrogomphus guerini*, *Austrogomphus ochraceus*, *Austrolestes cingulatus*, *Cordulephya montana*, *Diphlebia lestoides*, *Hemicordulia australiae*, *Hemigomphus gouldii*, *Notoaeschna sagittata*, *Rhadinosticta simplex* and *Synlestes weyersii*. This is the only current known site for *A. refracta* in Victoria. *C. montana* is also rare in Victoria. Identity of *Hemigomphus* uncertain due to similarity between *H. gouldii* and *H. heteroclytus*.

Other fauna personally observed include *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* (Platypus), *Papilio aegeus* (Orchard Swallowtail Butterfly), *Physignathus lesueurii howittii* (Gippsland Water Dragon), *Egernia saxatilis* (Black Rock Skink) and *Litoria nudidigita* (Leaf Green Tree Frog).

After preparing the original report for the *Victorian Entomologist* I visited Raymond Creek (in Snowy River National Park) on 8-9 March 2013 mainly for this dragonfly and did indeed observe *Austrophlebia costalis* several times along the length of the walking track. A perched male was photographed at 37.4758°S, 148.2991°E and an ovipositing female was photographed the following day nearby. This extends the known range by a further 100km.

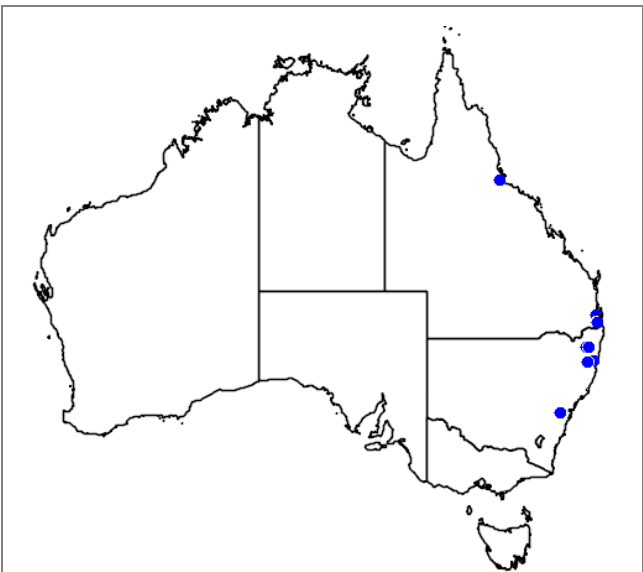


Austrophlebia costalis ♂, 8 March 2013, Raymond Creek, Snowy River National Park

Locations

The map to the right shows the locations of public records previously available.

Their apparent habitat preference means other suitable sites are very limited in Victoria to a few in east Gippsland. Sites I have visited on the Thurra River are enclosed by trees and there are no large, open pools. Other tributaries to the Snowy River may be suitable. Much of the Genoa River I have visited does not contain *Tristaniopsis laurina*. Broadribb is a healthy-looking river lined with these trees however the water flow would seem too substantial although once again it may have suitable tributaries.



Previous public records courtesy

<http://bie.ala.org.au/species/Austrophlebia+costalis>

This document:

http://photos.rnr.id.au/reports/Austrophlebia_costalis_2013.pdf