

Cyrano Darner: The Master Naturalist Logo



Darners are mostly large, strong flying dragonflies, usually brightly and distinctively patterned in blue and green. They typically patrol margins of ponds, lakes, and marshes, and seldom alight except to roost for the night (Leahy 1987).

The Cyrano Darner (*Nasiaeschna pentacantha*), the only dragonfly classified in the *Nasiaeschna* genus, is the logo of the Master Naturalist program. The Cyrano Darner is named for its long forehead, reminiscent of the nose of the literary character Cyrano de Bergerac. The Cyrano Darner stays in or close to forest habitats, and does not forage in the open or in swarms. It commonly hunts with a slow flight along and through branches overhanging a stream. The mesmerizing male performs territorial patrols, usually seen in the morning sunlight. They fly slowly to and fro with their continuously flickering wings held up at an angle while sometimes suddenly darting at invading dragonflies. A second uncommon type of patrol is low through the shade to examine water-soaked logs where females lay eggs (Dunkle 2000).

Identification:

The Cyrano Darner is 2.7 inches long. Males are easy to recognize by their tapered abdomen and distinctive patrol flight. Eyes are dark blue, thorax is dark brown with green stripes. The abdomen has mid-dorsal and lateral interrupted blue-green stripes. The abdomen tapers from base to tip in males but is stout and cylindrical in females. Their greenish-blue forehead projects forward and makes up 1/3 of the length of the head (Dunkle 2000).

Habitat:

Sheltered forest ponds, swampy streams and lake coves.

Why did we choose the Cyrano Darner dragonfly as our program logo?

The Cyrano Darner was chosen as the Master Naturalist program logo for many reasons. First, dragonflies in general are beautiful, interesting creatures. They are widely distributed and accessible and even the most urban of urbanites are likely to have seen them “in person”. The size of the dragonfly made it easy to use in a logo and the darner family has the most classic dragonfly shape with the Cyrano darner having the most beautiful coloration especially in the male. A cruiser may have also worked, but the Cyrano was the most beautiful we thought. The beauty of the detail, the structure and the venation of the wings in the Cyrano Darner made it very appropriate for capturing the “19th Century naturalist’s field notebook look we were trying to achieve with the logo. The idea of capturing that much detail in a creature that small says a lot about not only love of nature but also the value for scientific accuracy. Forrest Mitchell’s Digital Dragonfly Museum (<http://www.dragonflies.org>) inspired us early on because most of the specimens were collected by Forrest and his assistants. We wanted the logo to be an actual

species and not just a pretty drawing. The Digital Dragonfly Museum specimens were captured and refrigerated to make them dormant and then scanned using a flatbed scanner and a mouse pad with a hole cut in it to keep from crushing the specimen. The scanning helped re-warm the specimen and when it was done the original was released unharmed. That shoestring creativity to capture accurate images (avoiding the loss of color that happens when you kill a specimen) and meticulous attention to detail seemed like a great attainable example of what a naturalist does. When the program was implemented statewide in 1998 we chose the Cyrano Darner as the program logo from several other species drawings which are also represented in the program today. At the time, we wanted a logo that wouldn't be confused with those of other nature organizations and since dragonflies were not yet seen very often in logos--unlike oak leaves, horned lizards, bluebonnets and other emblems of Texas flora and fauna--we chose it. Of course dragonflies are everywhere now, but who knew?!?

References

Dunkle, S. W., 2000. Dragonflies through binoculars: A field guide to the dragonflies of North America. Oxford University Press, Inc., New York, NY.

Leahy, C., 1987. Peterson First Guides: Insects, A simplified field guide to the common insects of North America. Houghton Mifflin Company, New York, NY.