

## Off-season Homework Pays Dividends

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There is an odonate “off-season” during winter in most regions of the contiguous U.S., except for some locations along the southern border and Pacific coast. Think about it this way: winter is either the end of the last odonate-hunting season or the beginning of the next one. We prefer the latter mindset.

Planning for the next season is a good way to stay connected with odonates during the winter months. One off-season activity that can pay big dividends in the future is to research sites for finding new life-list species of dragonflies and damselflies, especially rare and uncommon species. During the winter of 2017–2018, WS and MB independently mined online odonate-related information resources and records databases in search of potential sites for finding Sable Clubtail (*Stenogomphurus rogersi*) in Virginia in Fairfax County (WS) and Albemarle County (MB).

### Fairfax County, Virginia

WS used Google Earth to virtually explore the site of a small stream in Fairfax County where Sable Clubtail was discovered by Kevin Munroe, former manager of Huntley Meadows Park. The stream was rejected as practically inaccessible, in part due to residential development since Kevin found the site in June 2012.

WS recalled seeing Sable Clubtail on a species list for one of several sites surveyed regularly by a group of volunteers coordinated by Jim Waggener, in association with the Audubon Society. He contacted Jim and asked for information regarding sightings of *S. rogersi* by the survey group. Jim sent an e-mail to all members of the survey group; Bob Blakney kindly responded by sending a photo taken on 8 June 2012 and providing guidance for finding the location.

As it turns out, only one Sable Clubtail was seen by the survey group in 2012 and that was the last sighting of the species for the next six years. Jim’s group surveys the site once a month, and the adult flight period for *S. rogersi* is estimated to last approximately one month. WS speculates the six-year gap in sightings might be explained by the fact that the survey dates didn’t coincide with this relatively brief adult flight period.

WS scouted the Blakney site for the first time on 1 December 2017. Fred Siskind kindly provided guidance that helped focus the search area. WS started actively hunting for adult Sable Clubtail in mid-May 2018, and 4 June 2018 was his last fruitless search. The off-season homework paid dividends for the first time on 8 June (Figure 1), and 5 July was the last date when Sable Clubtail was observed at this site.

The habitat in which this small population of Sable Clubtail in



Figure 1. Sable Clubtail (*Stenogomphurus rogersi*), Fairfax County, Virginia, June 2018. Photo by Walter Sanford.



Figure 2. Habitat for Sable Clubtail (*Stenogomphurus rogersi*) in Fairfax County, Virginia. Photo by Walter Sanford.

Fairfax County was found didn’t look promising (Figure 2). The channel is a few feet deep, and the stream itself is no more than a foot wide and a few inches deep. When scouting the location during the off-season WS recalls thinking, “I don’t see clubtails coming from this tiny stream!”

### Albemarle County, Virginia

MB read an article in *Banisteria*, the journal of the Virginia Natural History Society, entitled “Dragonflies and damselflies

of Albemarle County, Virginia (Odonata)” by J.M. Childress. A single paragraph (p.32) describes two locations where Jim found Sable Clubtail 10 years ago. The exact location of the Childress sightings cannot be determined from the Banisteria article, so MB decided to explore Albemarle County in search of “a heavily shaded small stream that feeds into the Moorman’s River about halfway between Millington and White Hall.”

On 9 June 2018, MB started at White Hall and drove toward Millington looking for this stream, and found a road crossing over a creek that flows into Moorman’s River. He explored the stream bed for several hours with no luck and around midday decided to abandon his search. As he was heading back toward White Hall, he noticed a smaller creek—a tributary of the first one he had explored. He parked his car and scouted the new place on foot, checking out the creek from the roadside with binoculars. At 12:45 pm, he spotted a Sable Clubtail perched on a rock in midstream. Unfortunately he didn’t have any photography gear with him, so he ran back to his car to get his camera.

The clubtail was gone when he returned to the stream, but after a half-hour of searching, he spotted one on the far side of the creek. He took several photos from the roadside to document the sighting. That’s when it started raining, a light rain that quickly became a downpour. He returned to his car to sit out what he hoped would be a passing shower.

When the rain stopped and the sun was shining again, he returned to where he’d seen the Sable Clubtail and spotted one 15 minutes later. He noticed a farmer tending a herd of cows and got permission to enter private property. He crossed the barbed-wire fence, slid down the steep, muddy stream bank, and promptly saw the Sable again and took several close-up photographs (Figure 3) and documented the habitat (Figure 4).



Figure 3. *Stenogomphus rogersi* in Albemarle County, Virginia, 9 June 2018. Photo by Mike Boatwright.



Figure 4. Sable Clubtail habitat in Albemarle County, Virginia. The somewhat sluggish stream is ~10 ft. wide and a few inches deep. Photo by Mike Boatwright.

#### Rare to uncommon; or, under-reported and under-surveyed?

*S. rogersi* has a limited range (Figure 5) and is classified as a rare to uncommon species. However, some odonate experts, including Dr. Steven M. Roble (Staff Zoologist, Virginia Department of Conservation), contend that *S. rogersi* might be somewhat more widespread than the map indicates, as this is an under-reported species. Steven says that there are more county records in Virginia than have been reported to OdonataCentral, and that there is a need to survey under-sampled counties in the state (Steven Roble, pers. comm.).

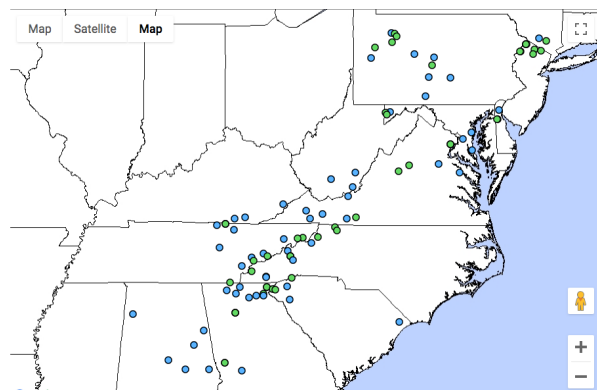


Figure 5. Sable Clubtail records for the U.S. in OdonataCentral (Abbott, J.C. 2006–2018).

There were no *S. rogersi* records in the OdonataCentral database <<http://www.odonatacentral.org>> for Albemarle or Fairfax County in Virginia when MB and WS were starting to plan for re-discovering the species in those two counties—but now there are several records! We strongly urge anyone who has seen this species to submit their records to OdonataCentral.



As for the problem of under-sampled counties, we encourage other odonate hunters to add *S. rogersi* to their list of target species for next season. Do some research and planning during the off-season, then get out there and make it happen. In our experience, no stream is too small for Sable Clubtail but it appears there are streams that are too big. Find a small, forest-shaded stream during winter and visit it a few times in late spring and early summer—we think the results might be surprising!

### References and Online Resources

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