

Contribution for *Agrion* from Philip Corbet

## Leiden, June 2002

### Philip Corbet

During 1-3 June 2002 the third WDA European Regional Meeting was held in Leiden, The Netherlands, having been convened and organised by K.-D. Dijkstra and Vincent Kalkman. The venue was the 'Pesthuis', one of the older parts of the magnificent National Museum of Natural History 'Naturalis', and the facilities were excellent. About 40 odonatologists attended, from Belgium, Germany, Spain, The Netherlands and the UK. The only two WDA Board members able to register were the Treasurer and me, but very unfortunately Dorothy Gennard had to cancel at the eleventh hour on account of the death of a relative. The programme was varied and interesting, catering for a wide range of tastes and levels of odonatological expertise. Participants who had arrived in Leiden on 31 May met for an informal takeaway meal at K.-D.'s home and enjoyed slide presentations, featuring Odonata and their habitats from Botswana, Malawi and Turkey. There was ample opportunity throughout the meeting for informal discussion, and on that first evening we enjoyed our meal in the garden under a clear sky enlivened by darting swifts (*Apus apus*), also having *their* evening meal. Afterwards we were able to purchase copies of the latest edition of the fine fieldguide on Odonata of North-western Europe by Frank Bos and Marcel Wasscher.

The first day of the meeting proper, 1 June, was devoted to formal presentations which began with the screening of a video of 44 species of Dutch dragonflies, photographed in their natural surroundings by Weia Reinboud and Tienieke de Groot. The images were arrestingly beautiful and the pleasure of viewing them was enhanced by the accompanying backcloth of birdsong, recorded simultaneously with the images. Four oral presentations occupied the rest of the morning, treating the biogeography of a tropical family, alpha taxonomy, history, and adult population biology based on mark-recapture records. There was ample opportunity for discussion of these talks, after each session and during lunch in the congenial setting of the open-air courtyard of the Pesthuis. The afternoon sessions comprised a review of data collection in the context of nature conservation in The Netherlands and a specialized session focused on colour polymorphism. The latter was chaired by Niels Dingemans and included stimulating talks by Tom Sherratt, Adolfo Cordero, Jose Andrés and Hans van Gossum, speaking on his own behalf and that of his collaborators, Robby Stoks and Luc de Bruyn. This session was thought-provoking and constituted the meat in the sandwich of the oral presentations. That evening participants all met for a meal in an attractive old hostelry, from which they issued afterwards, suitably fortified, for an open-air drink and more discussion, under a clear sky once again decorated by swifts displaying their aerobatic expertise.

On 2 June the weather remained sunny and warm for the field trip to the fenlands of the Kromme Rade where we saw all the species on the organisers' wish list, namely: *Coenagrion pulchellum*, *Erythromma najas*, *Aeshna isoceles*, *Brachytron pratense*, *Cordulia aenea*, *Libellula fulva* and *Leucorrhinia pectoralis*. Highlights for me were the large numbers of *Aeshna isoceles*, mostly early matures (which I had last seen in Algeria in the company of Boudjema Samraoui in 1993), foraging in the open over

the herb layer of the fen, and the early matures of *Libellula fulva*, the rich brown abdomen of the females fully justifying their specific name. The radiant green eyes of the *A. isoceles* were memorable, especially to an *A. isoceles*-deprived resident of the UK.

The outing was pleasantly interrupted by a waterside lunch underwritten by mustard soup. That evening we met for a meal at a farm restaurant where the meal was a smorgasbord presented in a picturesque old barn (beside a canal of course). White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*) were nesting at the top of a suitable pole in the adjacent farmyard. Farewells were exchanged at the conclusion of the meal, after which most participants returned home, well pleased with their experiences during the meeting.

I remained in Leiden during the following day, using the time, courtesy of Jan van Tol, Curator of Entomology, to examine specimens of *Tetracanthagyna* in the collection of the National Museum of Natural History. I had long wished to view these examples of the dragonfly aristocracy and I was not disappointed. A female of *T. plagiata* Waterhouse had a wingspan of 162 mm and a body length of 100 mm. Imagine the sensation of encountering one of these dark brown giants hawking over a stream at sunset in Indonesia. Mind-blowing!

I returned to UK on 3 June, replete with pleasant memories of stimulating talks, old friendships renewed and new friendships made, and admiration for the organisers of a very worthwhile meeting. I am convinced that Regional Meetings constitute a valuable part of WDA's activities, allowing, as they do, personal contact and exchange of information among members between our rather infrequent symposia.