

# WILDLIFE OF VICTORIA PARK

by John Serrao

## DAMSELFLIES

We've all seen and admired dragonflies as they patrol back and forth around our ponds and along our roads. These large, colorful insects are among our most familiar and easily recognized creatures. And their roles as beneficial predators on mosquitoes, gnats, horseflies, deerflies, and other pesky insects is widely appreciated. Like butterflies, dragonflies have now become very popular among nature enthusiasts who spend hours outdoors observing, identifying, and photographing them.

Closely related to dragonflies are the damselflies, which are much smaller and more delicate than their cousins. Damselflies fold their wings above their backs when they land, unlike dragonflies which keep theirs

outstretched like the wings of a plane. And the eyes of damselflies are separated, while those of dragonflies are so large that they're almost fused together on the head. Like their larger relatives, damselflies are predators, feeding on small insects like leafhoppers, flies, and leaf beetles.

I've been roaming around the ponds of Victoria Park and many of the natural areas in central Florida in recent months with a newfound "obsession" over Odonata — the insect order that includes dragonflies and damselflies. So far I've identified 56 different species of these gorgeous, interesting insects — blue ones, red ones, orange, yellow, black, green. My latest gem is a stunning but tiny Duckweed Firetail (these insects have the coolest names, too — darners, dashers, dancers, spinylegs, skimmers, etc.), which I photographed in early October in DeLeon Springs(see photo). Take a walk around one of our ponds and pay close attention to the damselflies that emerge from the shoreline

plants.