

Gomphurus dilatatus Blackwater Clubtail

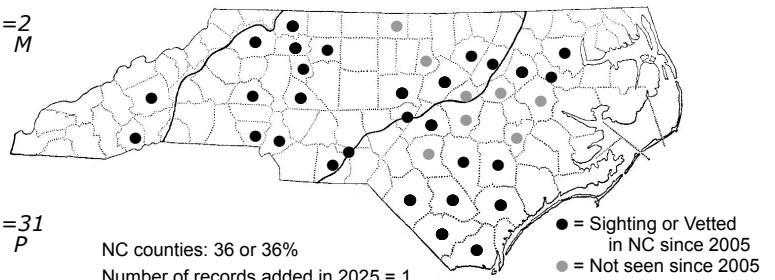
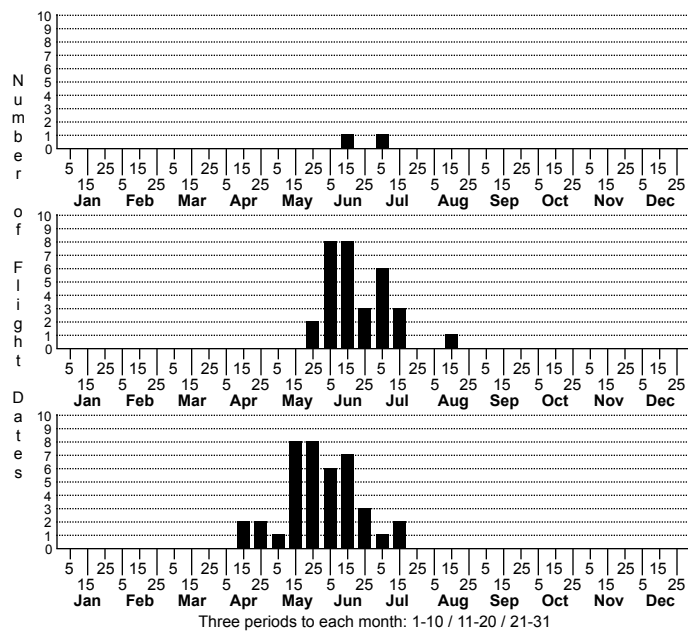


Photo (vetted) in 2025: Franklin

High counts of:
30 - Bladen - 2016-05-27
30 - Pender - 2016-05-27
17 - Sampson - 2019-05-24

Earliest date: Brunswick 2017-04-12
Latest date: Mecklenburg 2005-08-13

Status	Rank
NC	US
-	-
S3S4	G5

Synonym: *Gomphus dilatatus*

DISTRIBUTION: Scattered over most of the state, though lacking records in the northeastern and far eastern counties, as well as the northern mountains. Apparently absent over most of the mountains, at least over roughly 2,500 feet elevation. New records in 2021 from Catawba and Transylvania counties filled in gaps in the western Piedmont and southern mountains, and two more new county records from the Piedmont were made in 2022. Perhaps occurs in most Piedmont counties, but known at present from only about 35% of them. Seemingly most widespread in the southern Coastal Plain.

ABUNDANCE: Locally uncommon in the southern portions of the Coastal Plain, but rare northward in that province to the Roanoke River area (with few recent records in this region). Generally rare to locally uncommon over most of the Piedmont, with a remarkable flurry of records from the western and central Piedmont in 2018. Very rare in the southern half of the mountains, where first recorded in 2017. With more canoeing and kayaking efforts, observers have been finding the species in some numbers now, including daily counts of 30 in 2016 and 17 in 2019, indicating that it can be reasonably common in a few places in the southeastern counties.

FLIGHT: Mid-April to at least mid-July in the Coastal Plain, and from early June into mid-July in the Piedmont and mountains. There is a sight report from the Piedmont for mid-August, though the latest specimen or photo record is only to mid-July.

HABITAT: Slow-moving rivers or streams with sandy or silty bottoms. Though the common name suggests it is not normally found along brownwater rivers, such is not the case in NC. Of course, all Piedmont and mountain records are from brownwater areas, and a few in the Coastal Plain are as well, such as along the Cape Fear River. A recent record from Lake Waccamaw (at the spillway/dam) presumably relates to an individual using the headwaters of the Waccamaw River as breeding habitat.

BEHAVIOR: Males perch on leaves or branches close to the water, or over the water.

COMMENTS: This is one of the larger clubtails, and the wide club also adds to its striking appearance. However, it can be confused with the Cobra Clubtail. Mark Shields provided the first notable count of the species, seeing and photographing about 30 individuals as he was canoeing down the Black River along the Bladen - Pender county line on 27 May 2016. Recent review by our website editors have determined that one or two photos previously identified as Blackwater Clubtails are actually Cobra Clubtails. And, that puts into jeopardy any sight reports of this species, due to the great confusion of these two species; the Mecklenburg County and the Martin/Bertie (i.e., Roanoke River) reports should be considered as tenuous, and certainly not definitive. However, Vin Stanton made a remarkable discovery in July 2017, by photographing a female Blackwater Clubtail in Buncombe County near the French Broad River -- our first record for the western third of the state. The OdonataCentral database has a single record for eastern TN in the Ridge and Valley province, but otherwise the Buncombe and Transylvania records fill in a large gap in the range in the southern Appalachians (between eastern TN and west-central NC).

Considering the great number of recent records of the species from the Coastal Plain and Piedmont, the N.C. Natural Heritage Program has moved the species off its Watch List, in late 2020. The State Rank has been moved down to S3S4, also.