



Scientific Name:

Crocothemis erythraea

English:

Scarlet Darter

Maltese:

il-mazzarell l-iskarlatt

The Scarlet Darter is a dazzling dragonfly with a widespread global distribution. It has a body length of around 40 - 45 mm, a large rounded head with compound red eyes, and specialised chewing mouthparts. From its long and slender abdomen emerge two pairs of long, strong, transparent wings which are nearly equal in length. The forewings and hindwings function independently from each other, enabling this insect to swoop, turn, dive and hover about.

Males sport a bright red colouration with a red or orange-yellow patch at the base of the hindwings and have a widened and very long abdomen. The females, on the other-hand, are rather dull, with a light brown to olive-green coloured body; the hindwings bear a yellowish-coloured spot. The females lay gelatinous strings of eggs in freshwater pools on floating or submerged vegetation, from which nymphs, which look quite different from the adults, would emerge. These use their extendable jaws to capture and feed on aquatic insects, including mosquito larvae and tadpoles. Nymphs would later emerge as adult dragonflies, leaving their outer shell behind.

Dragonflies are especially beneficial because they feed on mosquitoes and other small insects, remaining close to sources of water, where especially males defend their territory against rivals. This species is part of our natural heritage, and even though commonly found across the Maltese Islands, one should not harm or destroy such an interesting and eye-catching insect.

