



*Argia moesta*

## **Dainty Dancers - Slender Blue Damselflies of Kansas Tallgrass Streams**

You have to look close to find them, these streamside tiny treasures. But isn't that the case with so much of the natural world. God never said that he would bless us only with these wide-open skies and vast expanses of green grass and not with small, hidden gems.

The Dancers, damselflies of the genus *Argia*, are blue, needle-like aquatic insects of the family Coenagrionidae; they are most often found along streams. They take their common name from their bouncy, flighty way of flying. One way of telling them from another genus of also mostly blue damselflies, the Bluets (genus *Enallagma*), is that the Dancers often perch on horizontal surfaces whereas the Bluets almost always perch on vertical stems. That is not foolproof, however, and to be

definitive, you need to get close enough to them to see the spurs on their legs. If the spurs are longer than the space between the spurs, they are Dancers.

Let's take a closer look at three species of Dancers that I found and photographed on a hike along King's Creek in the Konza Prairie. All three pictured are males.

The Powdered Dancer, *Argia moesta*, looks as if he has been dusted with blue talcum. That appearance comes from pruinescence, a waxy coating that develops on the outer skin of some species of dragonflies and damselflies as they mature. Powdered Dancers are found along nearly every stream or river in the state.

The Springwater Dancer, *Argia plana*, is a wonderful sky blue. True to its name, this species is found at springs, small and large, all across the state. I have seen them at Scott County State Lake, at tiny springs in Cowley County, and here, along King's Creek on the Konza.



*Argia plana*

The last of our trio is the Dusky Dancer, *Argia translata*. Guess he got that romantic name because he is dark and handsome. This species, in Kansas, is almost exclusive to the Flint Hills, although it can be found in the eastern-most tier of counties as well.



*Argia translata*

These are just three of ten species of Dancers known to occur in Kansas. For more information, please refer to my issue of The Kansas School Naturalist, "Checklist of Kansas Damselflies." The link to a pdf version of the booklet is included below.

#### On-line Resources:

- "A Checklist of North American Odonata," by Dennis R. Paulson and Sidney W. Dunkle. 2012 Edition:  
[http://www.odonatacentral.org/docs/NA\\_Odonata\\_Checklist\\_2012.pdf](http://www.odonatacentral.org/docs/NA_Odonata_Checklist_2012.pdf)

- Guide to Konza Prairie Trails:  
<http://keep.konza.ksu.edu/visit/hike.htm>
- "Checklist of Kansas Damselflies," by Roy J. Beckemeyer and Donald G. Huggins, 1998, Kansas School Naturalist Issue 44(1):  
<https://www.emporia.edu/dotAsset/b6585765-20cd-4d2d-9f7f-acc1a5bbdfde.pdf>

~ Roy Beckemeyer

**Roy Beckemeyer**, a retired aeronautical engineer who has studied natural Kansas as an avocation for years, , with special emphasis on prairie plants, birds, and insects (focusing on dragonflies, damselflies, robber flies, and Paleozoic insect fossils), is also a practicing poet whose first book, *Music I Once Could Dance To* (Coal City Press, 2014), was a 2015 Kansas Notable Book. He and wife Pat, married 55 years, live in Wichita.