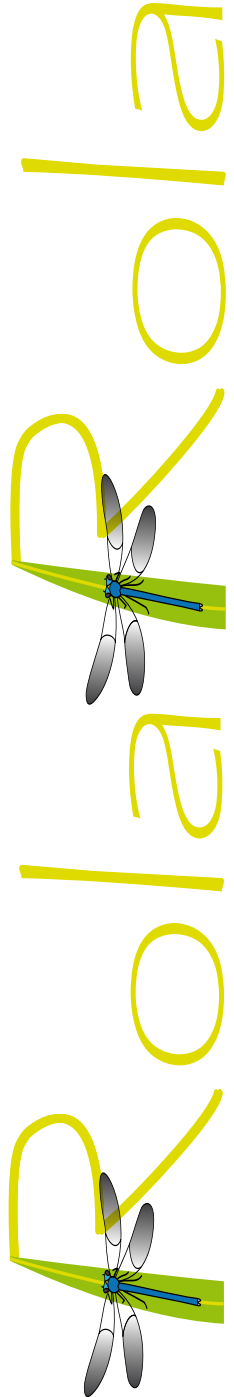


## EDITORIAL

I'm no biologist, I'm an engineer. During my day job, I mainly speak to other engineers, to sales persons, to commercial guys. They usually know about my passion for dragonflies, but it's safe to say they don't understand it very well. They don't get why I go on holiday to southern Spain without ever setting foot on a beach or in a club or a tourist resort. I get asked questions about it on a regular basis: What's the fun of spending full days in the sun when it's 40°C in the shade, wearing long trousers to protect my legs from thorns and biting crawlies, eating and drinking too little, just to see some big insects? Every field day I end up red as a fire truck, dirty from lying on the ground taking pictures, with itchy scratches on the legs despite the long pants, sweaty, tired, thirsty and hungry and I love it. When I show some of the resulting photos, people often think they finally understand what it's all about.

Of course, an ever growing and improving collection of dragonfly pictures is a reward on its own, but it's also just one aspect of the hobby. My passion brings me to some of the most beautiful places in European nature. When I'm standing knee-deep in a rocky river with fast flowing water foaming around my legs, *Zygonyx* or *Boyeria* whirring past me left and right, I'm having the time of my life. And after a long day of watching dragonflies under the relentless Spanish sun nothing beats enjoying a shower, a clean set of clothes, a cool cerveza (o dos) and a delicious comida.



If having a great time isn't enough reason for doing what I do, here's another: it's actually useful and important. It's a given that dragonflies serve well as an indicator for the health of their freshwater habitat, a habitat equally vital to us as it is to them. Protecting dragonflies by actively protecting their habitat is beneficial to us too on the long term. But in order to protect dragonflies, we need to know first what species occur where and how well they're doing. For this, we need data and lots of it. What species occur where is mostly a matter of documenting every single dragonfly species we see. It may be tempting to record just the rare species, but rare species can become common in a rather short period and the other way around. Establishing how well each species is doing is more work: populations need to be revisited and recounted on a regular basis in order to generate a meaningful data set that reflects the situation. Now I'm no mathematician and my knowledge of statistics is average at best (no pun intended). I can't calculate trends. But I surely can help collect data for others to work with!

If I've learned anything from almost 25 years of studying dragonflies, it's that species are always on the move. Southern species expand to the north, some species that disappeared from their old locations long ago return now that the quality of their freshwater habitat gets better than it has been for a long time. And some species, unfortunately, have suffered badly from threats like habitat destruction or pollution. Many of these changes I've seen happen myself, but more important is that these developments have been proven, quantified and documented in research done by others. Knowing that my data has contributed to this research (even if it's just a tiny bit) is yet another reward.

Antoine van der Heijden  
Chairman Dutch dragonfly society NVL.



*Anax parthenope* (Antoine van der Heijden)