

More beautiful than butterflies, better fliers than hummingbirds and with behaviour as intriguing and complex as either mammals or birds, dragonflies and damselflies are the ultimate insects.

They've been around for hundreds of millions of years, dodging dinosaurs before we mammals were even a twinkle in the eye of evolution. Because of their age, they're almost always described as primitive, which is entirely the wrong perspective. To survive that long, you have to be pretty special—and this film will show just how special they are.

Dragonflies are masters of the air, and with the very latest high-speed camera technology we will witness their aerial performances in unrivalled detail. They can do *everything* that hummingbirds can—flying backwards, sideways or vertically upwards. In fact, they're much better fliers than hummingbirds, because they have twice as many wings.

Dragonflies use this aerial skill to catch insects in flight—even the nimblest of flies can't escape. Just last year, it was discovered that dragonflies predict their

prey's movements using the same kinds of calculations as the most advanced vertebrates, all using a brain just a millimetre or so across.

Dragonflies live very complex lives and, filmed in unprecedented detail, we'll come to realise that many have their own distinct personalities. In many species, males hold and defend territories, just like birds. Some even co-operate. In North America, five or six male *common whitetails* share a territory and defend it together. But they have a strict hierarchy and an alpha male, like a miniature wolf pack. The alpha gets first pick of the visiting females, but once he is busy with his elaborate mating rituals, the next in line will get a chance.

Some damselflies also defend territories. *Demoiselles* are beautiful species in which the males have deep blue patches on their wings (different in different species). They use these to display to other males that come too close or in courtship, as they fly slowly, low over the water surface.

The behaviour of dragonflies is so complex that many scientists are now turning to these ancient creatures as model animals to study everything from mating strategies to territorial behaviour to flight dynamics. And all of this means that we are finding out more and more about these fascinating insects and the more we find, the more fascinating they become.



NATURE

DRAGONS & DAMSELS ULTIMATE INSECTS

4K 5.1 and Stereo | 1 x 50 min. | Written and directed by Steve Nicholls
Executive producers: Susanne Lummer, Sabine Holzer



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