

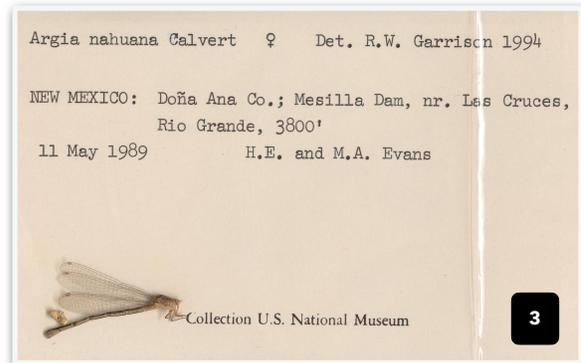
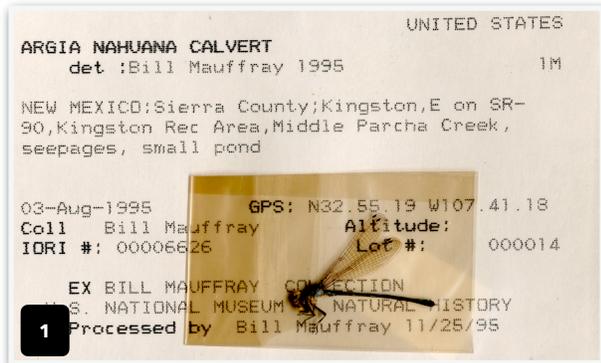
Aztec Dancer
Argia nahuana
(Calvert, 1902)

Paulson (2009) states this species is a small sky-blue dancer of southwestern weedy streams. Described habitat is small streams with open banks but abundant emergent vegetation (sedges and watercress); usually are at riffles (where they typically perch in vegetation) rather than pools (Paulson, 2009). The New Mexico flight season is March through November. Aztec Dancer distribution includes the entire western and southern portion of California, southern tip of Nevada, and the western third of Arizona; the species ranges south in Mexico to Jalisco (Paulson, 2009).

1. The specimen was collected by Bill Mauffray on August 3, 1995 in the Middle Percha Creek drainage near Kingston. It is now part of the collection of the [National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution](#). (Jonathan Batkin brought our attention to this specimen.)
2. Von Loh: I was able to [take this photograph](#) on 23 May 2025. Collected over a spring-fed rivulet below Leasburg Dam. Note that this male is light blue rather than the more common, darker 'sky blue' color with characteristics somewhat resembling the Paulson (2009) descriptive note: "Rare lightly marked individuals have median stripe narrower, humeral stripe unforked, and/or S7 all blue".

3. [GBIF: USNM ENT00365162](#). Collected by H.E. Evans and M.A. Evans (05/11/1989), at Mesilla Dam along the Rio Grande near Las Cruces. It is now part of the United States National Museum (Smithsonian). This specimen was confirmed by Rosser W. Garrison, Ph. D., the leading authority of the genus *Argia*. (Jonathan Batkin provided the information about this specimen.)
4. [Following Page](#): Jonathan Batkin photographed [this Aztec Dancer](#) (OC#2927684) at the Voiers "Pit" Park in Deming on 11 Jul 2024. Shown under Odonata Central's [Creative Commons license](#).
5. [Following Page](#): James N. Stuart photographed this individual (OC#377805) at Rancho del Rio (on the Mimbres River) in Luna County on 18 July 2012. Shown under Odonata Central's [Creative Commons license](#).
6. [Following Page](#): Habitat particularly suited to Aztec Dancers occurs below Leasburg Dam where spring-fed rivulets support Rabbitsfoot Grass and Southern Cattail stands (05/30/25). Note that this habitat is seasonal, between about March to May most years, until release of irrigation/water compact flow to the Rio Grande from upriver storage reservoirs inundates the channel. JVL

There is at least one other record of Aztec Dancer within Doña Ana County; [Catalog # UMMZI-00261367](#) collected by R.B and J.M. Selander (08/28/1952), at San Andres Spring within the San Andres National Wildlife Refuge, White Sands Missile Range.







7. A small number (perhaps 20-30) of Aztec Dancers were observed (October/November 2025) along a short reach (~25m) of the Rio Grande eastern bank within Leasburg Dam State Park by James Von Loh, this and all of the following photographs are by him.

The following is his summary of these observations.

Occupied habitat is characterized by shallow water from spring and stream flow; saturated sand, rocks, and small driftwood; emergent shoots of Johnsongrass, three-square bulrush, and southern cattail; and densely vegetated Johnsongrass and southern cattail, merging into coyote willow tall shrubs on the adjacent steep embankment. Light-to-medium blue males were easily observed perching on twigs, branches, and rocks to defend territory, patrolling or waiting for potential mates to emerge from cover, and hunting for abundant small arthropods.

8. A few males appeared somewhat bicolored with the typical lighter blue abdomen but a notably darker bluish-lavender thorax. This male was photographed on 10/28/25. It has dark blue eyes and darker dorsal thorax color, appearing bluish-lavender at some sun angles versus the lighter blue color of the lower thorax and abdomen (see also images under the ovipositing section).

9. Enlarged view of the dark blue eyes and dorsal thorax coloration (10/28/25) of the individual in number 8.

10. Male (10/26/25) in bright natural light, reflecting bluish-lavender



dorsal thorax coloration and light blue eyes.

Females were not observed individually; they remained in dense embankment vegetation until located by a patrolling male or the female flew out to a perched male to join in tandem linkage/mating wheels. Typical females are predominantly brown in color with black markings. Paulson (2009) states uncommon blue andromorph females with blue eyes may occur within a population; I observed the blue female forms on three occasions. Over a two-month period I photo-documented Aztec Dancer pairs joined in tandem linkages, two tandem pairs formed mating wheels, and a few post-mating pairs perched to rest but mostly oviposited into the aquatic portion of the habitat in and around emergent stems and around submerged driftwood.

11. Following Page; Medium-brown color and black patterning of most females within this population is described in Paulson (2009) as "...eyes brown, color pattern as male but black dorsolateral stripes



ending in points along each abdominal segment, continuous on S7, usually incomplete on S8-S9 and lacking on S10" (11/04/25).

12. Following Page: Blue andromorph females were rarely observed (only three times) within this small population, shown here in tandem linkage with a light



12. Continued from previous page: blue male shortly after uncoupling from a mating wheel (11/06/25). Note that her distal abdomen has dried mud (likely from a previous mating/ovipositing event) covering some of the black markings.
13. Following Page: Typical brown female (L) and uncommon blue andromorph female (R) ovipositing into shallow water around a driftwood branch as the males, in tandem linkage, move them from site-to-site (11/06/25).

Tandem Linkage

Tandem linkage is necessary to transfer the male sperm from his abdominal segment S2 to the female S8 via a mating wheel (illustrated in the following photographs) thus fertilizing her eggs; this behavior is also a form of mate

guarding (see J. Alcock, 1982: "[Post-Copulatory Mate Guarding...](#)").

14. Following Page: This typical blue male selected/captured the brown female (10/31/25) from embankment vegetation and joined with her by clasping his abdomen tip (cerci) to the back of her prothorax (Paulson, 2009); he selected a low-lying dried branch upon which to perch in the sunshine.
15. Following Page: Warm rocks were also popular resting sites post-mating and while taking breaks during ovipositing (11/04/25).
16. Following Page: A Johnsongrass leaf lying on moist adobe provided a perch for this tandem-linked pair (note the male's more lavender-colored dorsal thorax) (11/04/25).





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17. This blue tandem-linked pair selected a dried southern cattail leaf at the water's edge on which to warm and rest (11/06/25).

Mating

During the autumn study timeframe over three weeks, two mating behavioral events were photo-documented, the first from the beginning following mate selection and the second near the end of the process (leading into ovipositing behavior). To mate, the female and male must join in a mating wheel to effectively fertilize her eggs.

First Photo Documented Mating Event - 11/02/25

This midday was warm and calm.

18. A tandem pre-mating pair flew to an open area on the muddy riverbank for a short time (note the male is grasping a Johnson-grass stem base), then flew up to a perch ~0.3m high on a coyote willow stem to form a mating wheel.
19. The blue male then selected an open area on the willow stem to carry out the mating behavior.
20. The blue male begins to elevate the brown female by curling his abdomen up, as she curls her abdomen up to overlay her S8 segment (with genital pore) over his S2 segment (with sperm).
21. Blue male attains his maximum elevation of the brown female by sharply bending his abdomen.
22. Following Page: Brown female was unable to make the mating wheel connection and both relaxed, it required 4-5 similar attempts before the mating wheel was formed.
23. Following Page: Brown female makes the final upward approach to complete the S8/S2 overlap with the blue male and form the mating wheel.
24. Following Page: Brown female makes the S8/S2 overlap and they begin mating, to transfer his sperm to her eggs. At this point the male flies deeper into the willow shrub to complete copulation.





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**Second Photo Documented
Mating Event - 11/06/25**
This midday was warm and windy with gusts.
Photographs 25-28 are on the following page.

- 25. Late in the mating wheel behavioral event, the blue (andromorph) female (lower individual) remains firmly attached to the blue male with her S8 abdominal segment covering his S2. The pair remained firmly attached in the mating wheel for several minutes.
- 26. The pair shifts mating wheel configuration and the blue female (lower) begins to release from the blue male (upper).
- 27. The blue female fully releases and extends her wings for a horizontal configuration of the tandem linkage.
- 28. She then swings below the blue male and they both rest in tandem linkage for several more minutes, prior to flying to a nearby shallow water site with emergent plants to begin ovipositing.





Ovipositing

At the most regularly selected oviposition site, from 1-5 pairs of Aztec Dancers, several Desert Firetail pairs, rarely a pair of Arroyo Bluets, and Mexican Forktail females ovipositing solo could be observed. Also, wider-ranging and abundant Variegated Meadowhawk pairs would occasionally oviposit among the damselfly species.

29. A typical ovipositing site includes clear, shallow water (pool or rivulet), algae and detritus on the bottom, and emergent Johnson-grass, three-square bulrush, and/or southern cattail shoots (adjacent, dense bank cover is a plus). Note that there are three pairs of Aztec Dancers ovipositing in this image (11/04/25).
30. The brown female deposits her eggs underwater on or adjacent to a Johnsongrass emerging leaf and its associated rhizome (11/04/25).
31. Following Page: This blue female extends deep into the detritus around a submerged driftwood stem to deposit eggs (11/06/25).
32. Following Page: Ovipositing pairs often attract other pairs to visit the same or nearby locations to deposit eggs (11/04/25).
33. Following Page: A light blue male (typical color for this small group) leads a brown female among emergent Johnsongrass shoots as she deposits her round, bright white eggs into the bottom detritus and along the leaf base and submerged rhizome (10/26/25).





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34. The brown female appears to be wiping her eye; perhaps a water droplet from the blue male's abdomen splashed on her eye surface (11/02/25). Note they are ovipositing in the water and detritus around an emerging Johnsongrass leaf.

35. A blue male exhibiting a lavender-blue dorsal thorax color, leads a brown female ovipositing around emergent Johnsongrass shoots and into bottom detritus (10/26/25).

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36. An individual brown female Aztec Dancer perches on moist sand of the riverbank; it is rare to see them in the open as they are typically secretive, hidden in dense vegetation patches (11/11/25).
37. An individual brown female Aztec Dancer perches on driftwood within a small pool (11/29/25).

Size Comparison

Aztec Dancers are mid-sized within the genus; at this site they are notably smaller than Bluet species and larger than Desert Firetails and Mexican Forktails. On one day an Amethyst Dancer was present, they shared a small rock, and allowed for the comparison presented here.

38. Previous Page: A male Aztec Dancer (L) and a male Amethyst Dancer (R) each selected a small rock as their perch for hunting small arthropods, patrolling the surrounding habitat for a mate/waiting for a female to fly out to them, and challenging other males (mostly Mexican Forktails and Desert Firetails) that flew near the rock. While the slender Amethyst Dancer is the longer of the two, the more compact Aztec Dancer likely has more body mass (10/31/25).



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39. Previous Page: Perched over a pool on dried willow branches, the bicolored male Plateau Dragonlet (a small skimmer dragonfly) appears very large compared to the slender, blue male and brown female Aztec Dancers, which are joined in tandem linkage (11/15/25).

40. Previous Page: Perched over a pool on dried willow branches, the red male Desert Firetail is shorter and generally smaller than the slender, blue male Aztec Dancer (11/09/25).

41. Previous Page: Perched on a rock adjacent to a pool, the bicolored male Variegated Meadowhawk (a small, abundant, skimmer dragonfly) appears very large compared to the slender, blue male and brown female Aztec Dancers (12/01/25).

42. Variegated Meadowhawk and Aztec Dancer (12/01/25).

