

## RESEARCH NOTE

# Observation of the Vagrant Emperor (*Anax ephippiger*, ODONATA: AESHNIDAE) in Sri Lanka after 38 years

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## ABSTRACT

*Anax ephippiger* is a widespread dragonfly species whose range extends from Sri Lanka and India through Africa to the Mediterranean region and Europe. However, the species is previously known only from two sightings in Sri Lanka. Thirty-eight years after the last sighting of the species, the authors photographed a male *A. ephippiger* on 3<sup>rd</sup> of November, 2008 around 4.00 pm.

Keywords: Aeshnidae, dragonfly; migratory, Odonata.

## INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is home to 124 species of dragonflies, of which 61 (49.2%) are endemic to the island at the species or subspecies level (Bedjanič *et al.* 2014). *Anax ephippiger*, the Vagrant Emperor, first described by Burmeister in 1839, belongs to the family Aeshnidae (Hawkers) in the order Odonata.

The genus is represented in Sri Lanka by five species: *A. ephippiger*, *A. guttatus*, *A. immaculifrons*, *A. indicus* and *A. tristis*. Globally, *A. ephippiger* is a widespread species and its range extends from Sri Lanka and India through Africa to the Mediterranean region and Europe. It has been assessed and given the status of 'Least Concern' at the global level by the IUCN (Subramanian, 2013).



Figure 1: Sightings of *Anax ephippiger* in Sri Lanka.

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Figure 2: *Anax ephippiger* (male). Probably the first photographic record of the species in Sri Lanka. (Photographed by Nayana Wijayathilaka)

It is well known for its long distance migratory habits as its common name implies. The male *A. ephippiger* can be distinguished from other Aeshnidae in Sri Lanka by the following characters: brown eyes, overall pale brown appearance, brown to olivaceous thorax and abdomen, and blue marking on the upper part of the second abdominal segment.

Despite its global distribution, *A. ephippiger* is known only from two sightings in Sri Lanka (Figure 1). The first record was in January, 1892 from the vicinity of the Hot Wells near Trincomalee (Kirby 1894). The second record was in October, 1970 adjoining a tank in Badagiriya, Hambanthota, obtained by researchers of the Smithsonian Institution (Bedjanič *et al.* 2014). Thirty-eight years after the last sighting, the authors photographed a male *A. ephippiger* on 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2008 around 4.00 p.m. It was perched on a branch about 2 m above the ground at a seasonal pool near Panama, Ampara district (6.7482° N, 81.8026° E, WGS 84) (Figure 1). This is perhaps the first photographic record of the species in Sri Lanka (Figure 2).

In other countries *A. ephippiger* breeds in shallow tanks and marshes. Given its rarity in Sri Lanka, Bedjanič *et al.* (2014) suggested that this species

may periodically migrate with the monsoon winds from India, where it is locally common. However, further investigations are necessary to confirm whether or not it is a breeding resident in Sri Lanka.

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