

Large Water Skaters appearing in Worcestershire

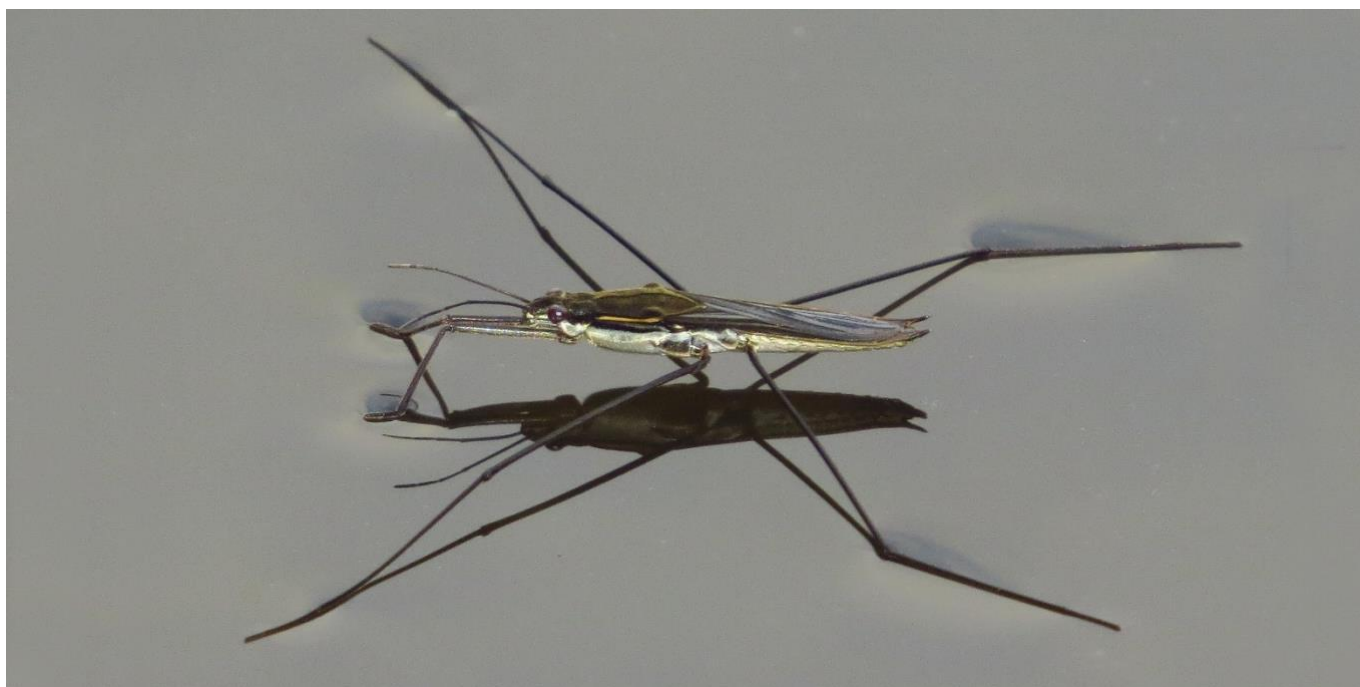
Mike Averill

We have ten species of Pond or Water Skaters in the UK and Ireland (Aquatic Bugs website), seven of these are small, less than 13mm in length, such as the Common Pond Skater *Gerris lacustris*, and three are much larger and therefore more noticeable. One of those is *Limnoporus rufoscutellatus* which is a rare migrant to the UK and is more likely to be found in Northern Ireland, leaving two others and despite their large size we only recently seem to be seeing these two

large species in Worcestershire. The first is *Aquarius najas* (01) and is mostly seen in western and southern England and Wales. This 13 to 17mm long species was found just outside Worcestershire in Shropshire on the River Teme (Westwood 2014), then a gravid female was found by Mike Averill on the Teme at Mathon, near Tenbury in 2019. More recently large numbers have been observed on the rivers Severn and Stour as well as on the Staffordshire/Worcestershire Canal in the Stourport to Kidderminster area. They are often in large fleets sitting in quiet shallows near the water's edge, usually in flowing water. Perhaps this is part of a range expansion eastwards from Wales.



01. *Aquarius najas* Staffs/Worcs Canal, Kidderminster. Mike Averill.



02. *Aquarius paludum* Hartlebury riverside pool. Mike Averill.

The other large skater is *Aquarius paludum* (02). This 14 to 16mm long species is moving westwards as its range was formerly south east England. The first record in Worcestershire was from Abberley in 2017 and since then there has been a sudden increase of sightings from still water locations in Worcestershire, often large pools or lakes.

Identification is possible from photos with a long lens camera, and the best angle is to try to get a sideways shot of the individual. Adult *Aquarius paludum* are usually fully-winged and have a yellow line along the side of the pronotum. The really key feature to look for is the spiniform projections either side on the end of the abdomen which are at least as long as the tip of the abdomen and upturned.

Aquarius najas is usually wingless (although can be winged in Central Europe) and has a uniformly dark pronotum, no yellow line. The spiniform projections do not quite reach the end of the abdomen and are not upturned. *A. najas* like *A. paludum* can appear in large fleet-like clusters with males jetting forward of the pack like formula one drivers on the warm up lap. The third large species *Limnporus rufoscutellatus* is very unlikely to be found in Worcestershire, but it is worth noting that it is similar in size to *Aquarius najas*, has the same sort of projections, but is fully winged and the pronotum is reddish.

More records are needed to determine whether the two species have spread to other parts of the county.

References

Aquatic Bugs - Aquatic Heteroptera Recording Scheme website. Available at: <https://aquaticbugs.com/the-species/> [Accessed 24.11.22].
Westwood, B. 2014. River Skaters *Aquarius najas* along the River Teme. *Worcestershire Record* 36:17-18.

Images

01. *Aquarius najas* Staffs/Worcs Canal, Kidderminster. Mike Averill
02. *Aquarius paludum* Hartlebury riverside pool. Mike Averill