

**Lake Pondskater *Aquarius paludum* (Fabricius, 1794) at Great Witley, Worcestershire.**

Ian Wright

In May 2016 I observed a larger than usual pondskater on one of my garden ponds at Great Witley in NW Worcestershire at SO750666. I presume that this individual only stayed a short time as I was unable to locate it later that day. I didn't realise that this pondskater might be an unusual species for Worcestershire until I mentioned the observation to Rosemary Winnall. There were no further sightings in my garden in 2016, but I resolved to check the pond regularly in 2017 once the pondskaters started to appear.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2017 a large pondskater was in residence and over the next few days I was able to obtain some photographs (01). My observations of this pondskater led me to believe it was the Lake Pondskater *Aquarius paludum* due to its size coupled with the pale line at the side of the pronotum, but my only book does not show all species. Rosemary Winnall kindly obtained the necessary information to confirm my identification (02).



01. Lake Pondskater *Aquarius paludum*, garden pool Great Witley, 9 May 2017. Ian Wright.



02. Lake Pondskater *Aquarius paludum*, garden pool Great Witley, 12 May 2017. Rosemary Winnall.

A second Lake Pondskater had joined the first by 11<sup>th</sup> May. These remained on the pond until 18<sup>th</sup> May and were joined by a third on 22<sup>nd</sup> May. On 21<sup>st</sup> May 2017 I also discovered Lake Pondskaters on Front Pool (04) at Witley Court at SO7708 6505. Time was limited, but on the small section of the lake that I checked, I counted six individuals.



04. Front Pool, Witley Court. Lake Pondskaters *Aquarius paludum* were present around water lily leaves furthest out, 26 May 2017. Rosemary Winnall

Although Lake Pondskaters may prefer larger ponds and lakes, it seems that they also make use of smaller ponds (my pond is approximately 15m<sup>2</sup>) so any water body with open water is worth checking for this species.

Thanks are due to Rosemary Winnall for her time spent finding information on Lake Pondskaters and also to the staff at Witley Court for allowing access to Front Pool.

**Reference.**

Brock, P.D. 2014. *A Comprehensive Guide to the Insects of Britain and Ireland*. Pisces Publications.

**Lake Pondskater *Aquarius paludum*. Notes from Rosemary Winnall**

I was very interested to hear from Ian Wright that he had seen another large pondskater on his garden pool (03) this year. By the time I could get across to take a look, two were present. Alongside the smaller *Gerris* pondskaters, their large size was evident, but they were not easy to photograph as they seemed to prefer to stay out in the open water. I know very little about pondskaters so I dusted down an old copy of Macan's 1976 keys from my bookshelf, and set off to discover more.



03. Ian Wright's garden Pond, 12 May 2017. Rosemary Winnall.

Giles King-Salter kindly provided the details of Sheila Brooke's useful key to the identification of water bugs on the web [http://www.touche-soft.co.uk/course\\_pdfs/ea\\_specid\\_mod\\_6\\_water\\_bugs.pdf](http://www.touche-soft.co.uk/course_pdfs/ea_specid_mod_6_water_bugs.pdf) and when contacted, she replied: "Yes, I would agree that this is *A. paludum*."

The upward pointing spines are very typical and it is a big bug. Although I have mostly seen it on large water bodies, I have also seen it on small ponds. It seems they like it there so they may breed!"

There are 230 records on the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) map of this Nationally Scarce species, (recently downgraded from Nationally Notable B), where it is seen as being mainly a species of SE England, but with no records from the Midlands (07).

Will Watson has never seen Lake Pondskaters, but kindly gave me the contact details of Tony Cook who runs the Aquatic Heteroptera Recording Scheme for Britain and Ireland. I sent photographs to him, and he replied: "It is undoubtedly this species and as far as I know the first record for Worcestershire. There is a recent record (post 1990) for Shropshire so the species may have been in the area for a while, although very rare, and is perhaps spreading." So I contacted Frances Riding who is the co-ordinator for the Shropshire Ponds Project. She replied and said: "We have had *A. paludum* in Shropshire for a few years and the records will be on the NBN this year. There are five confirmed sites dating back to 2014 and I expect to find more this year. They breed at one site containing a population of over a hundred."

So it appears that this species has been in our area for a while, but to our knowledge Ian was the first to spot it in our county! Interestingly Mike Averill checked his photographs and found one that was indisputably *Aquarius paludum* photographed at Eastham on 24<sup>th</sup> August 2016 (05) – the second county record!



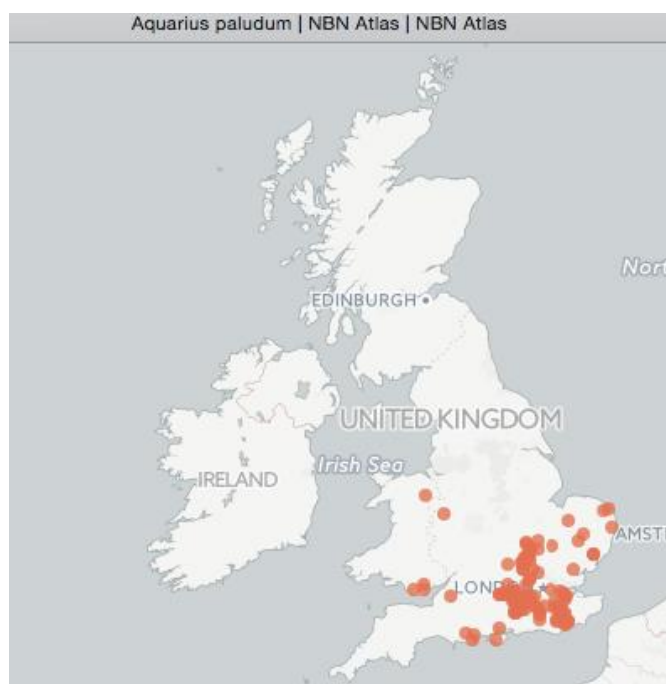
05. Lake Pondskater, *Aquarius paludum*, Eastham, 24 August 2016. Mike Averill.

Roger Plant kindly sent me his photograph (06) of the closely related River Pondskater *Aquarius najus* which is useful for comparison. Both species are large, but the Lake Pondskater has a yellow line along the side of the pronotum, and two spiny lateral upturned projections that reach to or beyond the end of the abdomen and which are easily visible through binoculars. It is generally winged whereas the River Pondskater is usually wingless.



06. River Pondskater *Aquarius najus* in-cop with female carrying prey. Herefordshire, 15 April 2017. Roger Plant

Pondskaters overwinter as adults and the young develop during the early summer. So we shall have another chance to look out for this species later in the year. It will be interesting to see where else we can find them in Worcestershire now that Ian has alerted us to this enigmatic species.



07. *Aquarius paludum* National distribution from NBN

#### Reference

Macan, T.T. 1976. *A Key to British Water Bugs*. Freshwater Biological Association.

#### Images

01. Lake Pondskater *Aquarius paludum*, garden pool Great Witley, 9 May 2017. Ian Wright.
02. Lake Pondskater *Aquarius paludum*, garden pool Great Witley, 12 May 2017. Rosemary Winnall.
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06. River Pondskater *Aquarius najus* in-cop with female carrying prey. Herefordshire, 15 April 2017. Roger Plant.
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