

Biodiversity Record: Clipper butterfly at Woodlands Botanical Garden

Lumin Ong Jun Xiang*, Tay Jing Xuan[§] & Ganesh Kumar Devakumar[‡]

Email: luminongjx@gmail.com (*corresponding author), jingxuan13.TJX@gmail.com ([§]), Ganeshkdev@gmail.com ([‡])

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Subject: Clipper, *Parthenos sylvia lilacinus* (Insecta: Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae).

Subject identified by: Lumin Ong Jun Xiang and Tay Jing Xuan.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Woodlands Botanical Garden; 16 and 23 September 2024, at around 0909 hrs and 1048 hrs respectively, and 7 October 2024 at 1142 hrs.

Habitat: Parkland. In a community garden at the base of a hill, adjacent to secondary forest on top of the hill.

Observers: Ganesh Kumar Devakumar, Lumin Ong Jun Xiang and Tay Jing Xuan.

Observation: On 16 September 2024, a seemingly pristine individual was photographed by Ganesh Kumar Devakumar perching high up on a sunflower tree, *Tithonia diversifolia* (Fig. 1). After a small window of observation, it flew off at high speeds but remained within the garden. On 23 September 2024, a specimen surmised to be the same individual was spotted by Lumin Ong Jun Xiang and Tay Jing Xuan resting on a low perch in the shade, allowing the observers to approach closer than they had expected (Figs. 2 & 3). The butterfly, with a wingspan of about 7 cm, was missing a chunk of its left hindwing (Fig. 2). It eventually flew off in response to other butterflies passing near it. Apparently, the same individual was last photographed on 7 October 2024 feeding from *Lantana camara* flowers, and showing significant signs of wear and tear to its wings (Fig. 4).

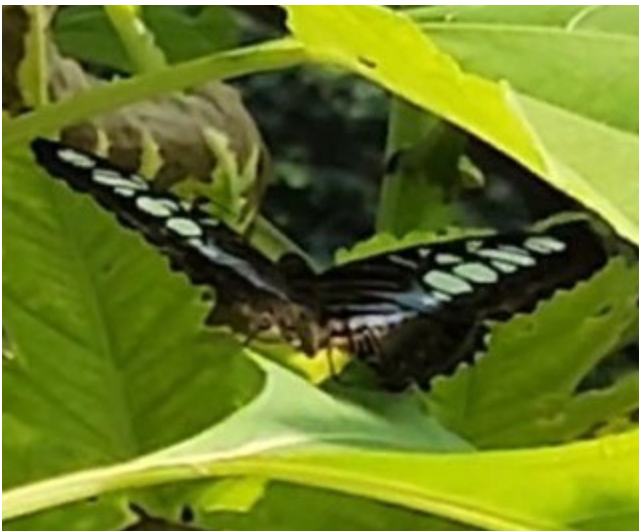


Fig. 1. Posterior view of the Clipper when it was first sighted on 16 September 2024 (Photograph by: Ganesh Kumar Devakumar).

Fig. 2. Dorso-posterior view of the Clipper on 23 September 2024. Note damage on its left hindwing (Photograph by: Tay Jing Xuan).

Remarks: The Clipper is a large and showy forest butterfly native to Singapore, where it has not been recorded for over 30 years in the wild since the 1980s (Butterfly Circle, 2013). It has been listed as extinct since 1997 (Khew & Neo, 1997; National Parks Board, 2024). After a sighting in 2013, it was re-listed as a rare vagrant in 2018 (Jain et al., 2018), then subsequently as ‘data deficient’ in the third edition of the Singapore Red Data Book (Khew et al., 2024).



Fig. 3. Latero-ventral view of the Clipper on 23 September 2024. Fig. 4. Dorso-posterior view of the Clipper on 7 October 2024 in a very tattered state (Photographs by: Lumin Ong Jun Xiang).

Due to its attractive appearance and large size, the Clipper is a popular species farmed and kept in butterfly enclosures such as the Singapore Zoo's Fragile Forest exhibit (Wildlife Reserves Singapore, 2018) and the butterfly aviary at Changi Airport Terminal (Lumin Ong Jun Xiang, pers. obs.). Hence, it is highly likely that this individual is an escapee considering the garden is only about 3.8 km from the zoo (with reference to Google Maps) with green spaces in-between. There is also a possibility that this individual was blown over from Johor in Peninsular Malaysia by the southwest monsoon winds, which occurred before and around the dates of the sightings.

The last reliable sighting of the Clipper was in 2017 at Khoo Teck Puat Hospital's medicinal garden (Chan, 2020), where the possibilities of it being an escapee or vagrant are similar. It is surprising to note that the featured individual in this record stayed at the Woodlands Botanical Garden for at least three weeks, being sighted frequently by both gardeners and visitors (Ganesh Kumar Devakumar, pers. obs.).

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