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SHORT COMMUNICATION

First record of *Acherontia styx* (Westwood, 1848) (Lepidoptera: Sphingidae) from Israel

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The genus *Acherontia* Laspeyres, 1809 of the Hawk-Moth family Sphingidae includes three species. The only species known to occur in Israel so far is *Acherontia atropos* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Müller *et al.* 2005*a*; Rittner pers. observ.), which is distributed throughout the Mediterranean, Middle East, Afrotropics and Europe (d'Abrera 1986). Eastwards it may reach as far as India (Sharma 2016).

On the 18th of April 2017, a specimen of *Acherontia styx* (Westwood, 1848) was observed and photographed in the southern city of Elat. Although the specimen

Fig. 1: *Acherontia styx* (Westwood) as observed on vegetation in Elat. (Photo: I. Biel)

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has not been collected, the photographs are clear enough for unmistakable identification of this very well-known hawk moth, which is already known from the neighboring countries. *Acherontia styx* (Westwood, 1848) is smaller (75–130 mm) in comparison to *A. atropos* (100–140 mm). The skull-like mark on the thorax in *A. styx* is more uniform in color and the general habitus of the wings is brighter. It is also differs from *A. atropos* in having two medial bands on the forewing instead of one, and no bands on the underside of the abdomen (Hampson 1892).

Acherontia styx is a highly polyphagous species known to feed on various plant families such as Labiatae, Bignoniaceae, Verbenaceae, Cucurbitaceae, Solanaceae, Myrtaceae, Convolvulaceae, Oleaceae, Leguminosae, Pedaliaceae and others (Robinson *et al.* 2010).

Acherontia styx is mainly distributed in the Oriental Region, but also found in Mesopotamia and Eastern Arabia (d'Abrera 1986). It has been also recorded in Northern Jordan from the Al Azrak (الأزرق) oasis (Müller *et al.* 2005*b*). These have been the westernmost records of this species so far and its present discovery in southern Israel stretches the western border of its distributional range even further.

Müller *et al.* (2005*b*) suggested that the record of this migratory species in Jordan might as well represent a stray individual rather than a local population (only one specimen was collected during that survey). This may also be the case in Elat. It is therefore unclear at the moment if the Israeli specimen represents an established local population or just a random migrant. Only further observations will shed more light on the nature of its presence in Israel.

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