



Range expansion of clouded silverline butterfly (*Cigaritis nubilus*) in Sri Lanka

Clouded Silverline, *Cigaritis nubilus* (Moore, 1887) is a small butterfly belonging to the family Lycaenidae and is endemic to Sri Lanka. It has wings with a brick-red background on the underside of the wings. There are silvery and dark red lines across the undersides of both wings. The upper side of the hind wings is dark, bright blue in males, whereas in females it is greyish. It is considered a rare butterfly, as it has historically been recorded only in a few places (Fig. 1) in the dry northern part of Sri Lanka (Woodhouse 1950).

According to the records available at that time, Ormiston (1924) indicates that this species is confined to the Northern Province of Sri Lanka including Elephant Pass, Jaffna, Iranaimadu, and the Giant Tank in Mannar. Woodhouse (1950) included Murunkan, which is also close to Giant's Tank Sanctuary, as an additional location. Further, he considered that this species probably occurs over most of the low country dry zone below 92 m. Herath *et al.* (2015) observed five individuals in Chundikulum Sanctuary in 2014. Van der Poorten & van der Poorten (2016) found the species at the Anawilundawa Wetland Ramsar site, further southwest of the known range. Further, it has been recorded in Arippu in Mannar District, as indicated on the website "The Story of Sri Lankan Butterflies" (Anonymous 2024). In this article, we report a few new locations of this butterfly in Sri Lanka, which gives insight into its distribution.

Karandamulla, Pallegama. On 1 May 2022, we observed a few individuals of clouded silverline in Pallegama (7°32'36.1"N, 80°48'46.3"E; 232 m a.s.l.) near Kaluganga Reservoir, Matale District at 232 m above sea

level. The habitat is an open area with shrubs and medium-sized trees in between the reservoir and the motorway. The weather was sunny and humid. This is the first time the butterfly has been recorded away from the coastal region. Again, we recorded them in the same place on 22 March 2023. On both occasions, butterflies were observed feeding on *Chromolaena odorata* (L.) flowers (Asteraceae);

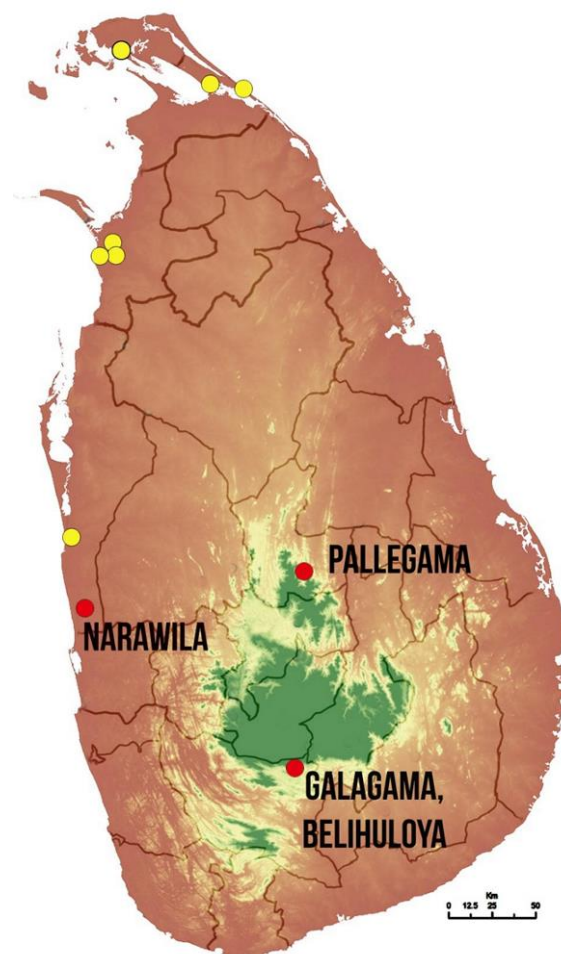


Figure 1. The map of Sri Lanka showing the locations of clouded silverline (*Cigaritis nubilus*) has been recorded previously (yellow) and in this study (red).

Narawila. On 23 January 2019, a clouded silverline (Fig. 2) was observed at Narawila (7°24'10"N, 79°54'31"E). The habitat is an open area close to a stream that has small shrubs. During midday, the butterfly was seen flitting around and spending a few minutes basking on the same flowering shrub (*Zizyphus oenopila* (L.) mill. (Rhamnaceae), where it was consuming nectar.



Figure 2. Clouded silverline (*Cigaritis nubilus*) from Narawila; © Photo: Chathura Udayanga.

Galagama, Belihuloya. A single individual of clouded silverline was observed on 5 August 2023, ~200 m away from the Colombo-Badulla main road in Belihuloya (6°43'25"N, 80°46'26"E; alt. 632 m a.s.l.), located in the intermediate zone. The habitat is a secondary forest with shrubs and trees. The day was windy and dry with most plants limp and wilted. This is the first record of a clouded silverline found above 500 m of elevation. Further, this is the southernmost record of this endemic species. Based on these new records the clouded silverline shows a much wider distribution in Sri Lanka than previously thought.

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