

Tiger Spiketail



Tiger Spiketail (*Cordulegaster erronea*) – 2.9", 65-76 mm

Habitat Conservation Alert!

Flight Record:
(6/11-8/13)
Peaks in July.

Rare

Habitat:

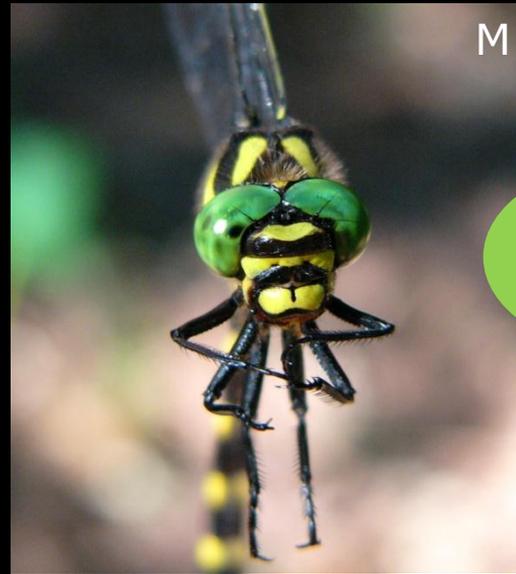
Clean, very small, seep-fed forest streams

First Glance:

Large, black and yellow. Patrols small to tiny forest streams, flying fast and straight, low over the middle of the stream. Most active in late afternoon.

Compare:

Royal River Cruiser, other spiketails



Brilliant green eyes, bold black face stripes

Our only spiketail with yellow bands that wrap around the abdomen – other spiketails have rows of spots, or triangular marks



Two thoracic side stripes – river cruisers have *one* stripe

Notes from the field – Tiger Spiketail:

This secretive and seldom seen forest dweller has an almost elven quality. It lives deep in mature woodlands and spends most of its life around tiny, almost invisible spring-fed seepage streams. When startled, it disappears into the leafy canopy, which is also where pairs fly to mate, often hidden for hours. Their larvae live in such small, food-scarce streams that they take several years to mature. Tigers live in smaller streams than any other Northern VA spiketail. Their numbers are relatively low, and it's unusual to see more than one or two together. There's a certain thrill to finding a Tiger Spiketail at its stream – you know you've stumbled upon a clean, quiet and special corner of whatever park you're exploring.

This is our latest and brightest spiketail, with wide yellow bands that encircled its abdomen, and a flight season that stretches into August. Look in mature woodlands for shady, perennial, flowing seeps leading to small streams. Moss-covered rocks, skunk cabbage, spicebush and ferns are often nearby.

After searching for years, I've only found one Tiger Spiketail stream in Northern VA, although at least three more have been found by fellow dragonfly chasers. There may be dozens more in our area, but they exist in places we don't



Notes from the field – Tiger Spiketail:

usually look for dragonflies – deep in shady woodlands with barely flowing, inch-deep trickles.

One July, I found a small, rocky stream spilling into the Potomac River, and decided to follow it up a hilly woodland to find its source. I was searching for spiketails, had been all season, and was beginning to believe field guides had made them up! I left an open, sunny river behind me and climbed into the shady forest, weaving between beech trees and boulders. Beautiful stream, beautiful woodland, but after a humid hour of rock-hopping, no spiketails. I ventured away from the stream and up a narrow path, deeper into the large forest. There! Ahead! A large dragonfly (I think I see yellow), fluttering towards a huge fallen beech. I ran, tripped, then caught up and swung my net.... the rustle of dry wings – success! I carefully pulled a big female Tiger Spiketail out of my net, all yellow stripes and long wings. I'd been able to catch her because she had a deformed thorax, and was unable to do more than weakly flutter. After setting her on a Paw Paw leaf for photos, she flew weakly off. I've been back several times and seen Tiger Spiketails patrolling up and down the tiny headwaters of that stream. Thankfully, that female, or her sisters, were able to lay eggs and add more elven spiketails to Northern Virginia.

Tiger females have a spike-like ovipositor at their abdomen tip.



The shady, shallow trickle below is just what Tigers love.

