

**Nymphalidae family**

# Tailed Emperor

*Polyura sempronius*

**Abundance in Adelaide area:** Rare

**Flight:** Mid Oct – mid May

**Wingspan:** m 75 mm; f 85 mm

**Mature larva length:** 55 mm

The Tailed Emperor migrated from the eastern states in 1973. This magnificent species is only present in urban areas where its Australian (but not South Australian) caterpillar food plants are grown. This species has become quite rare in metropolitan Adelaide in recent years, despite a moderate density of these plants. This may be due to climatic factors. Growing more of these plants may prove to be of some advantage to it.

**Caterpillar food plants:** Variable, usually tree legumes and Kurrajongs from the eastern states. The caterpillars eat the leaves.

**Australian species:** Wattles (*Acacia* spp.), Illawarra Flame-tree (*Brachychiton acerifolius*), Lacebark or White Kurrajong (*Brachychiton discolor*), Kurrajong (*Brachychiton populneus*).

**Foreign species:** Black Locust or False Acacia (*Robinia pseudoacacia*).

A relatively recent addition to the South Australian butterfly fauna, this large and spectacular butterfly was first noted in Adelaide in 1973. It needs relatively mild winters to survive and seems to be able to do this in the warmer areas of the Adelaide Plains.

A characteristic of the group of butterflies to which it belongs is the habit of feeding on things other than flowers, such as sap, rotting fruit and moisture from dung and other sources.

The size of the butterfly is notable in the context of other South Australian species. The expanded wing size can vary from 75–85 mm or even larger.



The upper side is boldly marked in white and with blue-grey, narrow margins, housing some orange markings on the hind wings. The black, prominent double-pointed tails that grace the bottom of the outer margin of each hind wing give the butterfly its name.



Underneath, both sexes have complex linear patterns in rich red and yellow-browns on a white background, with black outlines and a bright orange border to the hind wing.



The mature caterpillar is one of the most spectacular of any Australian butterfly. It is green with a yellow line running down each side. There is at least one, and sometimes more, yellow crescent shaped markings that stretch across the back of the caterpillar. It is the head, however, that attracts the most attention. It is green and has two long pairs of horns as well as one short set of horns along the back of the head-scale, where it attaches to the body.

