

European **Butterflies**

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Charaxes Publications

BUTTERFLY HOLIDAYS 2019



ITALIAN ALPS WITH MARTIN WARREN

This June we invite you to join us on a new and exciting holiday in the Piedmont region of northwest Italy, to explore the Parco Naturale delle Alpi Marittime (Natural Park of the Maritime Alps), also known as the Park of Kings. True to the meaning of its name (foot of the mountain), Piedmont is a land of mountains. It is surrounded on three sides by the Alps, with the highest peaks and largest glaciers in Italy.

Italy itself is an incredibly rich country for butterflies with about 260 species! We should see around 100 species or more, including some local specialities and rarities such as Scarce Fritillary and Southern Swallowtail. A small selection of other highlights includes Poplar Admiral, Tania's Fritillary, Italian Festoon, Small Apollo, Apollo, Alpine Blue, Scarce Large Blue, Camberwell Beauty, Cynthia's



Fritillary and Piedmont Ringlet.

We've assembled a special team to lead this tour; Martin Warren, the previous CEO of BC and now the Head of Development for BC Europe. And Simon Spencer, the chair of the BC European Butterflies

Group branch. They will also be joined by David Moore, who has rapidly become one of our most popular and skilled guides.

PICOS DE EUROPA WITH PATRICK BARKHAM

In July we have another new holiday and the chance to go butterflying in the Picos De Europa with the charismatic writer, naturalist and self-confessed butterfly addict Patrick Barkham!

The Picos is at the core of the Cantabrian Mountain range, which stretches along the north coast of Spain for about 300 kilometres. It is one of the most beautiful and beguiling parts of the whole region.

Over 150 butterfly species reside among the spectacular and rugged range of limestone mountains. Our daily excursions from the attractive and unspoiled village which is our base, will take in a variety of habitats and scenery, including flower rich meadows fizzing with a range of fritillaries and other goodies, woodlands and sunlit glades and then up into the mountains themselves for alpine treasures, hidden among rocky pastures and limestone pavement!

We should see a good number of different butterfly species, including stars such as the Apollo and Gavarie Blue, Bog Fritillary, dusky large blue, Camberwell Beauty and Large Chequered Skipper.



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Cover: **Scarce Swallowtail**, Viper's Bugloss, Leuk, Valais, Switzerland, 09.07.18 by Jason Sargerson.

Introduction

Welcome to the second edition of European Butterflies. I would like to thank all the contributors for their articles and photographs. Most of the articles concentrate on specific butterfly excursions. This is to be expected, as the maximum enjoyment of butterflies is usually in the field on a nice sunny day. I am still pleased to welcome articles about Conservation and Life Cycle. One key issue in the articles is location of rare species. Locations of rare species are described in general terms so as not to encourage collectors. I hope that any collectors reading this magazine will transfer their interest to photography and film. If you are reading the magazine for the first time and would like to contribute to the next issue of the magazine, please contact me by September 30th 2019. I am happy to receive contributions from individuals and societies as well as organisations with a commercial interest.

It was very disturbing to read recently that scientists have estimated that 60% of the worlds' wildlife has been lost since 1970. In South and Central America it could be as much as 90%. People are rapidly polluting and destroying the land, the oceans and the atmosphere. Unless countries stabilise their populations and balance their use of resources, the natural world we enjoy so much will be lost. So called economic wealth creation comes at a huge loss and cost to the natural world. This has only just begun to be measured and accounted for by companies and governments.

Jason Sargerson



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Albarracin, 03.08.18



Azure Chalkhill Blue, 30.07.18



Black Satyr, 29.07.18



Cardinal, 01.08.18

Montes Universales, NE Spain, 28 July to 3 August 2018

Few people have heard of the Montes Universales, much less know where it is, but a late summer visit to this largely ignored area of Spain proved to be quite an eye-opener. Spain is an interesting country for butterflies, but whilst many would be aware of the delights on offer in the Pyrenees and Picos de Europa, anywhere much further south would generally be seen as dry, arid and with little to offer to the enthusiast. This reserva nacional is situated some 200km east of Madrid, with the Sierra de Albarracin being slightly north of the towns of Cuenca and Teruel, and forming part of the Sistema Iberico, which runs from Burgos province in the north west towards the Mediterranean close to Valencia.

The elevation reaches approximately 1900m, though these limestone highlands are far more gently undulating than the more precipitous Spanish ranges to the north.

The general landscape comprises areas of arable land used for grain as well as extensive arid scrub, along with patches of juniper, poplar, pine and oak forest. There are several rivers which rise in the region, including the Guadalaviar which flows towards Valencia and the Tagus, whose source is the Fuente de Garcia, found near Frias de Albarracin and marked by a series of monuments just off the A-1704 main road. Whilst much of the region appears arid, there is some low intensity grazing in the more fertile areas and these places are often where large numbers of butterflies can be found, including some very interesting endemics. This was a Greenwings tour, and the timing of the visit was designed to catch up with as wide a range of species as possible. Granted, the jewel in the crown of this region, [Zapater's Ringlet](#), is predominantly an August butterfly, however the rationale was to cover the early flight period for this species without losing some of the other desirables which would likely be disappearing as August progressed.

Day 1 – Local ramblas between Albarracin and Pozondon

The first day of exploring was 28th July, and with afternoon highs reaching 36c in this region at this time of year, it was important to make the most of the cooler temperatures in the early to mid-morning period.

Having arrived in the charming, historic Moorish town of Albarracin the evening before, after a long drive from Madrid airport, a visit to a site a mere 10 minute drive away was perfect. The location was one of the many 'ramblas' found in this region; dried up river beds which most likely only see running water in late winter and early spring as a result of snow melt and storms.

Although the river Guadalaviar was just across the road, this rambla looked not to have seen any water for some while. The vegetation was sparse but there were surprisingly good numbers of butterflies, with the first species attracting attention being [Oberthur's Anomalous Blue](#) (*Polyommatus fabressei*).

Throughout the week there would be no shortage of these, nor would there be any trouble finding **Spanish Chalkhill Blue** (*Lysandra albicans*), which was also around in the dozens here. Dry, dusty locations are often attractive to Hesperids, and one of the highlights was the ubiquity of a species that is often very scarce elsewhere, **Cinquefoil Skipper** (*Pyrgus cirsii*). This was, by some distance, the commonest pyrgus throughout the trip and could often be seen taking minerals from damp ground in sizeable numbers. **Southern Marbled Skipper** (*Carcharodus baeticus*) was another notable find, with **Sage Skipper** (*Muschampia proto*) also being a welcome addition, although perhaps not too surprising given the amount of foodplant in this location.



Cinquefoil Skipper, 31.07.18

Perhaps the highlight of Day One was the sighting of several **Southern Hermits** (*Chazara prieuri*), an Iberian endemic. The odd one or two popped up elsewhere, but this rambla was the best spot for them without a doubt.



Dusky Meadow Brown, 30.07.18

All three Gatekeepers were seen here; **Southern** (*Pyronia cecilia*), **Spanish** (*Bathseba*) and the one we're used to at home (*Tithonus*), whilst **Dusky Heaths** (*Coenonympha dorus*) were pleasingly abundant.

There was an impressive range of Graylings on show, with **Rock Grayling** (*Hipparchia alcyone*) approaching pestilent levels. **Grayling** (*semele*) and **Great Banded Grayling** (*Brintesia circe*) were also quite abundant, although it paid to keep one's eyes open because smaller numbers of the delightful **Striped Grayling** (*Hipparchia fidia*) and the dusker coloured **Tree Grayling** (*statilinus*) were amongst the supporting cast.



Esper's Marbled White, 01.08.18

In the afternoon, a site towards Pozondon was visited, and this proved productive due to the presence of some standing water at the bottom of an overflow underneath a road bridge. There were tremendous numbers of butterflies flying around this area, the most notable being **Great Sooty Satyr** (*Satyrus ferula*) which is not shown on the distribution maps for this area.

Of course, many other species were recorded, including **Cleopatra** (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*), **Escher's Blue** (*Polyommatus escheri*), **Hermit** (*Chazara briseis*), **Berger's Clouded Yellow** (*Colias alfacariensis*), **Chapman's Blue** (*Polyommatus thersites*), **Black Satyr** (*Satyrus actaea*), **Provençal Fritillary** (*Melitaea deione*) and **Iberian Marbled White** (*Melanargia lachesis*). In fact, this last species was the commonest of all during the week, with many thousands seen in practically all habitats.

Day 2 – Gorge near Noguera and Sierra Alta

The following day saw a change of habitat, with the dry and dusty ramblas near Albarracin being swapped for a relatively verdant oasis near the village of Noguera. Again, the presence of a river was critical, with both sides of it having good quantities and varieties of larval foodplants, and with the steep rock faces providing protection from the sun (welcome for both plant life and humans!).



Great-banded Grayling, 02.08.18



Noguera, 30.07.18



Hermit, 01.08.18



Iberian Marbled White, 30.07.18



Iberian Scarce Swallowtail, 01.08.18

There were some enjoyable sights to behold right next to the parking area, with both **Oriental** and **Dusky Meadow Brown** recorded (*Hyponephele lupina & lycaon*) along with all five argynnis Fritillaries buzzing around an extensive patch of thistles.

On the track itself there were several damp patches, and within a few minutes both **Mother of Pearl Blue** (*Polyommatus nivescens*) and **Azure Chalkhill Blue** (*Lysandra caelestissima*) were observed, along with a handful of **Iberian Scarce Swallowtails** (*Iphiclides feisthamelii*) and a patrolling **Large Tortoiseshell** (*Nymphalis polychloros*).

In the afternoon, the first attempt to locate **Zapater's Ringlet** (*Erebia zapateri*) was attempted, with a trip to the 1854m Sierra Alta. This was an optimistic move, as if the insect had emerged then it was more likely to be found at lower altitudes, and so it proved. However, the best panoramic view of the week was had at the summit of the mountain, and satisfying numbers of butterflies were up there either hill-topping or merely nectaring. These included Swallowtail, Hermit and even Apollo. A handful of **Purple Shot Coppers** were seen on thyme blooms, whilst a solitary **Mountain Argus** was also recorded.

Day 3 – Light woodland and grassy meadows near Moscardon

The next morning was spent at a surprisingly lush, green site near the village of Moscardon. There were a couple of long water troughs near the parking area for local shepherds to bring their sheep to, and this damp area was proving popular with butterflies even early in the morning. A dozen or so **Damon Blues** caught the eye as they potted around the troughs although they mysteriously disappeared as the day warmed up.

This was one of the few sites visited where there was extensive long grass, and the numbers of butterflies were quite astounding, with Graylings literally having to be warded off as they buzzed around human skin looking to feast on sweat. Within these hordes of insects were the first **False Graylings** (*Arethusana arethusa*) of the week, although it is likely that prior to this, they had been around but simply hadn't been spotted amongst the multi-hundreds of their similar-looking flying cousins.

One particularly attractive newcomer was **Spanish Chestnut Heath** (*Coenonympha glycerion f. iphinoides*), which possesses a beautiful array of hindwing spots more akin to Russian Heath than the nominate form of this species.

Such was the spectacle of numbers that another fly-by Apollo was casually dismissed, although ironically, the week's first **Black Veined White** generated significant interest! The long grass also harboured **Small** (*Thymelicus sylvestris*) and **Lulworth Skippers** (*acteon*), whilst **Southern Brown Argus** (*Aricia cramera*), **Mallow Skipper** (*Carcharodus alceae*) and **Southern White Admiral** (*Limenitis reducta*) were also recorded.

Day 4 – Countryside beyond Terriente

The next day saw a trip into the wild countryside beyond Terriente where the Rio Cabriel flows. Much of the landscape was arid but again, there were areas which held sufficient ground water to allow meadows to prosper and it was here that the first **Esper's Marbled Whites** (*Melanargia russiae*) were encountered, easy to separate from the ubiquitous Iberian Marbled Whites due to the greater extent of black markings on the upperwings. Both **Lesser Marbled** (*Brenthis ino*) and **Twin Spot Fritillary** (*Brenthis hecate*) were on the wing here, along with **Silver Spotted** (*Hesperia comma*) and **Olive Skipper** (*Pyrgus serratulae*). A boggy patch (something of a rarity in these parts) was spotted at the far end of the grassland with huge numbers of flowering thistles, and a careful walk into this area provided a real treat – stupendous numbers of butterflies were nectaring here, with many, many different species present. Fritillaries were probably best represented, but there were also Hermits & Southern Hermits, along with commoner species such as the various Graylings, Peacock and Comma. **Blue Spot Hairstreak** (*Satyrrium spini*) and **Ilex Hairstreak** (*Satyrrium ilicis*) were recorded nearby in the scrub. Suddenly, a black butterfly was spotted flying past the thistle patch – a **Zapater's Ringlet**. Sadly, it flew purposefully towards the rocky slope and was lost without being seen settled.



Lesser Marbled Fritillary, 01.08.18



Mother of Pearl Blue, 01.08.18

Day 5 – Cabriel waterfall and return to meadow beyond Terriente

A repeat visit to the Zapater's site was undertaken the following day, although en route a stop was made at a waterfall which turned up **Spanish Purple Hairstreak** (*Laeosopis roboris*) as well as good numbers of puddling blues, including **Lang's Short Tailed Blue** (*Leptotes pirithous*). Later on, having revisited the meadow and parked the vehicle right beside the thistle patch that had proved so productive the previous day, another **Zapater's Ringlet** was immediately spotted. Thankfully, this one came down in a damp area but was constantly bothered by the many bees which were themselves taking fluids. It briefly settled on a grass stem allowing a handful of photos before taking off and disappearing. Clearly, the flight period of this species was only just beginning. Both specimens seen appeared extremely fresh and it is probable that many more individuals would be recorded should the area be visited later on in August.



Southern Brown Argus, 02.08.18

Day 6 – Return to the rambla and Noguera

The final full day was spent at two sites that had been productive earlier on in the week. The fact that no new species for the trip were observed is testimony to how successful the first five days had been. Again, **Southern Hermit** was recorded at the rambla whilst **Mother of Pearl Blue** was still going strong at the Noguera site. Yet again, by early afternoon, temperatures had reached the mid thirties and with persistently clear blue skies, it was time to retreat to the base in Albarracin for the final time.



Southern Hermit, 29.07.18



Southern White Admiral, 31.07.18



Spanish Heath, 01.08.18



Spanish Purple Hairstreak, 02.08.18



Striped Grayling, 29.07.18

Summary

A total of 99 species were recorded during the week, with some seen in the multi-thousands. The defining memory will remain the sheer numbers of Graylings along with Iberian Marbled Whites.

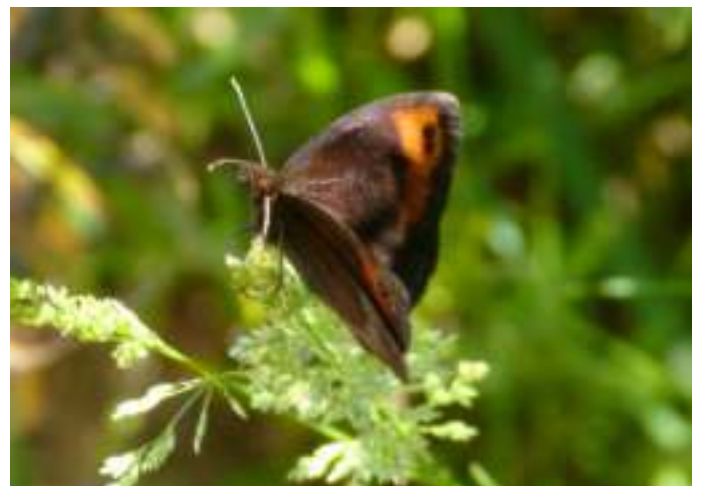
Driving along the roads, it is easy to be fooled into thinking that this area is relatively bereft of butterfly species, as only a handful are seen flying about, e.g. Bath Whites & Clouded Yellows. However, the bulk of the butterflies can be found congregated in those few areas of prime habitat and in seriously impressive numbers.

Quite a few species recorded here are either Iberian (or even Sistema Iberico) endemics, e.g. **Oberthur's Anomalous Blue**, **Zapater's Ringlet**, **Mother of Pearl Blue** (although this has occasionally been recorded in France), **Southern Hermit** and **Azure Chalkhill Blue**. Amongst the non-endemics, it was pleasing to see **Cinquefoil Skipper** in such numbers, with **False Grayling**, **Oriental Meadow Brown**, **Esper's Marbled White**, **Hermit**, **Black Satyr**, **Southern Marbled Skipper**, **Cardinal** and **Twin Spot Fritillary** being particularly welcome finds too.

From a general traveller's perspective, this part of Spain seems to be largely unknown even to Spaniards! Although it was peak summer holiday season, there was a relative paucity of tourists and few vehicles on what are largely very good roads. There appears to be plenty of accommodation available and several camp-sites for those taking camper vans, and prices are considerably cheaper than in France or Italy. With perfect weather practically guaranteed and around 100 species of butterfly to be discovered, this enchanting part of Spain is definitely worth considering.



David Moore
Photographs: David Moore



Zapater's Ringlet, 02.08.18

Nectar Plants for Butterflies: Part One

Astrantia or Great Masterwort (*Astrantia major*) Pink white flowers in groups of four, 1.0m. Common in grassy meadows, flowering from May to July. Attracts: Fritillaries and Browns.

Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) Orange tinged yellow flowers, perennial 20cm. Common on rough ground and in meadows, flowering from June to September. Attracts Blues, Yellows and Skippers and it is the caterpillar food plant for **Common Blue**, **Idas Blue** and **Silver-studded Blue**.

Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) Blue flowers, 30cm. Common, growing in meadows and woodland, flowering from May to September. Attracts: Blues, Fritillaries and Yellows.

Cabbage Thistle (*Cirsium oleraceum*) Yellow/green flowers, 1.5m. Frequent, growing in damp meadows and wetland, flowering from June to August. Attracts: **Brimstone** and Browns.

Common Bistort (*Polygonum bistorta*) Pink flower spike, 80cm. Common, growing in damp meadows, and flowering from May to July. It attracts Coppers and is the caterpillar food plant for **Violet Copper** and **Purple-edged Copper**.

Creeping Thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) Purple flowers, spineless stems, 1.5m. Common, growing in wasteland and meadows, and flowering from July to October. Attracts: Apollos, Swallowtails, Admirals and Fritillaries.

Jason Sargerson



Astrantia, Heath Fritillary, 25.06.10



Bird's-foot-trefoil, Escher's Blue, 30.07.12



Bugle, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, 05.07.13



Cabbage Thistle, Brimstone, 03.08.17



Common Bistort, Purple-edged Copper, 01.07.16



Creeping Thistle, Thor's Fritillary, 05.08.14



Field Scabious, Lesser Marbled Fritillary, 04.08.14



Great Burnet, Scarce Large Blue, 07.07.18



Hairy St John's Wort, Scarce Copper, 03.08.18



Martagon Lily, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, 10.07.18

Nectar Plants for Butterflies

Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*) Blue flowers, 1.0m. Common in dry meadows, flowering from July to September. It attracts Skippers, Fritillaries, Ringlets and Admirals.

Great Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) Purple flowers, 1.0m. Frequent in damp meadows, flowering from June to September. It is attractive to the rare Large Blue species and is the caterpillar food plant for **Scarce Large Blue** and **Dusky Large Blue**.

Hairy St John's Wort (*Hypericum hisutum*) Yellow flowers, 1.0m. Common in damp meadows and woodland, flowering in July and August. Attracts: Coppers, Ringlets and Fritillaries.

Martagon Lily (*Lilium martagon*) Pink flowers, 1.0m. Mountains and chalky soils, flowering in June and July. Attracts Fritillaries and Skippers

Ox-eye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) Yellow centred, white flowers, 1.0m. Common in meadows, flowering from May to September. It attracts Coppers, Fritillaries, Blues and Whites.

Oxford Ragwort (*Senecio squalidus*) Yellow flowers, 40 cm. Common in waste ground, by railways, flowers from June to December. Attracts Fritillaries, Hairstreaks.

Red Clover (*Trifolium pratense*) Pink flowers, 60cm. Common in meadows, flowers May to September. Attracts Fritillaries, Blues, Yellows, caterpillar food plant for **Mazarine Blue** and **Clouded Yellows**.

Round-headed Rampion (*Phyteuma orbiculare*) Blue flowers, 40cm. Chalk grassland, flowers May to August. Attracts Blues, Browns and Fritillaries.

Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*) Pink flowers, 60cm. Chalk grassland, flowers May to July. Attracts Blues, Skippers, caterpillar food plant for **Damon Blue**.

Selfheal (*Prunella vulgaris*) Purple/pink flowers, 40cm. Frequent in damp meadows, flowering from June to September. It attracts Blues and Fritillaries.

Tufted Vetch (*Vicia cracca*) Blue flowers, 1.5m. Common in meadows and rough ground, flowering from June to September. It attracts Blues and Fritillaries and is the caterpillar food plant for **Amanda's Blue**.

Vipers Bugloss (*Echium vulgare*) Blue flowers, 1.0m. Common on waste ground and in meadows, flowering May to October. Attracts Swallowtails, Yellows, Blues.



Jason Sargerson
Photographs: Jason Sargerson



Ox-eye Daisy, Purple-shot Copper, 28.05.12



Sainfoin, Geranium Argus, 11.06.17



Oxford Ragwort, Queen of Spain Fritillary, 05.06.18



Selfheal, Alcon Blue, 01.08.15



Red Clover, Black-veined White, 04.06.18



Tufted Vetch, Amanda's Blue, 05.08.17



Round Headed Rampion, Northern Brown Argus, 30.07.16



Viper's Bugloss, Scarce Swallowtail, 09.07.18



Clearing below Molines en Champsaur, 03.07.16



Almond-eyed Ringlet, 29.06.16



Apollo, 30.06.17



Arran Brown, 02.07.17

France: Champsaur Valley, Haute Alps 05.

The Champsaur valley is situated in the Parc national des Ecrins, situated North of Gap East of the Route Napoleon N 85, it came to my attention on a French website "Le Monde des Insects" a list of 162 species of day flying butterflies have been recorded over a number of years by three enthusiastic lepidopterists, I decided this would be an interesting place to visit and so it would prove to be. Our first visit was in 2016, St Bonnet en Champsaur was our base camp at a VVF holiday complex with camping facilities, St Bonnet is a quiet modest village well situated to explore the Valley. Several locations at different altitudes were selected to explore, Champoleon and a high altitude ski complex Orcieres another

We took the road to La Motte-en-Champsaur and then continued towards Molines-en-Champsaur, a few kilometres below Molines a large clearing proved to be an exciting spot giving me my first **Purple-shot Copper**, take care not to approach the numerous bee hives, the bees are not friendly as I can testify, a track that runs uphill to the left offers good possibilities, a short drive then took us to Molines this became our favourite location.

Molines-en-Champsaur (1250m), is a tiny hamlet that time forgot, a church, a cemetery, several houses, and the indispensable Auberge Gaillard where help is on hand to sustain the thirsty lepidopterist's enthusiasm. Parking is limited at the Hamlet, popular with hikers it can sometimes be crowded. However, there is a large parking area a short distance before reaching the Hamlet. From the park a wooden bridge crosses the torrent into a wide grassy area, a path takes the walker to higher mountains. These flowery meadows are home to a good number of species, **Scarce Copper** and **Purple-edged Copper** fly together, the sharp eyed observer may also pick out a **Dusky Meadow Brown** and **Titania's Fritillary**, **Niobe Fritillary**, **Queen of Spain Fritillary**, **Dark Green Fritillary** and **High Brown Fritillary** are all present. **Safflower Skipper** and the more common species are also present.

The path that starts from besides the Church leads to a marked Sentier de randonnée, this path proved to be alive with many species, providing my first sighting of a **Poplar Admiral**. Other butterflies included **Apollo**s, **Titania's Fritillary**, **Spotted Fritillary**, **Marbled Fritillary**, **Swallowtail**, **Large Blue**, **Arran Brown**, and many more. We returned in 2017 to enjoy this peaceful location, my only regret is that age and creaking knees prevent me from being able to access the higher pastures of this lovely valley. At higher altitudes, only for the energetic mountain hikers, such exotic species such as **Cynthia's Fritillary**, **Balkan Fritillary**, **Mountain Dappled White**, **Clouded Apollo** and **Mnestra's Ringlet** have been recorded.



James Gibbs

Photographs: James Gibbs



La Route Napoleon en Champsaur, 07.07.16



Safflower Skipper, 30.06.17



Mazarine Blue, 04.07.16



Scarce Copper, 30.06.17



Niobe Fritillary, 02.07.17



Spotted Fritillary, 01.07.16



Purple-edged Copper eurydame, 27.06.16



Titania's Fritillary, 10.07.17



Swallowtail, Pedersano, Trentino, Italy, 13.04.13



Scarce Swallowtail, Pedersano, Trentino, Italy, 14.04.13



Purple Emperor, Monte Stivo, Trentino, Italy, 23.08.11



Purple Emperor, Monte Roite, Trentino, Italy, 02.08.13

Hill-toppers: Italy and Spain

Accounts from Rovereto, (Italy), Monte Circeo (Italy) and Altea (Spain)

When I go out on my butterfly-searching excursions, or just simply for a walk, I like to have a destination to aim for, as I believe most people do. Quite often that destination is the top of a nearby hill or the summit of a mountain. Over the last few years I have learnt that these places are very often ideal spots for finding certain species of butterfly, the so-called “hill-toppers”, which are usually males and which use the high vantage points to defend their territories and watch for passing females. I thought it would be interesting, therefore, to share a few of my experiences with everyone.

Two common butterflies that can be found in most places in my local area (Pedersano, 470m) and which often choose hill-tops to soak up the sun and survey the area are the **Swallowtail** and **Scarce Swallowtail**. In mid-April last year on one of my shorter walks I found both on a raised piece of ground on the edge of a ridge just above the village where I live (Photos 1 and 2). They were both resting at opposite sides of a shrub with their wings open and heads towards the valley below. Every so often one would take off, disturbing the other, resulting in an air battle with each trying to send the other away. After a while, one would come back to resume its strategic perching position, followed a little later by the other. I watched this behaviour continue for a good thirty minutes.

On a longer walk, again near my local village, climbing to one of the peaks on Monte Stivo (1915m), I was pleased to see a dark looking butterfly swoop past me. I recognised it as a **Purple Emperor**, always a special butterfly to come across, and saw it settle on the outer side of a clump of bushes. Approaching very carefully, being careful not to slip over the edge, I managed to get a few photos of it. Looking at the photo (number 3), I think you will appreciate its well-chosen position at 1915m, with a clear, unhindered view over the whole valley.

On another occasion, this time on one of the mountains in the Pasubio area of Trentino, I saw another **Purple Emperor** on the way up. My guess was that the butterfly was heading for the summit about 150m above us. Sure enough, there at the highest point, sitting on a clump of creeping pine bushes was a male **Purple Emperor** (see photo 4), presumably the one I had seen flying up. To my delight, a few minutes later, a female appeared and settled just a few branches away from the male (although it wasn't immediately seen by the male). Photo 5 shows the ridge of Monte Roite (2116m) just near to where I saw the two butterflies.

Perhaps the most colourful of the hill-toppers is the **Two-tailed Pasha**, present along much of the coastline of Spain, France, Italy and the ex-Yugoslavian countries. My first experience of it was at the top of Monte Circeo (541m), above San Felice Circeo in Lazio, Italy.

After, a hot and sticky climb up (the clouds had just lifted off the higher part of the mountain) I initially came across a **Two-tailed Pasha**, on such a narrow crest with a sheer drop down to the sea on one side and a steep rocky descent on the other, that it was difficult to get in a position to get any decent photos (photo 6). However, continuing along the crest to a wider clearing, I found 3 or 4 more, each guarding or fighting for a particular tree or branch. With patience I managed to get close enough to tempt one of them onto my finger for some close-up shots (photo 7). Flying nearby were some **Scarce Swallowtails** (photo 8).

The experience on Monte Circeo was in August. In March another year, I was in Spain near Altea and I decided to head for the summit of the Sierra Gelada (439m), the mountain on the coast between Albir and Benidorm. On the way up, I thought to myself that it was the sort of habitat which would suit **Two-tailed Pashas**, but quickly dismissed the thought, believing it to be far too early in the year, especially because I had seen little of interest up to then. Immediately I reached the top (photo 9), what should appear but a magnificent **Two-tailed Pasha**! After observing it for a few minutes, the butterfly finally settled in an accessible place, even obliging me with opening its wings for a short time for photo number 10.

So, the moral of this account is, I suppose, that it's well worth making the extra effort to reach the top of the hill or mountain. You never know what nice surprises you might find when you get there.



Robin Fox
Photographs: Robin Fox



Monte Roite, Trentino, Italy, 02.08.13



Monte Circeo, Lazio, Italy, 09.08.09



Two-tailed Pasha, Monte Circeo, Lazio, Italy, 12.08.09



Scarce Swallowtail, Monte Circeo, Lazio, Italy, 09.08.09



Sierra Gelada, Spain, 28.03.16



Two-tailed Pasha, Sierra Gelada, Spain, 28.03.16



Naturetrek Group, Bükk Hills, Hungary



Berger's Clouded Yellow



Clouded Apollo



Large Copper

Naturetrek: Emperors of Hungary

It was when a **Lesser Purple Emperor** landed on my head that I realised that Hungary is a special place for butterflies. I had once seen a **Purple Emperor** in a southern English oakwood, for about a millisecond, disappearing into the oblivion of the high summer canopy. Now, in a glade in Aggtelek National Park, three or four Lesser Purples were part flitting, part soaring around the same, seemingly enchanted glade. And they were becoming friendly, attracted by the sweat of their admirers. I watched them with a mixture of delight and incredulity. A birder, and well used to the relative impoverishment of the British butterfly fauna, I had never seen anything like this. If ever there was a purple patch, this was it.

I had come to Hungary on a private tour for a few days in midsummer ten years ago. It wasn't a butterfly trip, but it turned out to be a revelation. It was late June, and the limestone slopes and rich forests of Aggtelek and the nearby Bükk Hills had been cooking up biodiversity. The sun shone and the warm breezes swept clouds of butterflies along the forest rides and over the flowery meadows. I had never seen anything like the profusion here. Different species buzzed, lolloped and soared in every direction, heavy insect holiday traffic in the gentlest of settings.

Apart from the standard British species, I didn't know what they were, but by happenstance, I was staying in the same hotel as a butterfly-watching group. We kept running into each other, and every time we met, they tried to unlock the colour and pattern codes of the bewildering forms. "That's a **Short-tailed Blue**, with the small tail and orange spots..." "That's **Provencal Short-tailed Blue**, with barely visible tail and tiny orange spots..." "**Small Blue** – absolutely no orange spots. Get it?" Well, I didn't really. There were too many Blues and they all looked very similar. And as for the Fritillaries...

But I was captivated by the whole experience. The group arrived at their chosen spot, spread out by following the paths of their choice, and peered at every flying insect. It looked like a communal treasure hunt, which is, to be honest, exactly what it was. The treasures weren't always obvious when you found them – who would have thought that a **Large Copper** was better than a **Scarce Copper**? And fool's gold was around, too; for every singleton of **Wood White** there were ten **Small Whites**, at least. But the sheer sense of discovery was palpable.

Every few minutes, somebody would call out the next interesting species, and people would come together in a bubble of anticipation. "Niobe here," would come the call, which I eventually discovered was in Fritillary-speak. Everybody would dutifully peer at the orange-and-black puzzle before their eyes, the insect sitting contentedly on a colourful herb, unaware of the brain-engagement it was causing. And then, after a while, somebody else would call "Lesser Marbled," and the herd would come together again, cooing. I well knew that birders easily get caught up in collective joy, but this was the first time I had witnessed butterflies causing the same.

One species of butterfly was apparently on everyone's wish-list for that trip. I caught up with the group as they were about to peruse the Ménes Valley. "We might see a Pallas's today," said a tour member, almost in a conspiratorial whisper. More Fritillary shorthand - he said it with a hint of mystery and emotion, the same tone you might adopt on the search for the Yeti. So, we wandered into another lepidopteran fleshpot, and several grown men and women ran about, chasing very fast, big orange sprites. It took us an hour, but we were soon crowding around a butterfly in the same way that the crowds gather around the Mona Lisa in the Louvre, with hushed respect and craned necks. "You see that silvery white streak separating the outer and inner parts of the wing..." said one of the worshippers, their voice crackling. And one or two people gazed at the **Pallas's Fritillary** with the sort of wistful look that represents longing fulfilled. There was emotion in that meadow, and it was totally infectious.

I found myself longing, too – to see everything, to hear the next exotic name. I had heard of a Clouded Yellow, but here we were far enough east to see **Berger's Clouded Yellow**. I ticked off **Great Banded Grayling**, **Alcon Blue** and **Blue-spot Hairstreak**. I had vaguely heard of some of them, but now they were "on my list", prizes that I didn't previously realised that I wanted. At the end of a couple of days I had seen more species than have ever been recorded in Britain. My mind was ablaze with sunlit memories. The Lesser Purple Emperor landed on my head, but butterflies in general had settled on my heart.

That was a decade ago, and since then I have been to many other places in Europe, where the mix of species is delightful and different. Who would have thought it – you can see great butterflies by the Baltic Sea - **Nickerl's Fritillary** anyone? I have seen **Apollos** in the Pyrenees, and **Poplar Admirals** in Slovakia. I have seen vast gatherings of Fritillaries and other butterflies coming down to the muddy edge of a river for nutrients, something I never knew happened in Europe. Since that sun-drenched time, I have also become a tour leader for Naturetrek, the UK's leading specialist wildlife tour operator and a company which donates 10% of the proceeds of its varied butterfly holidays to Butterfly Conservation. At the moment I am only a bird guide; those tricky, flighty, if delectable *Mellicta*s are still beyond my level of expertise. But on every trip I run, birds are not the only focus. Find me a warm glade in June and I will be off with the Emperors and Admirals, the Skippers and the Blues, hoping to share in discovery and excitement with anyone else who cares. Truly we are blessed in Europe, our lands dripping with fabulous species. If you happen to run into a birder on your next trip, tell them.

Naturetrek's next 'Butterflies of Hungary' tour runs from 11th Jun - 18th June and costs £1,695 including all flights, food, accommodation and guiding by an expert leader. Contact information: 01962 733051 or visit naturetrek.co.uk

 **Dominic Couzens**
Photographs:
Naturetrek/Shutterstock



Lesser Purple Emperor



Nickerl's Fritillary



Pallas's Fritillary



Purple Emperor



Asian Fritillary, Valais, 26.06.15



Asian Fritillary, Valais, 26.06.15



Asian Fritillaries on Adenostyles 08.07.17

Switzerland: Asian Fritillaries in Valais

The **Asian Fritillary** is a rare butterfly found in the high mountains in Austria, France, Italy and Switzerland. In Switzerland there are small colonies in the cantons of Uri and Graubünden and a slightly larger population in Valais. As it is a rare butterfly, I am not giving its exact location. In Valais it is found in the mountains south of the Rhone Valley.

This is a mountain butterfly, but not above the tree line, more usually at an altitude of 1500 to 1800m. It prefers sheltered, flowery areas with low shrubs. The habitat is often characterised by the presence of *Alpenrose* (*Rhododendron ferrugineum*) and a small stream. Nectar food plants include the favourite Wild Thyme. The second time I visited the site I found it on the pink flowers of *Adenostyles*.

The larval foodplant is Blue Honeysuckle (*Lonicera caerulea*), a relatively rare plant. The sexes are similar, but the female has lighter colours with more yellowish markings. The flight period for the Asian Fritillary is the last two weeks of June and the first two weeks in July. To see good quality butterflies the best time is probably the last week of June.

Other butterflies to look out for in this region of Switzerland include: **Alpine Grayling**, **Chequered Skipper**, **Cranberry Blue**, **Large Blue**, **Lesser Marbled Fritillary**, **Northern Wall Brown**, **Pearl-bordered Fritillary**, **Scarce Copper**, **Sooty Copper**, **Titania's Fritillary** and **Turquoise Blue**.



Jason Sargerson
Photographs:
Jason Sargerson



Alpine Grayling, 26.06.15



Northern Wall Brown, 09.07.18



Chequered Skipper, 09.07.18



Pearl-bordered Fritillary, 09.07.18



Cranberry Blue, 26.06.15



Sooty Copper subalpina, 09.07.18



Lesser Marbled Fritillary, 09.07.18



Turquoise Blue, 26.06.15



Bosnian Blue, 10.07.12, Nick Greateorex Davies



Bosnian Blue, 09.07.12, Nick Greateorex Davies



Danube Clouded Yellow Egg, 10.08.15, Martin Davies



Danube Clouded Yellow, 11.08.15, Martin Davies

European Butterflies Group

Butterfly Conservation's European Butterflies Group (formerly European Interests Group or EIG) has the same constitution as other Butterfly Conservation Groups and aims to promote the enjoyment, conservation and study of butterflies, moths and their habitats in Europe rather than in the UK. It was set up in 2006 to bring all members of Butterfly Conservation Interested in European butterflies together. The idea was not only to swap information on where to go to see and photograph butterflies but to do useful work surveying and recording butterflies in conjunction with partners in Europe where we work closely with Butterfly Conservation Europe. We encourage our members to send in records to local recording schemes.

The group was formed after a West Midlands BC branch trip to Hungary in 2006 that conducted butterfly surveys of two National Parks. Over the years members have done surveys from Tenerife to Arctic Scandinavia and these are usually written up in the twice yearly European Butterflies Group Newsletter. Back issues of this with a summary of the surveys are on the website <http://www.european-butterflies.org.uk/about.html>. For example we have surveyed for the **Bosnian Blue** (*Plebejus dardanus*) in the Balkans – one group going to Greece and another to Bulgaria. Another EBG trip surveyed for **Scarce Fritillary** (*Euphydryas maturna*) in NE Italy extending the area of occupancy at Italy's only (*maturna*) site from a few hectares, greatly threatened by collectors, to a few sq km. More recently we have surveyed for the **Odd Spot Blue** (*Turanana taygetica*) in Greece and for **Danube Clouded Yellow** (*Colias myrmidone*) in Romania, Bulgaria and Belarus with the Romanian survey leading to two areas being designated as Natura 2000 sites. Members also assisted with surveys and monitoring of **Violet Copper** (*Lycaena helle*) in France and Romania, **Canary Islands Large White** (*Pieris cheiranthi*) in Tenerife and several rare endemics in southern Spain.

European Butterflies Group is open to all members of butterfly conservation for an additional branch membership costing £10. All correspondence is by email and a direct debit is essential. European members joining Butterfly Conservation can have EBG as their 'local group'. An application form is on the www.european-butterflies.org.uk website. This website has a mass of information on where to go to see butterflies in Europe, butterfly holidays, an up to date list of European Butterflies and identification guides. You can also email photographs to the EBG ID service for identification. For France we have several regional guides and our local contact Jude Lock is in touch with butterfly people all over France. In 2013 we organised a conference in Digne les Bains in France which brought conservation minded butterfly people together, often for the first time.

EBG occasionally organises group 'trips' to Europe for members to do surveys in an expedition organised by a leader. This is an opportunity for members to improve their butterfly ID skills. Sometimes the trips also raise money for projects in Europe. We recognise that it is actually much easier to learn to identify European butterflies in a group than it is on one's own. Some butterfly genera are very difficult to separate such as the genus *Pyrgus*. In the UK it is easy we only have *Pyrgus malvae*, **Grizzled Skipper** but in parts of the Alps there can be up to a dozen flying in the same area. We try to let everyone come to a view independently usually using Tristan Lafranchis 'Butterflies of Europe' and then see if we have any agreement on what it is. Where possible we work with local experts from the country we are working in. The range and variety of species in Europe can be breath-taking. We had 62 species in one place in Hungary and we are disappointed if the species list for a week does not reach 100. The abundance of butterflies in an Alpine meadow can also be far greater than we are used to in the UK. Sadly, much of the really good butterfly habitats in Europe depend on low impact mountain pastoralism and a way of farming that is rapidly disappearing.

Simon Spencer

Chair: European Butterflies Group



Canary Islands Large White, 23.04.12, Matt Rowlings



Odd Spot Blue, 28.06.17, Kevin Tolhurst



Scarce Fritillary, 09.06.12, Dudley Cheesman



Scarce Fritillary, 07.06.12, Simon Spencer



Violet Copper, 10.06.16, Nick Greatorex Davies



Violet Copper, 11.06.16, Nick Greatorex Davies



Apollo, 16.06.18



Balkan Copper, 16.06.17



Balkan Fritillary, 02.07.18



Bosnian Blue, 04.07.18

Butterflies of Bulgaria

Bulgaria is amongst the richest in biodiversity countries in Europe and has a lot to offer to naturalists and wildlife photographers. Bulgaria lies in the Eastern Balkan Peninsula and has a highly varied relief (seashores with sand and dune complexes, large plains and lowland river valleys, narrow gorges, high mountains) ranging from the sea level up to the alpine zone in the highest mountains.

The butterfly and moth fauna is considerable with more than 3000 species of moths have been recorded, including 218 butterfly species. The unique character of the Bulgarian butterfly fauna is determined by the number of Balkan-Anatolian and Balkan-Turanic species living in the southern part of the country, as well as more than thirty endemics moths and glacial relicts which occupy the Subalpine belts of the high mountains. The country holds important populations of several species restricted to Europe and considered globally threatened. There are many sites with well-preserved butterfly habitats, especially in some river valleys and national park areas of Stara planina (the Balkan), Rila and Pirin Mountains.

The specific features of the country are determined by the impact of three bioclimates (Central European continental, Eurasian steppe and Mediterranean), respectively the presence of transitional climatic conditions. All that, together with long and diverse geological history, led to the formation of very rich and specific flora and fauna.

Bulgarian butterflies belong to 6 families, 79 genera and 218 species. Of them one is a rare migrant (**Cleopatra**) and two are thought to be extinct (**False Ringlet** and **Woodland Brown**). There are many butterfly hotspots in Bulgaria and this article will show you some of the best.

Clockwise, the first one is the Western Stara planina mountains, where more than 150 species have been recorded recently, including very rare **Spinose** and **Tessellated Skippers**, **Balkan Copper**, **Bulgarian** and **Almond-eyed Ringlets**, **Delattin's Grayling**, **Lattice Brown**, **Lesser Lattice Brown**. Here are the recently discovered **Violet Copper** with a stable population and **Freyer's Fritillary** in large numbers, along with one of the last strongholds in Europe of the **False Comma**. Further east lies another very interesting, but still underexplored area in NE Bulgaria - Dobrudzha and Ludogorie. The most spectacular species here is the elusive and declining in other parts of the continent **Scarce Fritillary**. In some places like Suha Reka valley, they are everywhere in the woodland patches – nectaring on the blossoms of elders while males patrolling on leaves of the surrounding trees. Once ten specimens were seen together on a sweaty rucksack! Continuing to South-East we reach the Black Sea coast and Strandzha Mt, where the brightly colored **Grecian Copper**, **Freyer's Purple Emperor** and **Large Chequered Skipper** occur. Here you can also find the extremely rare **Assmann's Fritillary** and **Lesser Marbled Fritillary**.



Eastern Festoon, 21.04.14



False Grayling, 08.08.11



Freyer's Purple Emperor, 08.06.18



Large Copper, 08.06.18



Marbled Fritillary, 12.06.16



Meleager's Blue, 10.07.11



Niobe Fritillary, 16.06.18



Russian Heath, 22.05.13



Scarce Copper, 07.07.18



Southern Festoon, 19.04.10



Yellow-banded Skipper, 12.06.16



Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell, 08.06.18

Passing relatively low and hilly-looking Eastern Rhodopes with the impressive Arda River valley westwards will reveal both **Festoons**, **Little Tiger Blue**, and many other plus dragonflies and damselflies as well as the Odalisque! Further west comes the relatively high Western Rhodopes, where one of the best places is the rocky and narrow Trigrad Gorge. Typical species here is one of the largest and strongly declining European butterflies – the beautiful **Apollo**, other species here are **Poplar Admiral**, **Purple Emperor**, **Chequered Skipper**, **Niobe Fritillary** and many more.

Further west lies some of the undoubtedly most interesting places in Bulgaria – highest peninsula mountains - Rila and Pirin. They are refugia for many high mountain species such as ringlets (including **Ottoman** and **Common Brassy Ringlets**, **Silky Ringlet**, **Black** and **Dewy Ringlets**), **Balkan** and **Shepherd's Fritillaries**, **Dusky** and **Alpine Grizzled Skippers**. This is also one of the places where the local endemics **Dils' Grayling**; **Bosnian**, **Phalakron** and **Higgins' Anomalous Blues** can be seen, and in the highest parts is situated the realm of **Cynthia's Fritillary**. We will finish our virtual tour in perhaps the most popular butterfly spot in Bulgaria – Struma River Valley and Kresna Gorge. In these biotopes under the high Mediterranean influence can be found extremely local **Inky Skipper**, **Mediterranean** and **Pigmy Skippers**, **Krueper's Small White**, **Eastern Greenish Black-tip**, **Gruner's Orange Tip**, **Grass Jewel** and **White-banded Grayling**.

Wild Echo is Bulgarian Tour Company operating for more than 15 years now, and is specialized in eco-tourism – birdwatching, butterflies, mammals, dragonflies, reptiles and botany holidays as well as wildlife photography tours. In our tour calendar you can find our specialized tours for butterflies. Our butterflies tours are specially prepared to show you the highest number of species possible under an optimal pace. We run tours throughout the entire butterfly season and visit all the best places. We have also developed butterflies tours combining Bulgaria with the adjacent countries – Greece, Macedonia and Serbia. We are also running butterfly holidays to Turkey, Poland, Morocco, Jordan, Armenia and recently to Bhutan.

Wildlife photography is considerable part of our activities and we run professionally prepared tours for photographers from all across the world. We can claim we have some of the best butterfly photography tours in Europe. They are specially designed in order to be able to take the perfect shot – to find a fresh specimen, on a nice perch and early in the morning. Along with the butterflies we also photograph many other insects, dragonflies and damselflies, orchids and enjoy wonderful landscapes and scenery. You're very welcome in Bulgaria!

 **Dobromir Domuschiev**
Photographs:
Dobromir Domuschiev

Scope of European Butterflies

One interesting aspect of European butterflies is the definition of what constitutes Europe and the scope of particular books about European butterflies. Higgins and Riley in 1970 described 381 species in their Field Guide to Butterflies of Britain and Europe. Tolman and Lewington in 2008 described 400 species in the Collins Butterfly Guide. Now, in Butterflies in Britain and Europe by Haahtela et al (2019) there are 472 species. This expansion must be of rare species, introductions and migrants from North Africa and Asia. In Butterflies in Britain and Europe there is a very useful table of the number of butterfly species found in 36 European countries. These are the top ten:

Italy	252	Austria	207
France	237	N Macedonia	203
Greece	233	Switzerland	200
Spain	229	Serbia	199
Bulgaria	222	Albania	196

The UK comes in 32nd with only 59 species. One interesting species now established in southern Spain is the **Monarch** (*Danaus plexippus*). This must have been a migrant from the Americas via the Canary Islands. It now has several colonies in Spain and Gibraltar.

Jason Sargerson



Monarch, Alameda Gardens, Gibraltar, 21.09.08



Monarch, Alameda Gardens, Gibraltar, 21.09.08

Join our 2019 tours and enjoy the butterflies and moths of Bulgaria, Eastern Europe, Africa, the Caucasus and the Middle East

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Leuk, Rhone Valley, Ergischorn, 08.06.17



Adonis Blue, 25.07.15



Bath White, 11.07.17



Blue Spot Hairstreak, 30.06.16

Switzerland: Large Tortoiseshell at Leuk

One of the butterflies on my must see list is the **Large Tortoiseshell**. This is because I have been disappointed that UK guidebooks have included the Large Tortoiseshell as a resident species, when this is not the case. The last time there were colonies of Large Tortoiseshell in the UK was probably in the late 1940's. However, as recently as the 1990's, books were describing the Large Tortoiseshell as found in the Midlands and in southern England. It is clear now that the only Large Tortoiseshells seen must be migrants or releases and there are no colonies in the UK. So, when I discovered fourteen years ago that Switzerland is a paradise for butterflies compared to the UK, the Large Tortoiseshell was one of the butterflies I looked forward to seeing. All the books say on the wing in June and July and again in the spring. However, on looking at the Swiss enthusiasts' websites it is clear almost all the photographs are taken in March. Even Switzerland is not a paradise for butterflies in March, the only other likely species are **Small Tortoiseshell** and **Queen of Spain Fritillary**. A visit in March would not be very fruitful.

Leuk is one of my most visited sites in Switzerland. Leuk is in the Rhone Valley in Valais in South-west Switzerland. This region has a hot dry climate, very suitable for vineyards, in fact it is more like Southern France or Spain. The butterflies found in the Rhone Valley are very often unique to the area. Rare species include **Bath White**, **Iolas Blue**, **Meleager's Blue**, **Swiss Grayling**, **Tree Grayling**, **Provençal Fritillary** and **Cardinal**. In the spring it is possible to see up to 20 common species. These are joined by **Camberwell Beauty**, **Large Tortoiseshell**, **Glanville Fritillary** and **Chequered Blue**. I may have seen a **Large Tortoiseshell** at Leuk in the spring, but cannot be sure. I was very pleased to find a Large Tortoiseshell on the path at Leuk in early June. This individual was feeding on salts on the path or more likely on dung leached into the moisture. It flew up when I disturbed it, as I tried to get some film and photos, but returned to feed on dung beside the path. I was very fortunate, because in the summer the Large Tortoiseshell often disappears rapidly into hibernation or aestivation.

If you visit Leuk, walk from the railway station and cross the River Rhone and railway and walk slowly down the path on the opposite of the river. It is best to investigate the side paths into the vineyards where possible. Butterflies to look for in the summer include **Southern White Admiral**, **Scarce Swallowtail** and **Swallowtail**, **Marbled Fritillary**, **Violet Fritillary**, **Chalkhill Blue**, **Ilex Hairstreak**, **Blue Spot Hairstreak**, **Great Sooty Satyr**, **Grayling** and **Southern Grizzled Skipper**. See more of the butterflies of Leuk and the Large Tortoiseshell in my DVD *Swiss Butterflies: West*.



Jason Sargerson

Photographs: Jason Sargerson



Chequered Blue, 19.04.15



Marbled Fritillary, 06.07.16



Great Sooty Satyr, 06.07.16



Scarce Swallowtail, 09.07.18



Iolas Blue, 28.06.13



Southern Grizzled Skipper, 03.06.16



Large Tortoiseshell, 05.06.18



Violet Fritillary, 10.07.17



Sierra Nevada, 04.07.14



Apollo, 06.07.16



Cardinal, 10.07.18



Clouded Yellow, 04.07.18

Spain: Sierra Nevada Butterflies 2014-18

We have often taken our family holidays in southern Spain in July and I am usually a little disappointed with how few butterflies there are there at that time of year. I suppose it isn't really surprising, given how parched the vegetation is by then. Before we went on our 2014 holiday I contacted Mersche Calle, who helps produce a web site about the natural history in southern Spain. She suggested the best place to go in July is the Sierra Nevada and she gave me directions to a walk at Hoya de la Mora, where she promised I would see all sorts of butterflies.

So, on 4th July I got up early and drove for three hours to the Sierra Nevada. Hoya de la Mora is a winter ski resort located on an amazing mountain road at 2,500 metres above sea level. The road continues further up the mountain, but it is closed to private vehicles. My initial impressions when I arrived there were that it didn't look very promising! Having driven through cedar woods with areas of wild flower meadows, this spot seemed desolate, with patches of snow still evident. However, within a few metres of the car an **Apollo** landed in front of me, which was a promising start. The Apollos in the Sierra Nevada are the endemic subspecies, *nevadensis*, which has orange in the ocelli, rather than the more usual red.

I followed a rough path from the car park down towards a stream, called the Arroyo de San Juan, where I was delighted to see a number of blue butterflies. The most common were **Escher's Blues**, but there were also **Silver-studded Blues** and **Common**, or **Southern Blues**. In much of southern Spain the **Common Blue**, *Polyommatus icarus*, is replaced by *Polyommatus celine*. However, in the Sierra Nevada the two indistinguishable species both occur, with the *icarus* being an isolated population, left there when the remainder of the species moved northwards as the climate warmed after the last ice age.

I was captivated by the amazing flora in the area. In amongst the prostrate junipers, there were so many beautiful dwarf flowering plants such as *sempervivum*, *sedum* and gentians many of which, of course, are the food plants and nectar sources for the local butterflies.

Amongst the blue butterflies were the occasional beautiful sky-blue **Nevada Blue**. These turned out to be quite common and I found them in various locations.

This area was great for *lycaenidae*. As well as the four species of blue already mentioned there were **Purple-shot Coppers** and one **Small Copper**. However, there were also **Clouded Yellows**, **Small Tortoiseshells** and **Large Wall Browns**. Walking back towards the car park, I spotted a little corrie, containing a tumbled down sheep pen. This sheltered spot had protected the wild plants allowing them to produce more flowers. These had attracted a number of fritillaries, including **Niobe**, **Queen of Spain**, **Cardinal** and a **Heath Fritillary**.

I was delighted with what I had seen, but I decided to check out a few locations a little further down the mountains. At 2,100 metres, I stopped and walked to a viewpoint on a rise. This attracted a number of **Swallowtails** and a few **Iberian Scarce Swallowtails**. Also, there were **Dusky Heaths**, **Wall Browns**, **Idas Blues** and a **Blue-spot Hairstreak**. Further down the road I stopped at on a corner not long after the trees started at about 1,800 metres. Here I found a lovely area of wild flowers. This turned out to be a fantastic spot for butterflies, with there being almost too many to watch. Each time I started to photograph one butterfly I would be distracted by another flying past. Species there included **Iberian Marbled Whites**, **Graylings**, **Great Banded Grayling**, **Rock Grayling**, **Black-veined Whites**, **Safflower Skippers**, **Essex Skippers**, **Idas**, **Silver-studded and Common Blues**, **Oriental Meadow Browns**, **Cleopatra**, **Small and Large Whites**, **Clouded Yellows**, **Mountain Argus** and **Marsh Fritillary** all flying in good numbers.

Exactly two years later to the day I returned to the Sierra Nevada. This time I had been in touch with Mike Prentice, who had suggested an area I could look for **Zullich's Blues** and another area where I may find **Spanish Chalkhill Blues**. So, once again, I headed for the Hoya de la Mora car park. This time I made my way up the mountain towards a couple of GPS locations that Mike had suggested. At one of these locations, at 2,650 metres, I was delighted to find **Zullich's Blues**. Also in that area were **Spanish Argus** and **Spanish Brassy Ringlets**. The habitat there consisted of fist-sized rocks with very sparse vegetation and it was difficult to imagine that these delicate species could survive there, particularly with it being so exposed and there being a drift of snow a few metres away.

There were quite a few **Painted Ladies** flying that year, a butterfly that I hadn't seen on my previous visit. I was also delighted to see many more **Apollos** than previously. These beautiful big butterflies were drifting up and down the mountainside, making the most of the wind.

I took a bit of a detour, avoiding the car park, on my way back down to the stream I had visited on my previous visit. Strangely, there was a single small circular cloud slowly drifting across my route. As it cast a shadow on the path in front of me I noticed that the Apollos all landed and appeared to be unable to fly. On a couple of occasions I almost stood on one! The temperature at that altitude was about 15 degrees and it seemed that without being in direct sunlight the Apollos were unable to remain airborne. I noticed that there were many more **Escher's**, **Common**, **Nevada** and **Silver-studded Blues** than I had seen two years earlier. Down at the stream there were several of them taking minerals from cow pats and in a damp area of gravel. There were also three or four **Dark Green Fritillaries** and along a short, damp grassy strip leading down to the stream I came across about 20 **Meadow Fritillaries**. It seemed strange that I hadn't seen either of these species here two years earlier.



Dusky Heath, 04.07.18



Escher's Blue, 10.07.18



Iberian Marbled White, 06.07.16



Large Grizzled Skipper, 06.07.16



Marsh Fritillary, 04.07.18



Meadow Fritillary, 06.07.16



Mother of Pearl Blue, 04.07.18



Nevada Blue, 10.07.18

However, many of the other butterflies were just as I had seen previously, **Small Tortoiseshells** near the stream, **Clouded Yellows**, **Safflower Skippers** and **Purple-shot Coppers** all along the hill side. On my way down the mountain road I stopped off at the viewpoint, where there were **Swallowtails** and **Iberian Swallowtails** hill-topping again. There were also a number of **Blue-spot Hairstreaks**, a **False Ilex Hairstreak**, **Long-tailed Blues**, a **Lang's Short-tailed Blue**, a **Spotted Fritillary**, **Purple-shot Coppers** and **Wall Browns**. I didn't see any **Large Wall Browns**, or **Dusky Heaths** this time, though.

Further down the road at the meadow that I had found two years earlier, again, I wasn't disappointed with the butterflies there. Almost as soon as I got out of the car there was a **Marsh Fritillary** on a yellow flower in almost exactly the same place I had seen one two years earlier. And many of the other butterflies were there again, **Iberian Marbled Whites**, **Black-veined Whites**, **Small** and **Large Whites**, **Clouded Yellows**, **Graylings**, **Rock Graylings**, **Essex Skippers**, **Cardinals**, **Queen of Spain Fritillaries**, **Silver-studded Blues**, **Idas Blues**, **Common Blues** and **Oriental Meadow Browns**. In addition, this time, I saw **Large Grizzled Skippers** and **Southern Brown Argus**.

Spain experienced a very hot spring and summer in 2016 and we saw evidence of several wild fires. The hot temperatures appeared to impact on the number of butterflies in much of southern Spain, but it certainly hadn't had the same effect in the Sierra Nevada. I had been blown away by the number and variety of butterflies in 2014, but 2016 proved to be so much better.

In 2018 we returned to the same villa that we had rented previously and so on 4th July I made my biennial pilgrimage to the Sierra Nevada. I set off at 6am on a still, mild morning, but by the time I arrived at the Hoya de la Mora car park I couldn't believe how windy it was. Having driven for three hours, I thought that I may as well continue on my intended walk up the mountain to where I had previously seen **Zullich's Blues**. All of the way up there and back I saw no butterflies.

I decided to walk down to the stream, thinking that it would be more sheltered there, but unfortunately the wind appeared to be funnelled down the valley. All I saw was one **Clouded Yellow**, a **Painted Lady** and a **Common Blue**, all being blown along the mountain side.

Rather disheartened I returned to the car and started driving back down the mountain. As I approached the corner where I usually stop to look in the scrubby meadow I decided I should take a look despite the weather and I was delighted to discover that the meadow was beautifully sheltered.

As usual, the place was alive with butterflies. On previous visits the meadow has been my last stopping point at the end of a long day, but this time I was able to spend a long time there indulging in the butterflies. I saw most of the species I have seen previously there, but being able to stay for longer I managed to see species I hadn't seen there before. As well as the **Essex Skippers**, I saw **Small Skippers** and **Sage Skippers**. There were plenty of **Idas Blues** and **Silver-studded Blues** were taking minerals from a damp patch in a dried up stream bed.

There seemed to be a lot more **Clouded Yellows** than I had seen there previously, including the pale *helice* form. I was very excited to see **Spanish Gatekeepers**, which was a first for me and also a **Nettle Tree Butterfly** that I hadn't seen before. I followed the dried up stream bed and saw a small light-coloured butterfly. I was delighted to discover that it was a **Mother-of-pearl Blue** - a butterfly that I had been wanting to see for a long time. There turned out to be two males, each with a small territory a few feet apart. A little further down the stream where the vegetation thinned out I noticed some Fritillaries flying. It turned out that there were two **Niobe Fritillaries**, about four **Knapweed Fritillaries**, a **Spotted Fritillary**, some **Queen of Spain Fritillaries**, a **Marsh Fritillary** and the occasional **Cardinal Fritillary** all sparing for this spot. There was a distinct pecking order. The Knapweed Fritillaries were top dogs and the Spotted Fritillary seemed to be chased away by everything. Despite being chased several times, the Marsh Fritillary persistently returned to its favoured rose bush. After spending some time photographing them, I sat on a rock and enjoyed this aerial display for some time.

The butterflies I saw in the meadow more than made up for the morning's disappointment higher up on the mountain. However, for the next few days I kept thinking about all of the species I had missed because of the wind. So, a few days later, having carefully checked the forecast I made my way back to the Sierra Nevada.

I was delighted to arrive at the Hoya de la Mora car park and discover that it was a beautifully still day. I made my way up to the **Zullich's Blue** site and on my way, I passed through a sizable colony of **Escher's Blues** and then an area containing a number of **Nevada Blues**. I arrived at the area where I had seen Zullich's Blues two years earlier, but I couldn't find any butterflies there. After a while I spotted a **Spanish Argus** and then a very faded **Zullich's Blue**. The ground seemed quite churned up and I am sure there was less vegetation there than I had seen previously. There are a few cattle and goats in the area and I am not sure if they were the cause of the disruption. After about an hour of searching this area I saw a total of only six **Zullich's Blues**, compared to more than 15 in the same spot two years earlier. There are only about 30 small colonies of **Zullich's Blues** in the Sierra Nevada and they are found nowhere else. They seem to live such a fragile existence in a quite hostile environment.



Niobe Fritillary, 04.07.18



Purple-shot Copper, 06.07.16



Queen of Spain Fritillary, 04.07.18



Safflower Skipper, 06.07.16



Zullich's Blue site, 10.07.18



Spanish Argus, 10.07.18



Silver-studded Blue, 04.07.18



Swallowtail, 04.07.14

There has been quite a bit of research into climate change and the impacts it is having on butterfly species in the Sierra Nevada and it is worrying to learn that already the butterflies appear to be moving higher up the mountains. Their food plant isn't able to move at the same rate, and obviously mountains get smaller the higher up you go. I really hope that these beautiful butterflies are able to survive any forthcoming changes in the climate.

On my way back down the mountain and on my way to the stream there were much fewer butterflies than on my previous visits. Despite looking for some time I didn't see any **Meadow Fritillaries** at all and in all the time I was there I only saw two **Apollos**. However, I saw a lot more **Spanish Brassy Ringlets** than I have ever seen before.

It is interesting to see how the number of butterflies has fluctuated on each visit and to speculate why that should be. It just goes to show how much luck is involved in spotting butterflies, particularly when just briefly visiting a site. There are about 125 different species of butterflies found in the Sierra Nevada. I have seen 55 species there, but that is only in a relatively small area in early July. I would love to go back at different times of year now to try and see some of the other species. Now that the children have grown up, and we are no longer limited to school holidays, I may soon have a chance!



Nick Morgan

Photographs: Nick Morgan



Spanish Brassy Ringlet, 06.07.16



Zullich's Blue, 06.07.16

Making a Butterfly DVD: Some Ideas

These are some of the things I have learnt during the making of my butterfly DVDs (Swiss Butterflies: East and West). They may be useful for home movies as well as for more ambitious projects.

Filming

The advantages of using a Video Camera over a stills camera have to be tempered when developing a DVD film. I used to use the zoom a lot when filming, but this is disconcerting for viewers, so it is best to have the zoom set and commence filming when the butterfly comes in focus. Another technique I thought would be useful is panning for scenery – but here again I had to relearn the use of single aspect views. I do not use a tripod for filming as I would miss a lot of butterflies if I had to set up a tripod. Butterflies above head height, such as the **Woodland Brown**, would be very difficult to film using a tripod.

Commentary

I would have liked to have employed Kenneth Branagh for the commentary, but his fee would be too high. I could have called my films 'Walking with Butterflies'. I used as a basis for my script the text in my Swiss Butterflies book. I practiced reading out the script before recording it – you can find some sentences difficult to say. I tried to read at a normal speed, but often I would speak a little fast. I tried to avoid the Ministry of Mispronunciation (or something similar à la Ronnie Barker). My German and Italian pronunciation are passable but my French is non-existent. A plant name such as Sainfoin has been pronounced in two ways. When you are being recorded, suddenly you feel under pressure. I recorded myself using my video camera, putting the camera close to where I was reading from my computer. The good news is that I am only speaking for about half of each film. There is plenty of opportunity to enjoy the 'atmosphere' of each butterfly site, including birdsong and running water. Extended sequences of favourite butterflies such as the **Southern White Admiral** at Bergün and Filisur have no commentary.

Music

I wanted to use music for the introduction and closing parts of the film. My producer at Kingston Studios, suggested 'The Archers' theme tune! I chose the pastoral awakening of the first movement of Mahler's Symphony No 1. I found that Naxos (Select Music) were very helpful and offered me a reasonable price for using 2 minutes of music.

Captions

For my books I chose the easy to read font: Times New Roman. So to achieve continuity Times New Roman was used for my films. Section titles are in red because this shows up well on blue sky. Titles are usually top left and positioned well inside the frame. For the butterfly captions a light blue was chosen as this shows up well on green foliage or on a dark or light background. Butterfly captions are placed generally in the bottom right hand corner, but this is adjusted if the butterfly is in the way. Both the scientific name and the common name are given.

Clips

It is amazing what can be achieved with modern editing. All my clips were assessed as we made the film for sound, image stability and length. Where a clip was shorter than the commentary, it was possible to slow it slightly to match the commentary. Camera shake was taken out where possible and slow motion helped to smooth some clips. The sound of wind or fast running water was reduced and sounds such as helicopters flying over Oberalppass were taken out and replaced with natural sound from another clip from the area. After the first film, where I put the butterflies in the order that I saw them, I decided to put the butterflies in alphabetical order for the second film. This makes it easier to locate a butterfly within a section, although the DVD insert of the full list of butterflies at each site should help. There was some comment about the lack of identification tips in the first film, so I have added some for the second film. However, some butterflies are very difficult to identify. For example, I have not differentiated clips of Wood Whites – some maybe Cryptic Wood White. I have given some ideas for distinguishing High Brown, Dark Green and Niobe Fritillaries.



Jason Sargerson

Photographs: Jason Sargerson



Southern White Admiral, Berguen, 04.08.14



Woodland Brown, Vaud, 27.06.15



BUTTERFLIES OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE A PHOTOGRAPHIC GUIDE

Tari Haahtela, Kimmo Saarinen,
Pekka Ojalainen and Hannu Aarnio



VIOLET COPPER - *Lycena helle*

The ecology of this beautiful species with its very local and widely dispersed colonies was recently investigated in western Germany. Habitat patch occupancy was primarily determined by patch size and the connectivity between different patches and abundance of the larval host plant, while other habitat quality parameters were of subordinate importance. The authors stated that even for an ostensibly sedentary species like the Violet Copper, habitat networks are decisive and need to form an integral part of any conservation management for this species, reminding us of the status of European butterflies. Legal protection already exists in at least six countries.

Lycena phyllas, *Lycena tityus*

IDENTIFICATION

- ① Males up to bright purple, deep on both wings
- ② Females orange with heavy black spots
- ③ Red eyes, with an orange submarginal band
- ④ Females up to dark brown with orange submarginal bands
- ⑤ One generation between May and late June. Large meadows and moors, springs and bogs, marshy grasslands and riverbeds, most coverages in forests up to 100m.
- ⑥ Very scattered distribution from S France to C Fennoscandia and Russian Karelia, common in local colonies, but declining throughout the range due to drainage and afforestation of habitats. Extinct in many countries, evaluated as Endangered in Europe.
- ⑦ Polytypic taxa in the southern range, if present in the northern range.



Book Review: Butterflies of Britain and Europe: A Photographic Guide (2nd Ed.) by Tari Haahtela, Kimmo Saarinen, Pekka Ojalainen and Hannu Aarnio (Bloomsbury Wildlife, £18.99).

The first edition of this title is one of my favourite butterfly books; I always take it on holiday with me. The authors have put a great deal of thought into the design and presentation of this book. The introduction covers the scope and layout of the book, and includes a clear acknowledgement of the many photographers who have contributed towards it. There is also information about endangered species and a useful list of the number of species found in each European country.

Each group of butterflies has an introduction describing the key features of the butterflies in the category. The number of butterflies in the group is given, as well as a summary list of all the species in the order that they appear in the text. Common or widespread butterflies are described first, followed by the rarer species from west to east. So, for example, in the Blues, Spanish species are followed by Balkan and Mediterranean Island species. The introductions are also illustrated with examples from the group as well as drawings of larvae taken from the 1904 book by Hofmann and Spuler – a particularly nice touch.

The individual text accounts of each butterfly do not always follow a defined pattern. The authors have made a significant effort to recount interesting experiences of the species being described. This is very entertaining and often describes key places to visit, such as the account of Freyer's Purple Emperor mentioning Zagori in northern Greece. I particularly like the Scandinavian flavour to the book, describing places in Finland and Estonia, as well as species spreading north.

The photographs are excellent and the authors have given considerable thought to the key ways to help identify a particular butterfly. Photographs are not to scale, which allows smaller butterflies to be illustrated larger than life-size. Butterfly sizes are described in the introduction as well as in the key for each account. Due to the size limitations of the book, some species have relatively small photographs. For example, I was hoping for some insight into the differences between Shepherd's Fritillary and Mountain Fritillary, but the photographs are quite small. Of the 1500 photographs included in the book, 150 have been changed or added for the second edition. The distribution maps, which have been updated for the new edition, are relatively small, however, it is still clear in which areas of Europe the butterfly is to be found.

One very useful aspect of the book is the account of butterflies in the islands of Europe and further afield in North Africa, Turkey, Ukraine and Russia. There are some tantalising photographs of new butterflies in the east, and useful information regarding the islands of the Atlantic and Mediterranean.

Compared to the first edition, the second edition has 400 pages and covers 472 species (compared to 382 pages covering 444 species in the first); the section on butterflies further afield has also been expanded by 20 pages (from 27 to 47); the status of all species has been checked and updated; and the nomenclature has been revised. If you do not own the first edition, this is an excellent book. If you do own the first edition, you must decide if the new material justifies the purchase.

To sum it up: this is a superb photographic guide. It has excellent photographs and its unique approach provides constant readability. It must be the definitive guide for all enthusiasts of European butterflies.

Jason Sargerson

Contributors Notes

Dominic Couzens

Dominic Couzens is a Naturetrek Tour Leader, specialising in birds.

Dobromir Domuschiev

Dobromir Domuschiev is the founder and owner of Wild Echo Tours. He is involved in conservation projects in Bulgaria and leads birding and butterfly tours in Eastern Europe.

James Gibbs

My interest in butterflies started at a young age, the memory of seeing Meadow Browns take to the air in large numbers whilst on walks with my Father though the local hay meadows remains with me. Bird, Badger, or Butterfly, the Fauna and Flora of my native Somerset that has been part of my life since early childhood can now be recorded by the magic of digital photography, undreamed of in my youth. For your enjoyment go to <https://jamesgibbs6929.zenfolio.com>



Nick Morgan

Although living most of his life in Scotland, Nick spent much of his childhood in Southern France where his father was a director of a nature reserve. He has always had a great interest in natural history, with butterflies taking a priority in the last ten years. Nick now coordinates the butterfly transects and other butterfly records for East Lothian and he is involved in various surveys and conservation projects. He is currently helping to create a habitat and plans to translocate a colony of Graylings which will otherwise be lost under a new housing development. Nick has a blog at

<http://nickmorgan-butterflypictures.blogspot.com/>

Simon Spencer

Simon Spencer is the Chairman of the European Butterflies Group section of Butterfly Conservation. He often participates in conservation field trips and leads Greenwings Tours in Europe. A profile is available on Greenwings website.



Back Issues

Back Issues of European Butterflies are available from Jason Sargerson: see my website for details.

www.jasonsargerson.uk



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Naturetrek

Butterfly Holidays in Support of Butterfly Conservation

Naturetrek has enjoyed a partnership with Butterfly Conservation (BC) since 2002 and, as a top-category 'Gold' corporate member of BC, annually donates £1,500 to the charity. As well as this, since 2002, Naturetrek has donated 10% of bookings income generated by an annual programme of Butterfly Tours (all led by BC staff or members) run in partnership with BC, with Naturetrek additionally gifting BC membership to all previous non-members joining these tours. The total amount raised by Naturetrek for BC to date is £207,074.

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July - 8 days - £1,595

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The Cévennes
June - 8 days - £1,495

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Mar - 11 days - £3,495



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