



EUROPEAN
BUTTERFLIES
GROUP

eNewsletter

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How was 2018 for you? For me it started slowly. In Spain in the first week of May and Sicily in the third week of May spring seemed late arriving and I was too early for target species such as **Sooty Orange-tip** (*Zegris eupheme*) and **Sicilian Marbled White** (*Melanargia pherusa*). In Cyprus at the beginning of June my visit coincided with several days of unseasonably cool wet weather. My trip to Arctic Scandinavia from 26 June to 13 July



Cynthia's Fritillary
(*Euphydryas cynthias*)

had some highlights but was slow overall, as you can read on pages 15 to 18. However, things did improve. In just two and a half days in the Maritimes Alps in France on 23 to 25 July I saw enough butterflies to fill a week, including this target **Cynthia's Fritillary** (*Euphydryas cynthia*). I had a splendid day in the central Apennines in Italy on 19 August, illustrated in the photo-spot on the last page. Then on a return visit to Cyprus at the beginning of September I caught up with species that I had missed in June. So for me, the butterfly season began with a whimper but ended with a bang.

The experiences of the authors of the articles in this newsletter seem to mirror this pattern – frustration in Poland at the end of June, plentiful butterflies in Austria and Spain at the end of July. As always, I am most grateful to all the contributors.

Nigel Peace, Newsletter Editor, November 2018





Notices and News

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AGM and Members Day, Saturday 1 December 2018

This year's AGM and Members Day will take place at the IBIS hotel in Birmingham (near New Street Station) on Saturday 1 December 2018. The formal business will commence at 1300 and will be followed by presentations by Martin Davies (exploring how many butterfly species there are in the Western Palearctic) and Chris van Swaay, from Butterfly Conservation's Dutch counterpart, Vlinderstichting. There will be an extended tea interval between the presentations and the meeting will close at 1700. Please refer to the EBG website for the latest details. •

2019 EBG Calendar

The 2019 Calendar is now available at the usual price of £8 for one or £15 for two, plus P&P as appropriate. For more details, or to order your copy, please email Anne Spencer at rhoslan.anne@gmail.com. Copies can be posted, or picked up at the AGM in Birmingham on 1 December, or at the Butterfly Conservation AGM in Nottingham on 10 November. •

Identification Guides on the EBG Website

Three identification guides have been placed on the EBG website at <http://www.european-butterflies.org.uk/species.html>. They cover the families **Pieris (Whites)**, **Gonepteryx (Brimstones)** and **Pyrgus (Grizzled Skippers)** respectively.

Pieris and Gonepteryx

The guides to the Pieris and Gonepteryx families have been put together by EBG member Bill Raymond. Bill has tried to make the guides:

1. accessible and easy to use by describing features without using technical terms and avoiding identification features which are difficult to recognise. He hopes that this will encourage and enable more people to complete the task of identifying their specimen without giving up in frustration.
2. as comprehensive as possible without making them too large and detailed.
3. easily updated. As pdfs they will also be useful as an educational resource.

Bill has commented that when he volunteered to design the guides he was keen to create an identification aid less daunting than the dichotomous keys which would lead him to some ambiguous photo where he gave up! During his research for Pieris he found it enlightening to see the massive variation in each species. Having looked at hundreds of photographs it was clear to him that every butterfly was very much a separate individual showing more or less of the distinctive features. This made it a difficult task to find a suitable photograph to illustrate ▼



Notices and News cont.

the point clearly. He would be pleased to receive feedback on the guides to ensure they are meeting the needs of members and other visitors to the website. Also, suggestions for future versions, and offers of access to photographs would be most welcome (billraymond@hotmail.co.uk). The next in the series is planned to be the Large and Medium Fritillaries.

Identification Guide: Gonepteryx

Diagnostic features [male and female]

Brimstone [Gonepteryx rhamni]

- tip light reddish brown above
- slightly concave
- strongly dentate

Powdered Brimstone [Gonepteryx farinosa]

- tip white above
- rounded
- strongly dentate

Cleopatra [Gonepteryx cleopatra]

- feebly dentate

Fore-wing underside

MALE & FEMALE: Uniform colour

MALE yellowish **FEMALE green and white**

MALE orange **FEMALE yellow**

Upperside & Range

All three species usually land with wings closed. Uppersides shown below to aid in-flight identification

Uniform colour, MALE: lemon yellow FEMALE: pale greenish white

Widespread in Europe

MALE fore-wing: lemon yellow, MALE hind-wing: pale yellow FEMALE: all white

Local in southern Balkan Peninsula

MALE: lemon yellow with orange fore-wing distinctive in flight FEMALE: pale greenish white with a yellowish shade on hind-wing

Widespread in Mediterranean Europe

Pyrgus

The Pyrgus key covers the *Pyrgus* species of mainland France and is the work of Cédric Jacquier. The key is in French but there are plans to produce an English version. In the meantime it is well worth getting out your French dictionary and making use of this excellent guide.

CRITÈRES DIAGNOSTICS IDENTIFIÉS & ÉLÉMENTS D'ÉCOLOGIE DES ESPÈCES

Pyrgus communis (répartis sur l'ensemble du territoire)

<i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>	Écologie : Pelouses, prairies et friches de 0 à 1700 mètres
 <p>Critères du dessus :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Taches en forme de "sablier" + écailles grises (AA) -Groupes de taches blanchâtres nettes (AP) <p>Critères du dessous :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Couleur : brun rougeâtre à brun-grisâtre -Trapèze peu pentu -Tache centrale avec 2 prolongements -Chevron visible [critère délicat !! en rose] <p>Répartition : Ensemble du territoire</p>	
<i>Pyrgus malvae</i> / <i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>	Écologie : Pelouses, prairies et friches de 0 à 2700 mètres
 <p>Critères du dessus :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Séries de taches blanchâtres marginales (AA+AP) -Taches centrales blanches dentées nettes (AP) <p>Critères du dessous :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Couleur : brun-grisâtre à brun-rougeâtre -Losange ou triangle foncé distinctif -Nervures blanches apparentes <p>Répartition globale : Moitié nord (<i>P. malvae</i>) et moitié sud de la France (<i>P. malvoides</i>)</p>	

News from France

Contributed by Jude Lock (lock.jude@gmail.com)

IUCN Regional Red List of Butterflies and Burnet Moths of the ex-region Rhône-Alpes, France. Published March 2018.

The Red List of Butterflies and Burnet Moths of the Rhône-Alpes was initiated in 2017 by the DREAL (Direction régionale de l'environnement, de l'aménagement et du logement) Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and implemented by Flavia, in collaboration with many specialists, naturalists and environmental groups. European Butterflies Group are one of the contributing organisations.

The former Rhône-Alpes region (now part of the new region Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes) comprises the Ain, Ardèche, Drôme, Isère, Loire, Rhône, Savoie and Hautes-Savoie departments and hosts nearly 88% of the butterfly species present in mainland France, making it the richest area of France.

Of the 266 species and 2 subspecies of butterflies and burnets present, 10.6% are considered endangered (either CR, EN or VU), although it would appear that no species has yet completely disappeared.

Seven butterfly species are listed as being critically endangered: **Cranberry Fritillary** (*Boloria aquilonaris*), **Scarce Heath** (*Coenonympha hero*), **Large Heath** (*Coenonympha tullia*), **Larche Ringlet** (*Erebia scipio*), **Iolas Blue** (*Glaucopsyche iolas*), **Violet Copper** (*Lycaena helle*) and **Southern Swallowtail** (*Papilio alexanor*).

This red list also shows the current decline of species, even for species found in the mountains. For further information and to download the Regional Red List, see here: <http://www.flavia-ape.fr/?p=2257>

Information kindly supplied by Yann Baillet of Flavia, Association pour les Papillons et leur Etude, and European Butterflies Group partner for the Rhône-Alpes. •

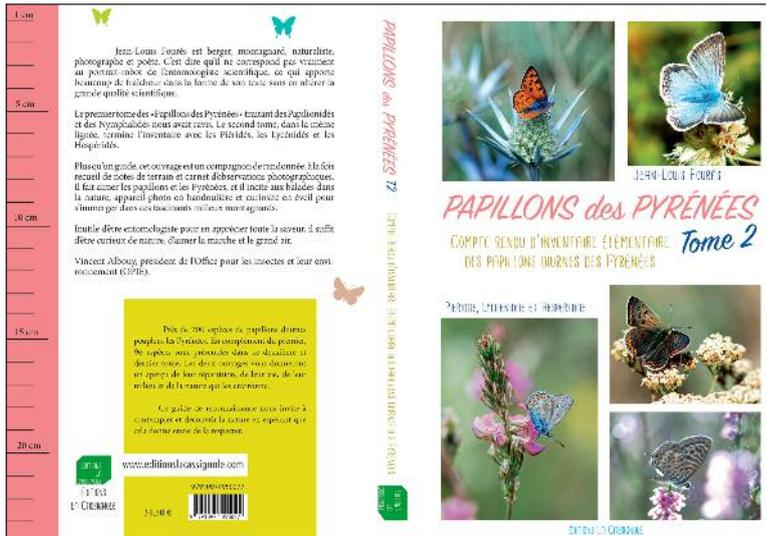




Notices and News cont.

Papillons des Pyrénées
Compte-rendu d'inventaire élémentaire des papillons diurnes des Pyrénées: Volume 2 Pieridae, Lycaenidae and Hesperidae
 by Jean-Louis Fourès

Published by Editions La Cassignole, 2018; paperback 16 x 24 cm, 320 pages, price €34,50. Text in French.



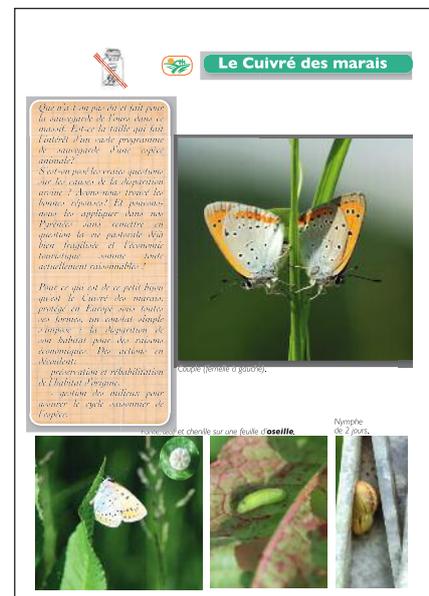
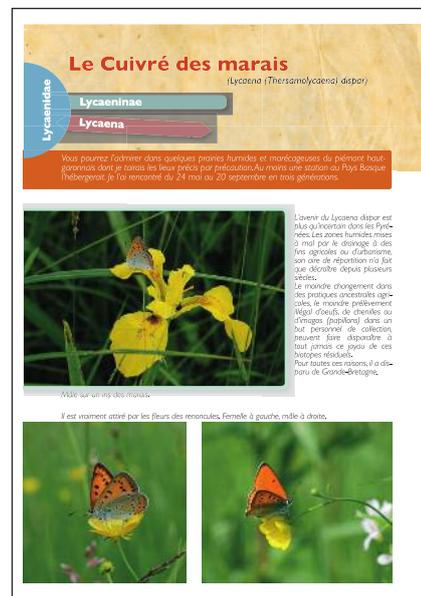
There are nearly 200 butterfly species to be found in the Pyrénées. In this second and final volume Jean-Louis covers the 91 species of the *Pieridae*, *Lycaenidae* and *Hesperidae* families in the 8 territories of the mainly north-facing side of the mountain chain, from east to west: Pyrénées-Orientales, Andorre, Aude, Ariège, Haute-Garonne (Hautes-Comminges), Val d'Aran, Hautes-Pyrénées and the Pyrénées-Atlantiques.

Jean-Louis is a passionate naturalist, photographer, sheep farmer and cheese-maker so is not the typical scientific entomologist, yet the poetic nature of his texts are an invitation to explore this fascinating mountain environment. His book is a

personal testimony to the biodiversity of the Pyrénées. Jean-Louis lives and farms in the department of the Haute-Garonne, Occitanie (previously Midi-Pyrénées).

For information about volume 1 please refer to issue 23 of the Newsletter (May 2018), page 8.

Both volumes are available from Editions La Cassignole, regional bookshops in France and from the author at jeanlouis.foures@orange.fr
 See <https://editionslacassignole.com/parutions/papillons-des-pyrenees-tome-2/> for further information. •



Danube Clouded Yellow

Looking for a Needle in a Haystack or a Danube Clouded Yellow in a Forest

by Martyn G. Davies

One of the observations made by a member of the EBG (European Butterfly Group) who visited Belarus in 2016 was “Perhaps the most interesting discovery, however, was to visit a site in the south-east of the country where **Danube Clouded Yellow** is still found.” So in 2018 a follow-up visit was arranged and four of us from the West Midlands Branch met at 3.00am in the departure lounge of Birmingham airport for the trip to Minsk and beyond.

The **Danube Clouded Yellow** (*Colias myrmidone*) has been branded one of Europe’s rarest butterflies and although its range may well extend beyond Europe, most of that will be in Russia with all of the implications of that fact. It is thought, therefore, that if we wish to maintain this butterfly as a European species we, as part of one of the leading butterfly conservation organisations in Europe, should at least offer to help with its conservation where we can.



Danube Clouded Yellow (*Colias myrmidone*), female

Contracting range

“Butterflies of Britain & Europe” by Tolman, T and Lewington, R printed in 1997 states that whilst the species is uncommon it is found SE Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Belarus, The Ukraine, Hungary and Romania. By 2004 when Tristan Lafranchis’ book “Butterflies of Europe” was published it is shown as occurring in many of the same countries but is described as “very local in Eastern Europe, in decline”. Today it is only found in two small areas of Romania and in parts of Belarus; in all probability it would also be found in The Ukraine. This confirms that in the past 14 or so years it has disappeared from many countries.

Purpose of our visit

So Mike Williams, Mel Mason, Liz Lloyd and I determined to go and see if we could find the butterfly in more sites and offer some help with the production of a conservation plan and also to offer some support to the local lepidopterists working on the species. It is worth reminding people that Belarus is outside the EU and still has a communist government which is only slowly opening up the country to outsiders. We were accompanied on our visit by Gabor and Andrea Orban, who had done all of the organising through their tour company Ecotours, and Anatoli ▼



Danube Clouded Yellow cont.

Kulak, the leading lepidopterist in Belarus. Also whilst in the south of the country we had a Senior Forester with us, Vladimir, who had responsibility for 175,000 hectares of forest. We say thank you to them all for their good humour and brilliant expertise.

Results of our searches

We spent most of our time in the South-eastern part of the country searching around the town of Rechytsa in the valley of the Dneiper River. We were able to confirm first of all that the larval foodplant - *Chamaecytisus ruthenicus* (Russian Broom) - was widespread along the forest rides and in recently clear-felled areas of the woodlands. The areas searched revealed adults, mostly females presumably looking for egg-laying sites, and then eggs and 1st instar caterpillars. We were surprised how widespread the butterfly was and it almost seemed that each new site visited revealed eggs if we just searched for them. The wayleaves under power cables seemed particularly significant as the only place where we recorded more than one adult and for the density of the foodplant.

Identification

The butterfly which has two generations each year flies in late May-June and again in August. The males and typical females are distinguishable from other species of *Colias* by the extra orange scales. The females are a paler orange or yellow but there is also a white form *alba* which we saw on at least two occasions. The butterflies in the pictures below were released unharmed!



Typical female



Female white form *alba*



The eggs were usually white in colour and were about 1.5 – 2mm tall; shortly before they hatched, however, the larva would be visible inside and the eggs apparently changed colour. The larva on hatching will eat the egg shell in some cases as we observed but other uneaten egg cases were found with exit holes. Larvae were found on a few occasions, but were obviously far less common and would have soon been predated if they had remained exposed on the upperside of the leaves. ▼



Report

A comprehensive report has been written by Mike Williams giving our thoughts on the ways in which the forest management can be used to the advantage of the species and its continued existence in Europe. It is worth pointing out that the sites in Romania are totally different and will require different conservation techniques, but that work is being carried out at Babes-Bolyai University in the city of Cluj Napoca, an institution with which the West Midlands Branch has some close ties. For a copy of the full report please contact Mike Williams at wmbutterflies@gmail.com.

It is also worth pointing out that we were very close to the Ukrainian border and it is likely that the species will exist there on a similar basis to the populations in Belarus; a visit to confirm this or at least correspondence with local lepidopterists would be useful. The former would be difficult as it lies within the area affected by the Chernobyl nuclear incident! We were told not to eat the wild mushrooms in Belarus on the British Government's website but it didn't seem to deter the locals! A hasty search using Google Maps satellite view shows some areas of woodland over the border from Belarus close to where we found eggs.

In conclusion

The visit was subsidised by the EBG and we thank them for that and we hope that the work we have started can be continued in Belarus as well other countries and that possibly other groups will go out from Britain. For my part I have always enjoyed visiting other places to see different butterflies, but I enjoy trips such as this one to Belarus and others I have done in the past where there is an element of scientific research and applied conservation.

Martyn G Davies

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Swings and roundabouts

Butterflies around Białystok in primeval north-east Poland by Peter Bygate

Without the immense assistance of Marcin Sielezniew of the Laboratory of Insect Evolutionary Biology and Ecology in the Institute of Biology at the University of Białystok, the 10 day trip undertaken by David Dennis, Neil Thompson and me would have been much less successful, and we are most grateful for his time and patience. And Neil's ability to translate Marcin's GPS locations into a decimal format before posting them on Google Maps was the icing on the cake!

Camberwell Beauty
(*Nymphalis antiopa*)



Sites north-west of Białystok

Our two-centre trip started on the 25th of June from a base in Monki to the north-west of Białystok from where we radiated out over the next 5 days to a variety of sites. High on our target list were **Scarce Fritillary** (*Euphydryas maturna*), **False Ringlet** (*Coenonympha oedippus*), and **Woodland Brown** (*Lopinga achine*), as well as **Violet Copper** (*Lycaena helle*), and we had good locations for them all. But upon our arrival Marcin told us that winter had ended in April, spring had been completely by-passed to be immediately followed by an extended summer heatwave resulting in early emergences of all our targets and we'd be lucky to see any of them!



Silver-washed Fritillaries
(*Argynnis paphia*)
Photo D. Dennis

(*Nymphalis antiopa*), **Silver-washed Fritillaries** (*Argynnis paphia*), and other Nymphalids all rose to greet us, swirling around before settling again on the ground, a truly exhilarating experience! ▼



Swings and roundabouts
cont.

Marcin's prediction was also essentially true for *C.oedippus* although, at a site near Nowa Wies, Marcin and Neil each separately spotted one amongst the tall reeds bobbing in the stiff breeze but given the habitat on the day any chance of a photo was out of the question.

Piaski

The dry weather had turned traditionally wet and damp sites into parched landscapes, crunchy underfoot but on the road to Piaski just north of iconic Tykocin we still encountered a strong **Large Blue** (*Phengaris arion*) colony supplemented with **Assmann's Fritillary** (*Melitaea britomartis*), **Dusky Meadow Brown** (*Hyponephele lycaon*), and a remarkably iridescent male **Sooty Copper** (*Lycaena tityrus*), to mention a few.



Sooty Copper (*Lycaena tityrus*)



Large Blue (*Phengaris arion*)



Assmann's Fritillary (*Melitaea britomartis*)



Dusky Meadow Brown (*Hyponephele lycaon*)
(photo by D. Dennis)

Other stops

One location discovered by chance while driving past - we would prefer to say it was pure instinct - lay 8km south of Monki alongside the railway track where a small concealed meadow was rich with mostly common species although it's always a delight to come across **Purple-shot Coppers** (*Lycaena alciphron*).

Amongst our targets were also the specialised species of **Cranberry Fritillary** (*Boloria aquilonaris*) and **Cranberry Blue** (*Plebejus optilete*), both resident on a raised bog near Krasne to the south-east of Augustow. Locating the bog was an undertaking in itself being hidden away amongst dense birch and pine forest and as at the Piaski site, the sphagnum moss was yellow and crunchily dry. Butterflies were at a premium and only a single and worn *P.optilete* was seen. As the realisation began to dawn on us that, once again, we were too late it was time to find our ▼



Pallas' Fritillary (*Argynnis laodice*) (photo by D. Dennis)

Woodland Brown (*Lopinga achine*) (photo by D. Dennis)



Violet Copper (*Lycaena helle*) (photo by D. Dennis)

way back to the car. There was, however, an exciting flip side to the 'too late' coin: maybe 'later' species we hadn't expected to see would emerge early? And so it happened, a pristine **Pallas' Fritillary** (*Argynnis laodice*) was seen nectaring fleetingly on scabious at the woodland edge and we each rattled off a couple of shots before it departed. **Silver-washed Fritillaries** abounded here and we even had a **valezina** pay us a visit. The day hadn't been so bad after all!

Sites south-east of Białystok

Three days of steady rain and low temperatures straddled our transit to, and arrival at, our second location near Zabłudow to the south-east of Białystok city but our final two days were to turn out well. **Woodland Brown** (*Lopinga achine*) and **Violet Copper** (*Lycaena helle*) now dominated our agendas and at a forest edge near the disused station at Grodek to the east of the city it was David who after a long search spotted the former, albeit a very weary and worn specimen, and a second was subsequently seen. We were fortunate to have added this species to our list.

Another of Marcin's GPS locations took us to a potential **Violet Copper** site near Planta north of Narewka in the Białowieski Park, an unlikely-looking spot at first glance being a long, narrow strip of meadow sandwiched between harvested neighbours. We searched long and hard focussing latterly on some lovely female **Scarce Coppers** (*Lycaena virgaureae*), and it wasn't until we were making our way back towards the car that David triumphantly announced that he'd found *helle*. In a similarly precarious habitat where a tractor was methodically reducing the meadow near the hamlet of Budy some 30 minutes drive south of Narewka we were indebted to Neil for the discovery of a solitary **Alcon Blue** (*Phengaris alcon*), another 'early emerger' mirroring the opening of its host plant Marsh Gentian flowers (*Gentiana pneumonathe*).

Belarus border

More pristine second-brood **Violet Coppers** (*Lycaena helle*) and **Pallas' Fritillaries** (*Argynnis laodice*) were seen on our last day in lush meadows around Luzany close to the Belarus border although our final visit to a **Danube Clouded Yellow** (*Colias myrmidone*) site again proved to be too early.

About 61 species were recorded in total on this eventful trip and a full list is available separately upon request. Further photographs can be found on www.lepidigi.net •

Peter Bygate

Peter.Bygate@btopenworld.com

(Photos by the author except where indicated)

False Comma foray

A trip through North West Bulgaria into Eastern Serbia by Peter Bygate

Flying into, and out of Sofia, Alan Bernard and I made a short trip to the western end of the Balkan Mountains, the 'Stara Planina' on 17th July with only five full days in the field and with False Comma (*Nymphalis vaualbum*) as the coveted species. Half of the time was based in the small Bulgarian town of Čiprovcı set amongst lush meadows and heavily wooded hillsides where small-scale agriculture remained the norm and where roadside verges and bushes had been spared the ravages of the tractor.

Ogosta valley, NW Bulgaria

The Ogosta valley, in which Čiprovcı sits, has a road running parallel to the river through the few houses comprising Martinovo and up into the hills where it ends. This is a superb general habitat with verdant meadows and side tracks producing at least 44 species on our first full day, notable being five species of **Copper**, a solitary **Brown Hairstreak** (*Thecla betulae*) totally preoccupied on stream-side mint, **Large Blue** (*Phengaris arion*), a single **Blue Argus** (*Aricia anteros*), unexpected second generation **Duke of Burgundy** (*Hamearis lucina*), fast-flying and unidentifiable **Emperors**, and six **Fritillary** species.



Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*), male



Brown Hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*)



Blue Argus (*Aricia anteros*)



Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*)



Staying pretty local the next day we followed another blind road up into the hills through Gavril Genovo to the end of the tarmac at Diva Slatina close to the Serbian border stopping several times en route. Once again, this road passes through wonderful wooded habitat and flowery meadows, home to **Large Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus alveus*), **Common Glider** (*Neptis sappho*), **Chequered Blue** (*Scolitantides orion*), and four additional **Fritillaries**.

Higher altitude

A visit to relative altitude at the Kom ski hostel (c1,750 metres) located south through Berkovica repeated the richness of the first two days, the lush meadows tucked in the beech tree clearings on the way revealing large male **Cardinals** (*Argynnis pandora*). Further up, we encountered **Nickerl's Fritillary** (*Melitaea aurelia*), **Large Ringlet** (*Erebia euryale*) once we'd finally satisfied ourselves that we weren't looking at **Arran Browns** (*Erebia ligea*), and also **Almond-eyed Ringlet** (*Erebia alberganus*).



Cardinal (*Argynnis pandora*), male



Large Ringlet (*Erebia euryale*)

Transit to Serbia

The transit day to Serbia did not offer many impromptu stopping places although the Vidbol river bridge 10km north of Dimovo on the way to Gramada had puddling groups of **Scarce Swallowtails** (*Iphiclides podalirius*), **Wood Whites** (*Leptidea sinapis*) and **Grizzled Skippers** (*Pyrgus malvae*). With only four cars in front of us at the border at Vraska Cuka it still took half an hour to pass through the bureaucracy. A monoculture landscape of sunflowers stretched before and all around us as we headed into Serbia, and although pleasing on the eye and for bees, it was a far cry from the habitats previously enjoyed. This, and a fast road south, encouraged us to push on to our next hotel, the huge and excellent Stara Planina at Čuštica where we duly arrived around 5pm.

Success!

But on the way and close by, Alan took me to a site where the **False Comma** (*Nymphalis vaualbum*), also referred to as the **Compton Tortoiseshell**, is known to fly and where he'd seen it on a previous trip, and after some searching he spotted one flying high around the roof line of a large building, appearing to be seeking out a roosting spot. Suddenly it swooped down to ground level and entered an open-fronted wood store followed quickly by us. With camera at the ready I managed to rattle off two quick shots before it rapidly exited and disappeared. Brilliant! ▼



False Comma foray cont.



False Comma (*Nymphalis vaualbum*)



False Comma (*Nymphalis vaualbum*)

Above Čuštica

The remainder of our time was spent in the mountainous area near the hotel. At the top of the ski slope at Jabučko Ravnište at around 1,750 metres in the morning a **Woodland Grayling** (*Hipparchia fagi*) was hill-topping and some other species also paid a fleeting visit. On the way down we picked up a solitary **Bulgarian Ringlet** (*Erebia orientalis*), **Woodland Ringlet** (*Erebia medusa*) and **Eastern Baton Blue** (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*). The afternoon was spent lower down in the meadows near Janja, around 850m, once again typified by small scale farms, extravagant meadows and streams. Tumble-down barns and old army trucks completed the scene. A single tired **Southern White Admiral** (*Limenitis reducta*) was the only new addition to our list but the large **Fritillaries** were common. Earlier in the day we had checked-out the various smaller whites and recorded a **Balkan Green-veined White** (*Pieris balcana*).



Balkan Green-veined White (*Pieris balcana*)



Meleager's Blue (*Polyommatus daphnis*), female

Toplodolska valley

We concluded the trip exploring the lovely Toplodolska valley all the way to the hamlet of Topli Do nestling some 18km at the end of the road. The valley initially passes through limestone outcrops then red sandstone giving way to conglomerate, a geologist's heaven. The vegetation is full and butterfly rich with **Meleager's Blue** (*Polyommatus daphnis*), **Adonis Blue** (*Lysandra bellargus*) and **Chalkhill Blue** (*Lysandra coridon*), the males appearing almost white in flight, readily seen. In the village two very ancient **Hungarian Gliders** (*Neptis rivularis*) put in a fluttering appearance and Alan saw a **Lesser Lattice Brown** (*Kirinia climene*), these being the final new species for the trip bringing the grand total to 81.

Further photographs can be seen at www.lepidigi.net and a full species day list is available upon request. •

Peter Bygate (and Alan Bernard)

Peter.Bygate@btopenworld.com (All photos by the author)

Arctic Scandinavia

Homo miserabilis in the Arctic, 26 June to 13 July 2018

by Tony Hoare

Nobody could accuse me of being an optimist so when my friend Nigel Peace announced that he was planning a trip to the Arctic and asked me if I would like to come along it was without much hope of success that I said that I would. I had read too much about the mosquitoes, the dreadful weather and the brief windows of opportunity to think that I might see many of the very special butterflies that are the reason for going. However I thought that a visit to the Arctic would be interesting and there would always be some flowers to look for.

We flew to Kiruna via Stockholm where we spent a night in a hotel that offered a shuttle service to and from the airport. Finding the right shuttle proved challenging and in the driver we were unfortunate to encounter seemingly the only person in Sweden who spoke no English. On arrival in Kiruna we picked up a hire

car and I was encouraged to see breaks in the cloud cover but we were disappointed to find that the Fritillary that we found on the way to the hotel was the familiar **Pearl-bordered Fritillary** (*Boloria euphrosyne*).

Our first stay in Sweden

Abisko is a small resort that owes its existence to the railway that transports iron ore from the very rich deposits at Kiruna to the ice-free port of Narvik in Norway. It is on the edge of the mountains that run up the western side of Scandinavia and offers skiing and Northern Lights in the winter and walking in the summer. The hotel that we stayed in is the only non-basic accommodation in the area and is very expensive. Less expensive accommodation may be available



Midnight sky - note the time-stamp

in Kiruna but the weather there differs from that in the mountains and the drive takes a little over an hour.

Being above the Arctic Circle we did not experience night at all during our visit. Our first day began virtually cloud free and we set off to a site above Abisko station to start our search for butterflies. Our first butterfly was another butterfly from home – the **Green-veined White** (*Pieris napi*), although it was a darker form than we would see in the UK. We ploughed about the bog and soon began to see Fritillaries. Most of these butterflies stopped low down with their wings open to catch the sun and identification meant much grovelling to try to see the definitive ▼



Arctic Scandinavia cont.



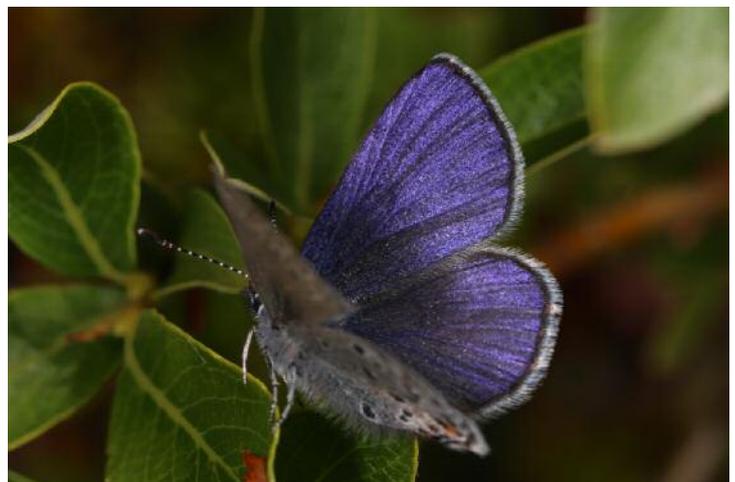
Pale Arctic Clouded Yellow (*Colias tyche*) - very worn

underside. They proved to be more **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** and on chasing after the occasional **Pale Arctic Clouded Yellow** (*Colias tyche*) they turned out to be very badly worn. Eventually just one of the Fritillaries was a target species – **Frejya’s Fritillary** (*Boloria freija*).

During the morning it began to cloud up and when we decided to break for lunch we found a **Small Tortoiseshell** (*Aglais urticae*) by the car which was our last butterfly of the day. During the afternoon we investigated the beginning of a local long-distance walk, the Kungsleden, but saw no butterflies in the cloudy conditions.

The next two days were cloudy and windy and we drove to Narvik on the first day to see if it was brighter on the other side of the mountains. It wasn’t and Nigel, who takes a great interest in birds, was surprised at their almost complete absence. On the second day we drove towards Kiruna to see if we could find some of the bog specialists that live in that area. There was some sun but after finding a nice **Moorland Clouded Yellow** (*Colias palaeno*) and a few more **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries** we blundered fruitlessly round a bog without seeing anything else. Two more stops were equally poor and we broke for lunch feeling rather depressed. By chance we chose a spot beside the road which harboured a colony of **Cranberry Blues** (*Plebejus optilete*) which were freshly emerged. Although this was not my first ever sighting it was a species that I had long wanted to photograph and I was very happy to be able to do so. Alas the only other butterflies were further **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**. Once again gathering cloud brought the day to a halt.

The weather forecast for the next two days was for fine weather and we were able to spend an extra day in Abisko and defer our drive north to Alta. A prime target for us was the **Dusky-winged Fritillary** (*Boloria improba*) and we took this chance to go up the chairlift on Mt Njulla in search of this very special butterfly. We walked up to the site but saw no butterflies except a stray **Arctic Clouded Yellow** or two. We had to console ourselves for our lack of success by enjoying nice views of some Long-tailed Skuas and Rough-legged Buzzards. By lunch time we abandoned the hunt and returned empty-handed down the chairlift to see what we could find above the station again. There we added **Bog Fritillary** (*Boloria eunomia*) and found that **Cranberry Blues** had started to emerge there. ▼



Cranberry Blues (*Plebejus optilete*) – a personal favourite



Arctic Scandinavia cont.



Your editor with unusual clothing for butterfly hunting

The trip north to Alta

We had to spend the next day driving the 300 kms to Alta in Norway. What a waste of a fine day! We saw few butterflies along the road and stopped to photograph none of them. We stayed at the Gargia Mountain Lodge (Fjellstue) which was simple, welcoming and eye-wateringly expensive. Once again, its main merit is that it is close to the site that is known for its special butterflies – Mt Grønnåsen. Alternative accommodation in Alta is sufficiently far away that it takes 30 minutes to get there and that can make all the difference when the weather is changeable.

Our first morning began encouragingly bright and we wasted no time in driving up to the car park near the mountain and walking across towards the summit where we understood the butterflies to occur. We soon encountered a couple of **Arctic Ringlets** (*Erebia disa*) but, though Nigel could snatch a couple of shots with his longer lens, I was quite unable to get anywhere near them before they shot off up the hill, never to be seen again.

We met some Norwegian lepidopterists who were kind enough to direct us to the precise location where they had seen the **Arctic Grayling** (*Oeneis bore*) but said that they had not seen anything else up there. The Graylings were there but were astonishingly sensitive, flying away at even a remote camera click. Gathering cloud made the butterflies less flighty and we were eventually able to get some shots at this difficult and very well camouflaged species. Seeing nothing else we walked back down to get very over-excited by our single sighting of a Fritillary. When we looked at our pictures later we realised that it was not a local speciality at all but a **Mountain Fritillary** (*Boloria napaea*).

Clouds now covered the sun and though it remained dry we saw little brightness for the next two days. We visited Kåfjord where the **Arctic Blue** (*Plebejus aquilo*) has a site, scouting it out twice without any success. We visited the nearby Tirpitz museum and also made a foray into charmless Alta. Searches for the **Arctic Woodland Ringlet** (*Erebia polaris*) were fruitless. We also visited the Rock Art museum which is a World Heritage site before, on our fourth attempt, we finally got a late gleam of sun which produced the desired **Arctic Blue** as well as a fine form of **Common Blue** (*Polyommatus icarus icarinus*) and a single **Small Copper** (*Lycaena phlaeas*).

Our final day in Norway saw us going up Mt Grønnåsen again but it was still cloudy over the mountains and we saw no butterflies there or lower down at Alta. The remarkable sight of Snow Gentians at sea level was a bright moment for me. We then returned to Abisko on a rainy morning having seen just six species of butterfly on the Norwegian leg of our trip.

Distant sunshine from Mt. Grønnåsen



Return to Abisko

Happily the next day was bright and sunny away from the mountains so we revisited the site above the station but this time we walked further away from the town in the hope of seeing some additional butterflies. We added nothing to our species count in the morning except **Dewy Ringlet** (*Erebia pandrose*) until after lunch when a hawk-eyed Nigel spotted a single **Northern Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus centaureae*). ▼



Arctic Scandinavia cont.

At last the clouds rolled away from the mountains and we returned to Mt Njulla, this time armed with a GPS reference for the **Dusky-winged Fritillary**. It turned out that we had been one level too low though we also thought that on our previous attempt we had been too early. As we got near to the site it clouded up and it was by good fortune that Nigel saw a single specimen during a brief bright interval and was able to get a picture or two. He called me over but it flew up, the wind caught it and, to my intense dismay, it vanished from sight. There was to be no further sunshine and the sight of a few **Dewy Ringlets** on the way down did nothing to dispel my bitter disappointment.

Norse Grayling (*Oeneis norna*)
– a happy chance encounter



The following morning there was a cloudless blue sky and we returned to Mt Njulla again and rode the chairlift up for the third time. On the walk a single **Norse Grayling (*Oeneis norna*)** flew into view, settled on the path just long enough to be well photographed and then flew off. It was the only time that we saw this species. On arrival at the **Dusky-winged Fritillary** site this time there were a modest number out and we were able, at last, to get a set of decent images of this strange butterfly which has chosen to live 3000' feet up an Arctic mountain. We rounded off our success by further encounters with the **Dewy Ringlet** before riding down the chairlift in triumph.



Dusky-winged Fritillary (*Boloria improba*) – worth all the effort

Our next day was also bright and sunny and we chose to walk along the Kungsleden long distance path in search of **Thor's Fritillary (*Boloria thore*)**. We very soon found it but further walking and scouting out the openings along the path failed to produce anything more than **Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Pale Arctic Clouded Yellows** and **Cranberry Blues**.

On our last day it was cloudy and raining over Abisko and to the west but sunny further east over the mountains into Norway so we drove towards the fjords again. We did find a population of **Arran Brown (*Erebia ligea*)** which were very uncooperative and a walk along a very promising bit of road gave us some more **Common Blues** and a male **White** that I have not yet managed to identify (either **Green-veined** or **Small**) but there just was not much to be seen.



The author in *improba* habitat
(photo by Nigel Peace)

In summary

We returned home having seen just 20 species of which only 9 can be considered to be Arctic specialities in 16 days and having spent a lot of time in each other's company and a great deal of money. Alta was an especial disappointment as we failed to see more than two or three of the high Arctic species that fly in the area. My pessimism over the trip was well founded where the weather was concerned though mosquitoes, with one exception, were less of a problem than expected.

I did enjoy the trip and Nigel is a congenial companion but I am not sure that I want to go again! •

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Austria

The Zillertal Alps, Austria, 28 July - 4 August 2018

by Michael Bailey

Based in the pleasant, year-round resort of Mayrhofen in the Zillertal Alps of south-west Austria, I spent a week of walking and looking for butterflies in glorious weather, and made full use of the excellent bus and cable car services to explore the scenic mountain splendour.



Mountain Fritillary
(*Boloria pales*)

On my first day I headed up towards the impressive peak of Ahornspitz where morning cloud suppressed the temperature and butterfly activity. However, once the cloud cleared and I found an ungrazed flowery slope at c.2300m, butterflies appeared in good numbers, including both **Shepherd's** (*Boloria pales*) and **Mountain Fritillary** (*Boloria napaea*), **Alpine Heath** (*Coenonympha gardetta*), and **Yellow-Spotted** (*Erebia manto*), **Lesser Mountain** (*E. melampus*) and **Blind Ringlets** (*E. pharte*).

Hintertux area

The following day I took a gondola up to the foot of a glacier near Hintertux. Here at 2600m **Small Tortoiseshell** (*Aglais urtica*) was the only frequent flier seen along with the odd **Shepherd's Fritillary** and a few **Large Whites** (*Pieris brassicae*). Lower down though, I encountered **Moorland Clouded Yellow** (*Colias palaeno*) and a couple of **Apollo** (*Parnassius apollo*) rushed past. Then, at around 2200m, I came across a more productive patch where **Large Ringlet** (*Erebia euryale*) and **Mnestra's Ringlet** (*Erebia mnestra*) were flying.

Lake Schlegeis

The scenery at Schlegeisspeicher was spectacular, with turquoise reservoir waters below glacial moraines and boulder fields. Although I failed to find any of the specialist *Erebias* here, I did find male and female **Alpine Blue** (*Albulina* ▼



Alpine Blue (*Albulina orbitulus*)



Lake Schlegeis



orbitulus) and **Eros Blue** (*Polyommatus eros*) near the upper end of the reservoir and a **Niobe Fritillary** (*Argynnis niobe*) along a flowery verge near the dam.

Climb up Frauenwand

On day 4 (1st August) I returned to the Hintertux area to climb the peak of Frauenwand (2541m). On the way up, not far from the summit a diminutive **Mazarine Blue** (*Cyaniris semiargus*) allowed close inspection. Butterflies were few and far between on my descent, though in a sheltered hollow above Sommerbergalm I encountered **Cranberry Fritillary** (*Boloria aquilonaris*) and more **Yellow-spotted Ringlets**.



Cranberry Fritillary (*Boloria aquilonaris*)



Yellow-spotted Ringlet (*Erebia manto*)

Further walks

The following morning a walk up the Zamsgrund valley via well-grazed slopes produced few butterflies on either side of the windswept Italian border. Returning on a higher level route I was however lucky enough to see a couple of **Cranberry Blues** (*Agriades optilete*) in a small boggy ravine with abundant *Vaccinium myrtillus* at 2050m.

De Lesse's Brassy Ringlet (*Erebia nivalis*)



I had a more productive day on the mountain slopes above Finkenbergr. Although very busy with people enjoying the superb weather, it wasn't too difficult to lose the crowds and get 'off-piste' onto flowery slopes. Here I managed to find **De Lesse's Brassy Ringlet** (*Erebia nivalis*) and **Alpine Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus andromedae*), and also added **Silver-spotted Skipper** (*Hesperia comma*), **False Heath Fritillary** (*Melitaea diamina*) and **Large Wall Brown** (*Lasiommata maera*) to my tally for the week.

Finally, at a more modest 1000m altitude in the Ziller valley the species range was a little more mundane but included both **Map** (*Araschnia levana*) and **Purple Emperor** (*Apatura iris*), a satisfying end to a very enjoyable week. •

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Montes Universales

Greenwings holiday to the Montes Universales, Spain, 28 July to 4 August 2018

by Emma Whitfield

The holiday was led by Simon Spencer, BC EBG's Chairman, and David Moore who has led other Greenwings holidays in France and is one of the UK Butterflies team. Mark Bunch was an additional driver and the guests on the holiday were David and Barbara, Barrie, Ken, Robert, Allan, Dave, Peter, Geoff, Aidan and Emma. We stayed at the Hostal Los Palacios in Albarracín.

The Montes Universales is in a very quiet corner of Spain, largely unknown even to the Spanish. It is a Reserva Nacional about 200 km east of Madrid between Teruel and Cuenca. The mountains of the Sierra de Albarracín rise to 1900 metres from a base of 1000 metres and the area is mainly wooded with fertile low-lying areas sown for wheat, together with grass and scrub areas with low intensity grazing. The limestone mountains form the watershed between the Atlantic and Mediterranean and a number of rivers start here including the Tagus which flows

west to Lisbon and the Guadalquivir which flows east to Valencia. In the summer the area has a mixture of dry riverbeds and spring-fed streams which retain lush vegetation despite the high temperatures (around 35 degrees). The area has two endemics: **Azure Chalkhill Blue** (*Lysandra caelestissima*) and **Zapater's Ringlet** (*Erebia zapateri*) and several species with localised distribution in the Iberian Peninsula: **Mother of Pearl Blue** (*Polyommatus nivescens*), **Southern Hermit** (*Chazara prieuri*), **Striped Grayling** (*Hipparchia fidia*), **Spanish Chalkhill Blue** (*Lysandra albicans*) and the **Spanish Zephyr Blue** (now *Kretania hesperica*). Simon made two previous visits to the area in 2013 and 2016 (see EIG newsletters 14 and 20).



Albarracín
(photo by Aidan Whitfield)

Day 1 - meeting up and drive to Albarracín

It was with high hopes that all 14 of us met up at Madrid Airport on 28 July for this first organised holiday to the

Montes Universales. Most of the group were relatively experienced butterfly enthusiasts and we were all looking forward to visiting a new area and finding new butterflies. Simon explained that July was the best month for most of the butterflies but that the endemic **Zapater's Ringlet** was an August species so we would be right at the beginning of its flight period and might not see it at all.

The leaders had collected the minibuses so we set off for Albarracín. We stopped for lunch en route at a restaurant and then called in at our first butterfly spot which was a mixture of grassland and pine trees next to a reservoir, the Embalse de la ▼



Montes Universales cont.

Toba on the CM2015 road. There were plenty of butterflies on the wing including **Spanish Purple Hairstreak** (*Laeosopis roboris*), **Tree Grayling** (*Hipparchia statilinus*), **Rock Grayling** (*Hipparchia hermione*) and **Iberian Marbled White** (*Melanargia lachesis*). Back in the minibus, the scenery became more and more dramatic as we approached Albarracín with its craggy hills and the river Guadalaviar rushing through the gorge. We booked into our hotel, the Hostal de los Palacios, which had a fantastic view over the town with its Moorish walls, cathedral and castle and narrow medieval streets which promised to be an intriguing place to explore. We met up in the restaurant in the centre of the town for our first evening meal together and soon realised that we were really off the beaten track as they didn't speak any English. Fortunately Robert lives in Spain and was able to act as interpreter for those of us who didn't speak any Spanish.

Day 2 - three sites near Albarracín

Javier's Rambla

We set off early after breakfast to drive the few kilometres to this rambla, the local name for a dry river-bed, and were excited to find butterflies still basking in the sun and easy to photograph. There were several species of **Skippers** so we were able to practise our identification skills with the help of Simon, David and Mark. These included **Southern Marbled** (*Carcharodus baeticus*), **Sage** (*Muschampia proto*), **Cinquefoil** (*Pyrgus cirsii*) and **Large Grizzled** (*Pyrgus alveus*). There were also

several species of **Fritillary**: **Knapweed** (*Melitaea phoebe*) and **Provençal** (*Melitaea deione*), and also **Spanish Heath** (*Coenonympha glycerion iphioides*) and **Dusky Heath** (*Coenonympha dorus*), together with **Spanish Gatekeepers** (*Pyronia bathseba*) and **Southern Gatekeepers** (*Pyronia cecilia*). Simon was very pleased that we found several **Southern Hermit** (*Chazara prieuri*) as he had only found a single individual here on his previous visits.



Javier's Rambla (photo by Aidan Whitfield)



Southern Hermit (*Chazara prieuri*)
(photo by Barrie Staley)



Provençal Fritillary (*Melitaea deione*)
(photo by Emma Whitfield)

Returning to the minibus we went down to the river and found large numbers of **Whites** and **Blues** puddling in the damp patches on the banks including **Oberthur's Anomalous Blue** (*Polyommatus fabressei*), **Chapman's Blue** (*Polyommatus thersites*) and **Spanish Chalkhill Blue** (*Lysandra albicans*).



Great Sooty Satyr (*Satyrus ferula*)
(photo by Robert Chubb)

Road to Pozondón, bridge with tunnel

This was another stop at a dried-up river bed with a damp area by a tunnel under the road which attracted large numbers of puddling butterflies, where we added **Escher's Blue** (*Polyommatus escheri*) to our list. We also found out that as the day wore on and we grew swetier, we attracted butterflies to feed on us! We found both **Hermit** (*Chazara briseis*) and **Southern Hermit** and a butterfly was photographed which the leaders thought was **Great Sooty Satyr** (*Satyrus ferula*) but we had to wait until the end of the holiday to have it confirmed as it a long way from its nearest known range in the Pyrenees. We stopped here for our lunch in the shade and were amazed at the numbers and variety of butterflies on the wing, including **Cleopatra** (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*), **Clouded Yellow** (*Colias crocea*) and **Berger's Clouded Yellow** (*Colias alfacariensis*).

Mother of Pearl Blue
(*Polyommatus nivescens*)
(photo by Emma Whitfield)



Lane beyond rock paintings

We finished the day on a rough grassy track past the cave paintings near Albarracín where we split into 2 groups and observed several species of **Fritillaries**: **Cardinal** (*Argynnis pandora*), **Niobe** (*Argynnis niobe*), **Twin-spot** (*Brenthis hecate*), **High Brown** (*Argynnis adippe*) and **Knapweed**.

Our first day had certainly been very successful. We had already seen several of the local species but we hadn't found **Zapater's Ringlet** yet.

Day 3 - Noguera

We travelled a bit further to Noguera, up a rough track in a steep-sided valley. The plants by the stream were lush and covered in butterflies nectaring mostly on thistles, particularly the **Argynnis Fritillaries**: **High Brown**, **Silver-washed** (*Argynnis paphia*), **Dark Green** (*Argynnis aglaja*), **Niobe**, **Cardinal**, and **Queen of Spain** (*Issoria lathonia*) together with **Silver-spotted Skippers** (*Hesperia comma*). These gave good opportunities for photographing them. We also saw our first **Azure Chalkhill Blues** (*Lysandra caelestissima*) and **Mother of Pearl Blues** (*Polyommatus nivescens*) and a couple of rather tatty **Purple-shot Coppers** (*Lycaena alciphron*).



Niobe Fritillary (*Argynnis niobe*)
(photo by Peter Gravett)

After lunch we took another fork in the track which was more wooded where a **Large Tortoiseshell** (*Nymphalis polychloros*) was spotted by some. There were lots of butterflies puddling in the ford which ran across the track, including **Spanish Swallowtails** (*Iphiclides feisthamelii*) and **Wood Whites** (*Leptidea sinapis*), with other butterflies nectaring on the brambles. There were also large dragonflies and Beautiful Demoiselles taking advantage of the verdant location. We had to stop for a while to allow four horses to pass us on the track and a Spanish family walking past were obviously intrigued as to what we were all doing. Having explained that we were interested in butterflies, they very helpfully told us that they had seen some big ones and some small ones!



Montes Universales cont.



The group at Sierra Alta (photo by Mark Bunch)

Bronchales and Sierra Alta

We drove up to Bronchales in the pine forest for a short stop and found a **Purple-shot Copper** egg-laying on sorrel. There were also **Grayling** (*Hipparchia semele*), **Rock Grayling**, **Great Banded Grayling** (*Brintesia circe*) and **Oriental Meadow Brown** (*Hyponephele lupina*). Then we drove a bit further up the track to Sierra Alta (1854 m), one of the highest points in the mountain range with superb views over the countryside and a firewatch tower. The hill top was an open area of dry grassland where we spotted an **Apollo** (*Parnassius apollo*) and large numbers of **Swallowtails** (*Papilio machaon*) and **Spanish Swallowtails** hill-topping. Despite the fact that the area seemed so dry there were good numbers of **Fritillaries** and **Great Banded Graylings**.

Day 4 - Moscardón

We spent the morning of our fourth day near Moscardón in a beautiful rich meadow with flowering thyme and salvia. There were pine woods on the sides of the valley and a shepherd brought down his flock of sheep to drink from the long wooden water troughs that were fed by a small spring. There was an abundance of butterflies and we soon attracted them with Barrie collecting a **False Grayling** (*Arethusana arethusa*) on his camera lens and Barbara and I had **Southern White Admirals** (*Limenitis reducta*) on our hands. There were a good variety of

Blues to test our identification skills - **Damon** (*Polyommatus damon*), **Turquoise** (*Polyommatus dorylas*), **Silver-studded** (*Plebejus argus*), **Adonis** (*Lysandra bellargus*), **Mother-of-Pearl**, **Oberthur's Anomalous**, **Azure Chalkhill**, **Spanish Chalkhill** and **Southern Brown Argus** (*Aricia cramera*).

We also identified a **Spanish Heath** (*Coenonympha glycerion iphioides*), there were large numbers of **Fritillaries** especially **Silver Washed** and **Cardinal** and we saw our first **Black-veined White** (*Aporia crataegi*). **Skippers** seen here included **Mallow** (*Carcharodus alceae*), **Red-underwing** (*Spialia sertorius*), **Safflower** (*Pyrgus carthami*), **Cinquefoil**, **Small** (*Thymelicus sylvestris*), **Lulworth** (*Thymelicus acteon*) and **Silver-spotted**. The meadow had plenty of

other insects such as a Praying Mantis tucking into a **Great Banded Grayling**, a Jersey Tiger Moth, the Burnet *Zygaena fausta* and a Green Forester moth. ▼



Spanish Heath (*Coenonympha glycerion iphioides*) (photo by Allan Ferguson)



Azure Chalk-hill Blue (*Lysandra caelestissima*) (photo by Ken Bailey)



Spanish Chalkhill Blue (*Lysandra albicans*) (photo by Barrie Staley)



Montes Universales cont.

Monument to the Nacimiento del Rio Tajo

After lunch we drove to the source of the River Tajo (Tagus) which has a picnic area and several huge metal statues representing the river and the three local provinces of Teruel, Cuenca and Guadalajara. The source itself was a spring-fed pond full of frogs. We spread out over the meadow and a dry river bed but the butterflies weren't so abundant here though we did see several **Skippers** and **Blues**. However, no **Zapater's Ringlet** yet.

Bridge over the Rio Tajo and Javier's Rambla

We stopped by a small bridge over the river Tagus where we found more puddling **Blues** and **Whites** next to the river and also a **Safflower Skipper** egg-laying. Our last stop of the day was at Javier's Rambla to check the river and we found large numbers of **Blues**, **Skippers** and **Whites** puddling in a different spot. There were a lot of butterfly wings scattered on the mud which we assumed were discarded by the dragonflies preying on them.



Esper's Marbled White
(*Melanargia russiae*)
(photo by David Coupe)

Day 5 - Vallecillo

We set off with high hopes of finding the elusive **Zapater's Ringlet** and drove up a track to Vallecillo. Our first stop was a meadow in the woods full of flowering lavender and a hundred bee hives that we kept well clear of. Here we found a variety of butterflies including our first **Esper's Marbled White** (*Melanargia russiae*) as well as **Dusky Meadow Brown** (*Hyponephele lycaon*), **Azure Chalkhill Blue**, **Oberthur's Anomalous Blue**, **Berger's Clouded Yellow** (*Colias alfariensis*), **Spotted Fritillary** (*Melitaea didyma*), **Olive Skipper** (*Pyrgus serratulae*) and **Hermit**.

We carried on up the track until we reached a wide meadow in the trees where there was a shepherd with his flock of sheep. We had a brief look around here before driving further up the track to a marshy area with a small stream. The vegetation was very lush here with plenty of thistles and a huge abundance of butterflies nectaring and puddling, together with hundreds of honey bees drinking at the water's edge. David was determined to find the **Zapater's Ringlet** (*Erebia zapateri*). He soon spotted one flying very fast down the track and chased it but it disappeared before he could get a photo. We spread out to look for it and a few of the group saw one a bit later but, again, it was very fast and there was no chance of photographing it. We all enjoyed walking through the long grass getting good views of the large **Fritillaries** and **Great Banded Graylings** nectaring on the thistles. We also saw **Blue-spot Hairstreak** (*Satyrrium spini*) and **Ilex Hairstreak** (*Satyrrium ilicis*). After lunch in the shade of the trees some of us headed up a side track where we found **Purple-shot Copper**, **Black-veined White**, **Dusky Heath**, more large **Fritillaries** and several **Brimstones** (*Gonepteryx rhamni*).

When we completed our butterfly list at the end of the day, Simon realised that we had seen 65 butterflies in total which was a record for him.

Day 6 - Ojos del Cabriel

We drove down a dusty track to this site which led us down to the Ojos del Cabriel, a series of permanent springs that form the source of the river Cabriel, with a mill and a very picturesque path along the river bank. We started in a plantation of poplars where we found various butterflies in the long grass including **Spanish Heath**, **Southern Brown Argus** and **Rock Grayling** perching on the tree ▼



Montes Universales cont.

trunks. We then walked along the river past the mill to an open area of flat rocks where a variety of **Blues** were puddling in the dimples in the rocks - **Lang's Short-tailed** (*Leptotes pirithous*), **Spanish Chalkhill**, **Azure Chalkhill** and **Oberthur's Anomalous**. Mark took advantage of the clear flowing water to have a paddle to cool down. David found a **Spanish Purple Hairstreak** on the other side of the bank and we spotted a beautifully coloured Ocellated Lizard. **Esper's Marbled White** was also found here, only the second site where we saw it.

Zapater's Ringlet (*Erebia zapateri*) (photos by David Coupe (upperside) and Geoff Woodcock)



Vallecillo

As we had seen most of the target species by this point, we decided that we would return to Vallecillo to see if we could find **Zapater's Ringlet** again, as not all the group had seen it the day before. It wasn't long before David spotted one puddling by the stream but it didn't stay for long as there were so many bees drinking at the same spot. It flew up and landed briefly in the vegetation behind the water where most of us managed to get a photo of it and then flew off again. Success at last, as we had all managed to see it and it was a very fresh specimen with beautiful orange patches on its forewings. We took a group photo here to celebrate seeing the **Zapater's**. After lunch we spread out again but no new species were found.



Rio Cabriel

We drove further up the long track to a small bridge crossing the Rio Cabriel where the river was completely dried up apart from a few small pools where we found a large frog and a Viperine Water Snake (*Natrix maura*) which swam across the pool in full view. There were more puddling **Blues** here along with several **Spanish Swallowtails**.

Roadside near Albarracín by river Guadalaviar

Our last stop was by the side of the road next to the river to check the elms as Simon thought we might find **White-letter**

Hairstreaks (*Satyrium w-album*) but there were none so we concluded that it was too late in the season. Some of the group opted for a paddle instead of walking up the road as it was very hot by this point in the day which seemed a sensible idea with the benefit of hindsight!

Tufted Marbled Skipper (*Carcharodus flocciferus*) (photo by Ken Bailey)



Day 7 - Javier's Rambla

For our last full day we returned to Javier's Rambla to give us the opportunity to spend more time photographing butterflies early in the morning before they became more active. We saw plenty of **Skippers** - **False Mallow** (*Carcharodus tripolinus*), **Southern Marbled**, **Red-underwing**, **Sage**, **Cinquefoil**, **Silver-spotted** and **Large** (*Ochlodes sylvanus*). This was the eleventh site where we had seen **Cinquefoil Skipper** which is normally considered a rare and endangered species but we found it on more sites than any other skipper. We also ▼



Striped Grayling
(*Hipparchia fidia*)
(photo by Dave Wright)

saw **Hermit** and **Southern Hermit** again and were able to get good photographs of a beautiful **Striped Grayling**. The butterflies were nectaring on the echinops and helichrysum which was very aromatic and gave off a mild scent of curry as we brushed past. On the river bank there were **Whites** and **Blues** puddling as before.

Noguera

We returned to the beautiful spot at Noguera and after lunch set off up the track with the ford and the stream running alongside. There were **Spanish Swallowtails** puddling in the mud and the range of **Blues** that we had

become accustomed to seeing - **Oberthur's Anomalous**, **Mother-of-Pearl**, **Azure Chalkhill** and **Spanish Chalkhill**. **Purple-shot Copper** were nectaring on mint and there were plenty of the large **Fritillaries** again - **Queen of Spain**, **Cardinal**, **Dark Green** and **High Brown**. A **Lesser Marbled Fritillary** (*Brenthis ino*) was also identified. Dragonflies were laying eggs directly in the stream and Beautiful Demoiselles perched just above the water, flashing their blue wings.

It was the end of the holiday and at dinner that night we were able to reflect on a very successful trip. The hotel itself was comfortable and the restaurant gave us the opportunity to get to know each other and swap experiences.

Day 8 - Drive back to Madrid via Huelamo

We had all our bags packed early and set off for the airport at Madrid. We called in for a quick break looking for **Sandy Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus cinarae*) in a meadow near the road next to a river 2 km from Huelamo but unfortunately did not find it. We had a quick lunch in a service station on the outskirts of Madrid before heading to the airport and splitting up to go our separate ways.

All in all, it was a fantastic holiday in a beautiful location. The weather was extremely reliable with wall to wall sunshine and although it was a bit hot by mid-afternoon it cooled off at night so we could sleep comfortably. Albarracín itself was a lovely medieval town to explore and the group as a whole saw 99 species, including a record 65 in one day. All of us (including the leaders) saw species which we hadn't seen before. The butterflies were found in good numbers and generally in good condition. There was a plethora of **Fritillaries**, **Skippers**, **Graylings** and **Blues** feeding on the eryngium and thistles. The other plus points were that we didn't have to spend too long travelling in the minibuses to the various sites and the roads and tracks were in good condition.

Bird numbers were limited as it was August although we did see some Choughs, Alpine Swifts, Rufous-tailed Rock Thrushes and Black Redstarts around Albarracín and Griffon Vultures flying high overhead in several places.

Simon said that he would send the results of our butterfly surveys to Miguel Munguira at Madrid University.

Thanks must go to all the leaders, drivers and Greenwings for organising a great holiday. •

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Photospot

Any reader who would like to submit a few photographs to conclude subsequent newsletters is most welcome to do so.

Mid-August butterflies of the central Apennines, Italy by Nigel Peace

For many years I have enjoyed a week's holiday with my wife in Pesaro, on the Adriatic coast of Italy, in the middle of August. We usually spend a day inland, either in Monti Sibillini National Park (where there is a metalled road to 1650m) or Monte Cucco regional park. Mid-August is of course late in the season for butterflies but there are still some interesting species to be found. Five are shown below, all photographed in Monti Sibillini National Park. The area suffered two severe earthquakes in 2016 and was free of the usual tourist bustle this year, but there was no problem with access.



Italian Furry Blue (*Polyommatus dolus virgilius*), male, 19 August 2018
(two images of the same insect)



Scarce Copper (*Lycaena virgaureae*), female, 19 August 2018.



Dusky Meadow Brown (*Hyponephele lycaon*), female, 19 August 2018.



Autumn Ringlet (*Erebia neoridas*), female, 17 August 2015.



Hermit (*Chazara briseis*), female, 17 August 2013.