



Dordogne, France

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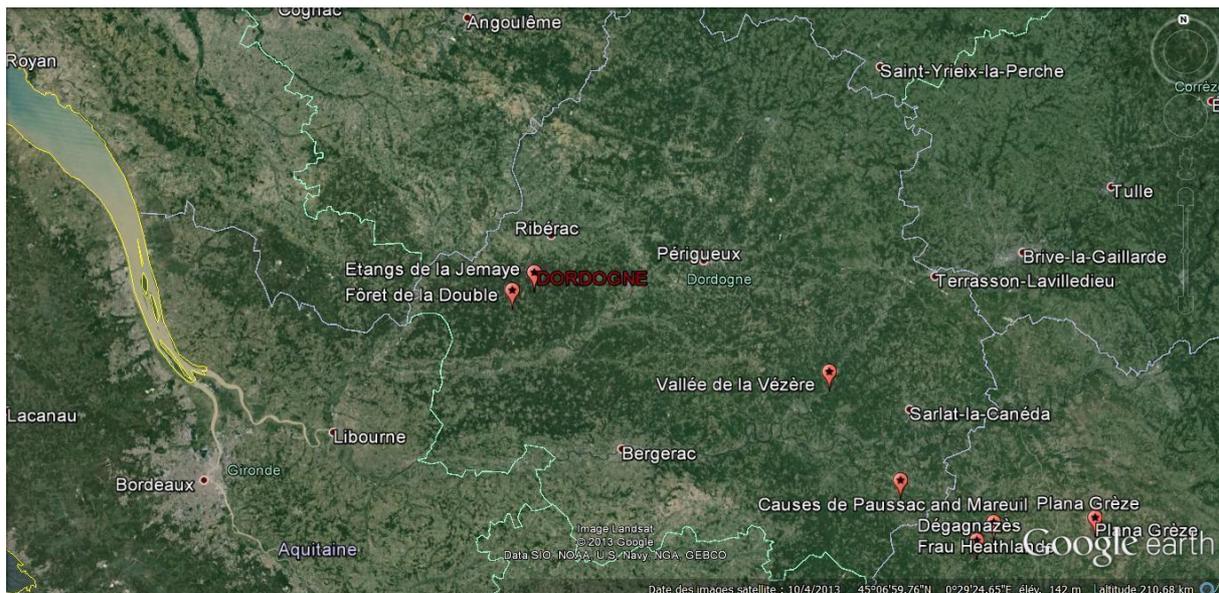
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Websites: www.dordognebutterflybirdwatching.co.uk - My own private website.

www.faune-aquitaine.org - LPO's (RSPB equivalent) wildlife recorders website.

Dordogne

The département is the third largest in France and is part of the Aquitaine region - lying in the north-eastern sector. It is approximately 450 kms south-west of Paris. The département is wholly landlocked and receives environmental influences from all quarters: Atlantic, Continental, Northern and Mediterranean. The geology is largely limestone (mainly Cretaceous but with some Jurassic), but there are Tertiary sandstones in the west (and capping some of the limestone hills), and volcanic rocks and Permian sandstones in the north-east. Relief rises from below 50 metres in the south-west to the north-east (adjacent to the Limousin region), where it reaches nearly 500 metres. As would be expected temperature and sunshine hours decline north-eastwards whilst rainfall increases. The main rivers drain westward (Dordogne) or largely southwestward (Isle, Vézère, Dronne).



Map of Dordogne

Dordogne is predominantly a rural département with only two towns, Périgueux and Bergerac, with more than 25,000 inhabitants. Farming is fairly intensive in the main valleys but in the side valleys and hills it is less so. Forest cover has increased from 25 to nearly 50% since the Second World War as fields and sheepwalk have been abandoned. Forest cover was around 25% in the mid/late 19th century.



Black-veined Whites *Aporia crataegi*

Habitats

An attraction of Dordogne (and many other parts of France) is the abundance of hay meadows and roadside verges covered in a great diversity of flowering plants and therefore butterflies. To this can be added the scrub/rough-grassland and woodland patchwork maintained by farmers, landowners and hunters for game, dry 'causses' - rocky limestone hills often with scrub including Juniper *Juniperus communis* (also



River Dordogne at La Roque Gageac

referred to as *garrigue*), small fen areas and wetlands, heathlands and varied forest types from predominantly oak on the limestones and volcanics to pine and mixed forest on the sandstones. The southern oak forest has a Mediterranean feel with Downy Oak *Quercus pubescens* and Holm Oak *Q. ilex*. With such habitat diversity within the south-west of France, this gives rise to a respectable butterfly fauna, for a lowland area, numbering around 120 species. This is around half of the French butterfly fauna.

Dordogne is not a département covered in vast swathes of pristine habitat like the more montane areas. However equally there are not large areas of intensive agriculture and urban areas. Rather the habitats and atmosphere of the place is very like rural England of yesteryear (though much warmer and sunnier in summer!) Interesting areas for butterflies are sometimes sandwiched between predominantly agricultural zones where species are thinner on the ground. In other areas semi-natural habitats are more extensive such as the forests including the Double, Landais, Lanmary and Bessède and the *causses* including Daglan, Terrasson,

Cubjac and smaller examples in the north-west. There are few formal nature reserves though there are some 'country park' areas which often contain good habitat.

Access to the countryside is fairly straightforward and there are marked footpaths throughout. These are GRs (Grandes Randonnées – major footpaths) or PRs (Petites Randonnées - local footpaths). There are many other unmarked paths. Access is fairly open but please respect 'Propriété Privé' and similar signs and fenced areas. Town Halls (Mairie) in most communes (roughly equivalent in area to a UK district) and tourist offices sell footpath maps and guides. Another very important source of information is the IGN maps – especially the Blue series at 1:25000 (about 2 and a half inches to the mile). In France hunting is referred to as 'La Chasse'. These days in Dordogne, it concentrates mainly on deer, wild boar, rabbits/hares and gamebirds. The hunting season is generally from the end of the first week of September until the end of February, though there is limited hunting in summer, as elsewhere in France.

Species

Of the approximately 120 species in Dordogne, around 60 or so are common whereas the rest are scarcer to very rare indeed and require knowledge of the ecological requirements of the species and habitats in Dordogne. One of the charms of Dordogne is the mix of familiar British species alongside rarer ones and more exotic continental species. Generally speaking, lowland British species are common and not mentioned exhaustively in the family sections below.

Papilionidae

European (*Papilio machaon*) and Scarce Swallowtail (*P. podalirius*) are common in all habitats with an early and mid-summer emergence. They are often seen on garden buddleia.

Pieridae

Black-veined White (*Aporia crataegi*) can be common in early summer. Wood White (*Leptidea sinapis*) is very common throughout the summer as is Berger's Pale Clouded Yellow (*Colias alfacariensis*) on limestone grassland – often well into the autumn. By contrast Pale Clouded Yellow (*C. hyale*) is largely unknown. Clouded Yellow (*C. crocea*) is common but never in large numbers.



Cleopatra *Gonopteryx cleopatra*

In the south of the département especially, Cleopatra (*Gonopteryx cleopatra*) is quite common – even in gardens. Bath White (*Pontia daplidice*), Southern Small White (*Pieris manni*) and Western Dappled White (*Euchloe crameri*) are extremely rare and the latter two are probably best searched for on the south-eastern *causses*. The few Bath White (*P. daplidice*) records are from arable zones.

Lycaenidae

Green Hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*) is quite common in early summer. Ilex (*Satyrium ilicis*) and Purple (*Favonius quercus*) are the commonest of the other hairstreaks. Blue Spot (*S. spini*) can be found in early summer on dry sunny limestone hills though Sloe (*S. acaciae*) is much rarer. Most of the aforementioned species are flying in June. Black (*S. pruni*) and Brown Hairstreaks (*Thecla betulae*) are scarce with Black flying early in the summer and Brown later in the summer and into the autumn. There have been very few records of White-letter Hairstreak (*S. w-album*).



Blue Spot Hairstreak *Satyrium spini*

Only three species of copper have been recorded. Small (*Lycaena phleas*) and Sooty (*L. tityrus*) are common with Large Copper (*L. dispar*) restricted to wetland areas, though not rare. For a lowland area there is a good variety of blues.

Long-tailed (*Lampides boeticus*) can be common in the late summer and autumn. Geranium Bronze (*Cacyreus marshalli*) can be found in most villages where the foodplant grows. There are very few records as yet of Lang's Short-tailed Blue (*Leptotes pirithous*).

Provençal Short-tailed Blue (*Cupido alcetas*) is often very common with Short-tailed (*Cupido argiades*) and Small Blue (*Cupido minimus*) more restricted. Green-underside Blue (*Glaucopsyche alexis*) is a fairly scarce butterfly of early summer and Mazarine Blue (*Cyaniris semiargus*) is also fairly scattered.

Large Blue (*Phengaris arion*) is quite a common species on limestone grassland in high summer. However, the two other Phengaris species are very rare. Scarce Large Blue (*P. teleius*) is only found near Vendoire in the north-west, whilst Alcon Blue (*P. alcon*) has only recently been discovered amongst damp heathland in the west of the département.

Adonis (*Polyommatus bellargus*) and Common Blue (*P. icarus*) are very common on limestone grasslands with Reverdin's (*Plebejus argyrognomon*), Idas (*P. idas*), Silverstudded (*P. argus*) (also on sandstones), Baton (*Pseudophilotes baton*) and Turquoise Blues (*Polyommatus dorylas*) are much more restricted and generally to the south and east. Chalkhill Blues (*P. coridon*) can be surprisingly scarce unless you hit upon a colony.



Turquoise Blue *Polyommatus dorylas*

There are very few records of Chapman's (*Polyommatus thersites*) and Escher's Blues (*P. escheri*), the former from the south-west of the département, the latter from the east.

Rhodinidae

The Duke of Burgundy Fritillary is quite widespread and common.

Nymphalidae

Lesser Purple Emperor is a common butterfly in Dordogne, in great contrast to its cousin the Purple Emperor which is very rare. The Southern White Admiral is also common whilst the White Admiral is scarcer. The Map butterfly is common and widespread, whereas the Small Tortoiseshell is very thin on the ground. The Large Tortoiseshell is commoner than its smaller cousin and is scattered widely through the département. There are very few records of the Camberwell Beauty.



Map *Araschina Levana* (summer generation)

The larger fritillaries are represented by four species. Map - summer generation Silver-washed is very common in mid-late summer, Dark Green and High Brown are less so and fly earlier, with Niobe very rare. This latter species is probably most likely to be encountered on the *causses* (dry rocky limestone grassland with scrub) at Terrasson, Daglan or Thenon. The Cardinal is not known apart from an old migrant record. The Queen of Spain Fritillary is common throughout Dordogne.



Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea phoebe*

All three *Brenthis* species are found in Dordogne, though only Marbled Fritillary is common with Lesser Marbled being restricted to scattered wetlands and Twin-spot scarcer still, most being recorded in the Vézère valley. Three species of *Boloria* fritillaries are present with only Weaver's (Violet) Fritillary common. Small Pearl-bordered seem to be restricted to wet flushes on sandy ground. Pearl-bordered Fritillary has been only rarely recorded.

The smaller fritillaries of the *Melitaea/Mellicta* group total seven species. Glanville, Spotted, Knapweed, Meadow and Heath are all common. False Heath Fritillary is restricted to a few wetlands mainly in the south, such as the Beune valley. The Provençal Fritillary is very rare but may be worth searching for on the eastern *causses* in early summer. The Marsh Fritillary is widespread or often common in suitable habitat which can be limestone grassland or damp meadows.

Of the smaller fritillaries the first emergences tend to be: Weaver's in April, followed by Glanville, Knapweed, Marsh and Meadow in May, with Heath later in May and into June.

Satyridae

Marbled White is very common on limestone grasslands in June and Meadow Browns on all grasslands from mid-May. This latter species often flies in woodland in high summer, when on very hot days all butterfly species seek out the shade of scrub or woodland edge. Pearly Heath is a common species in May/June and occasionally flies again in September. The Ringlet is widespread but in small numbers. Wall Brown is common and widespread but the Large Wall Brown is now rare and apparently declining, but may still



be found with luck in the north-west or south-east on 'cause' rocky grassland habitat. In 2011 a new species was added to the Dordogne list, the Woodland Brown, though the owner had known one site since around 2005. The four known sites are scattered across the département from the north-west to the south-east.

Woodland Brown *Lopinga achine*

There are five graylings currently found in Dordogne. The Great Banded is widespread and common in mid-summer. Woodland and Common Grayling are more restricted and can be scarce. False Grayling is restricted to cause habitat (like the Grayling) and is scarcer. Tree Grayling used to be quite common up until the 1970s – but it is now very rare and restricted to a few dry rocky hills in the north and east. Unfortunately, the Hermit (*Chazara briseis*) now seems to be extinct. The beautiful chocolate Dryad is a common butterfly of grasslands in July/August. However, the similar Great Sooty Satyr is very restricted – again to dry rocky hills – in the south-east. This is another species which must have suffered from the march of scrub and woodland.

Hesperidae

There are records for seven of the difficult *Pyrgus* group though all are rare or very rare except for the Grizzled and Southern Grizzled. Of the other *Pyrgus*, Oberthur's Grizzled and Safflower are most likely to be encountered, though scarce, on the *causses* and grasslands. Large Grizzled, Rosy Grizzled, Cinquefoil/Carline are all very rare. The similar Red-underwing Skipper is frequent on cause habitat.

Dingy Skipper is common and widespread with Mallow Skipper rather less so. There are a few old records for Tufted Marbled and doubtful ones for Tufted and Olive.

Of the 'brown' skippers, Small, Essex and Lulworth are all widespread and fairly common. Large Skipper is very common, whilst Silver-spotted is again restricted to *causse* habitat.

The rare Chequered Skipper is only found at a few sites in the west and north of the département in mixed forest with wet ditches. The Large Chequered Skipper is more widespread on more open damp sites, including those with adjacent pine.

Recommended butterfly sites

Many of the commoner species can be found anywhere in the countryside, in hay meadows and roadside verges. For scarcer species the following sites are recommended.

Plateau d'Argentine including the 'petits causses' of Paussac and Mareuil

Located in the north-west adjacent to the Angoulême road (D708). Plateau d'Argentine is signposted from the main road. Causse habitat and adjacent woodland are home to Twin-spot Fritillary, Sloe Hairstreak, Woodland Brown, and Large Wall Brown, apart from commoner species.

Large Chequered Skipper *Heteropterus morpheus*



Causse de Daglan at Saint Pompon

This site lies in the south-east, to the southwest of Sarlat. It is accessed at various points along the road (D52/60) between Daglan, Saint Pompon and Saint Laurent la Vallée. There is a great diversity of species including Cleopatra Niobe Fritillary, False Heath Fritillary, Large Copper, Black and Blue-spot Hairstreak, Turquoise Blue, graylings (except Tree) and Great Sooty Satyr

Causse de Terrasson at Condat

This area is found in the east of the département where the Vézère river turns south



westward through the famous prehistoric cave area. It is accessed from the D704 and D62. This area has a great diversity of species, similar to Argentine and Daglan, but including Tree Grayling (common). It is worth searching for Provençal Fritillary, Southern Small White, Western Dappled White and rarer skippers in the appropriate seasons. Escher's Blue has been recorded locally.

Large Copper *Lycaena dispar*

Tourbières de Vendoire

This interesting fenland is not far from Vendoire in the north-west of the département and is managed by the Conseil Général de la Dordogne (equivalent of the UK County Council). It is signposted from the D708 at Verteillac. This is virtually the only site for Scarce Large Blue. False Ringlet, Large Copper and Large Chequered Skipper are also present.

Etangs de la Jemaye, Fotêt de la Double

This is an area of small lakes in pine and mixed forest in the west of the département.



It is signposted from the D708 and D709 and lies near the village of Saint André de la Double. Like Vendoire, it is managed by the Conseil Général and is well known as a site for False Ringlet. It is worth searching locally for Large Chequered Skipper and Small Pearl Bordered Fritillary and possibly Pearl Bordered Fritillary and even Chequered Skipper. The Forêt du Landais south of the Isle river has a similar mix of species though False Ringlet and Pearl Bordered Fritillary have not been recorded.

False Ringlet *Coenonympha oedippus*

Vallée de la Grande Beune

The Grande Beune stream is a tributary of the Vézère immediately east of Les Eyzies in the south-east of Dordogne. The most interesting areas for butterflies are the damp meadows on the D48 Tamnies road. This is a site for Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Large Chequered Skipper, Large Copper and False Heath Fritillary. The adjacent forest and grasslands add to the butterfly diversity in the area. Towards Tamnies the rocky roadside harbours Great Sooty Satyr.

Vallée de la Vézère (Les Eyzies – Montignac)

This area includes the little side valleys running off the main road (D706). There is a great diversity of butterflies here including Twin-spot Fritillary and Silver-studded Blue.

There are some interesting meadows and hillsides above the Roque Saint Christophe prehistoric site.

Vallée de la Dordogne – Le Cingle de Tremolat

This is a small cause area high above the river Dordogne, just north of Tremolat beside the minor road to Mauzac. Interesting species include Turquoise and Baton Blues, Red-underwing Skipper, Woodland and False Graylings, Spotted and Marsh Fritillaries. Berger's Pale Clouded Yellow can be very common.

Butterfly records: These should be entered on to the Faune-Aquitaine website:
www.fauneaquitaine.org

There is an English version of the site which is very straightforward.

Four species of grayling: from left, Woodland, Tree, Common, (Tree again) and Great Banded.

