



EUROPEAN
BUTTERFLIES
GROUP

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eNewsletter

Welcome to the Autumn Newsletter. We have another packed edition with a variety of articles many from first-time contributors – thank you to all who have contributed.

I always believe that it is good to have a variety of articles; some scientific, some exciting trip reports and others which just inform and help us to identify difficult species.

You may have seen the recent article in *Butterfly magazine* by John F Burton, Vice President and founder member of *Butterfly Conservation* who described the abundance of butterflies in 1947. John who at 94 must be one of our oldest members has written for us about migration in butterflies drawing upon his experiences from the 1950's and 60's.

Sam Ellis has been deeply involved in the production of the new European Butterfly Red List and he outlines some of the process and, more importantly, the results which unfortunately show a significant increase in the number of threatened species.

On the subject of threatened species we have heard worrying concerns over the plight of the **Canary Islands Large White** on Tenerife. The species needs urgent action – and hopefully we are not too late to save it. If after reading the article you would like to help please get in touch.

Rikki Harrington explores the identity of some of his Swiss sightings from the comfort of his sofa and Keith Woonton describes a visit to Gran Canaria searching for the **Gran Canaria Grayling**. Finally Pete Smith takes us on 9 trips around Europe as he looks to add to his life list and photograph some of Europe's more elusive species.

Anne Spencer and I have edited the last couple of issues but I am delighted to say that Barrie Staley has stepped forward to offer his services and will edit the next issue of the Newsletter. Please support him and the Newsletter by contributing an article.

Mike Prentice, December 2025
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As the end of the year approaches it is good to look back at the year's achievements and forward to what next year may bring.

In May Sam Ellis and Dave Plowman led a trip to Sardinia to survey for **Sardinian Blue** (*Pseudophilotes barbagiae*) a species which is classed as Endangered in the new European Butterfly Red List. The group found the butterfly in six locations (three of which were previously unknown) often quite close to roadsides. There is quite an extensive area of mountainside where the habitat also appears suitable but which the group did not have time to explore and they concluded that the population is more widely distributed than previously thought. Following on from our surveys our Italian colleagues have committed to undertake regular monitoring of the species.



Danube Clouded Yellow (*Colias myrmidone*),

Keith Woonton

We continued to monitor **Danube Clouded Yellow** (*Colias myrmidone*) populations in Romania. In May we visited a newly found population south of the previously-known population near Gheorgheni but only saw one individual. Romania had suffered an unusually cold and wet Spring and this seemed to have affected the emergence of the first brood. A trip in August produced many more records with 75 seen on what we now

regard as the best site to the west of Cluj. The group as well as recording myrmidone were treated to the sight of 3 Phengaris species **Large Blue** (*P. arion*), **Scarce Large Blue** (*P. teleus*) and **Dusky Large Blue** (*P. nausithous*).

We continued our monitoring of **Southern Hermit** (*Chazara prieuri*) by funding an MSc student to visit 58 sites (with 2 observers at each site). No new sites were discovered but they did find the butterfly in greater abundance than previous years. The report is available on our website.

In the past two years we have taken part in surveys for **Nevada Grayling** (*Pseudochazara williamsi*) and our Spanish colleagues are now producing a Species Action Plan which we are helping to finance. The Plan should be published shortly.

Next year we are proposing to run more surveys for Endangered or Critically Endangered species – we plan to survey for **Ponza Grayling** (*Hipparchia sibdonii*), **Karpathos Grayling** (*Hipparchia christensenii*) and **Canary Islands Large White** (*Pieris cheiranthi*). We may also continue to monitor **Danube Clouded Yellow** (*Colias myrmidone*). Full details of survey trips will be sent out in an email early next year.



EBG is well placed to fulfil one of the objectives in the new Red List : **Undertake targeted surveys for those threatened European species whose distributions require confirmation** - but only if we have the funds to do so.

As some of you may know over the last 2 years or so there have been serious problems within Butterfly Conservation with both Hampshire Branch and more recently West Midlands Branch deciding to break away from the organisation unhappy at the way that the charity is being run. The concerns have mainly been over the centralisation of control over activities and particularly finance with the effect being a perceived emasculation of branches.

For the European Butterflies Group we also have a decision to make. Butterfly Conservation's current strategy does not pay any regard to any work or activity outside the UK. Whilst previously there was an International Director and more recently an International Officer there is now no-one with responsibility for work outside the UK and no funding from BC to Butterfly Conservation Europe. In my view and that of other Committee members this is short-sighted and a grave mistake.

Accordingly we need to decide whether to stay within BC and fight for a wider vision or decide to leave. As part of our efforts to stay and fight Simon Spencer has been elected to Council and I have volunteered to join the Strategy Group looking at BC's future strategy. However in each case we will only be one voice and our views may not hold sway.

BC is stipulating that in future they will only approve a branch's budget if it contributes to BC's strategy but with their decision to concentrate only on UK and ignore international work this puts us in real difficulty.

We are in discussion with BC over our future and I will write to all members when matters are clearer. I may also ask you to write to Trustees urging them to spend some time and thought and maybe a relatively small part of the budget on work outside UK.

Finally I would like to thank all who volunteer for EBG – Anne Spencer who organises the calendar competition and has stepped into the breach to edit the Newsletter, Jude Lock and Mike Haigh for our website, Jon Dunn for our social media, all who contribute articles for the Newsletter, our Committee members and all those who have come on survey trips.

Mike Prentice

A Swiss Sofa Safari

Since 1994, my wife and I have been holidaying in the Jungfrau Region of Switzerland. As the years went by, I became more confident in my butterfly identifications, whilst often having serious doubts about some of the grizzled skippers, ringlets and blues. Sadly, health issues are making returns to our beloved mountains increasingly infrequent. Nonetheless, I can guarantee much more happy hunting.

Yes, a friend whom I met on my favourite butterfly bank between Mürren and Winteregg has introduced me to <https://lerido.ch/>, a fabulous website that includes a facility for automatically identifying Swiss butterflies, many of which are, of course, found elsewhere in Europe. All you have to do is import your pictures, and it will identify the species and give a probability that the identification is correct, offering alternatives with lower probabilities. Here are some of the many examples I got wrong.



Provençal Short-tailed Blue (*Cupido alcetas*)

First, my best find to date. We were having lunch in Brienz. Next to the café was a path with wide grassy and shrubby borders running uphill between chalet-style homes. The weather was not great, so I was happy to snap any butterfly I spotted. A 'Small Blue' obliged. I thought nothing more of it until I began my foray into lerido.ch, which identified it with 100% certainty as ***Cupido alcetas*** (**Provençal Short-tailed Blue**) (Fig. 1). And, sure enough, when I looked closer, there were the short tails and the little black spot at their base that distinguishes it from ***Cupido argiades*** (**Short-tailed Blue**). My books don't even seem to think that Provençal Short-tailed Blue should be there, but it is. (Editor's note : *Cupido alcetas* has been spreading Northwards and there are many records from Switzerland and further North despite what many books may say).



Northern Wall Brown (*Lasiommata petropolitana*)

Lasiommata maera (**Large Wall Brown**) is very common in the area, ***Lasiommata petropolitana*** (**Northern Wall Brown**) less so. I had identified Fig. 2 as the former, but lerido.ch put me right, the distinction being the dark curved line on the hindwing. Several of my ***Aricia agestis*** (**Brown Argus**) turned out to be ***Aricia artaxerxes*** (**Mountain Argus or Northern Brown Argus**). I thought I was better at distinguishing ***Melitaea athalia*** (**Heath Fritillary**) undersides from ***Melitaea diamina*** (**False Heath Fritillary**). Far too many of my ***Fabriciana niobe*** (**Niobe** ▾



A Swiss Sofa Safari cont.



Turquoise blue
(*Polyommatus dorylas*)

Fritillary} were *Fabriciana adippe* (High Brown Fritillary). My *Pyrgus carlinae* (Carline Skipper) was *Pyrgus serratulae* (Olive Skipper).

Like me, lepido.ch can't separate *Colias alfacariensis* (Berger's Clouded Yellow) from *Colias hyale* (Pale Clouded Yellow) or *Melitaea athalia* (Heath Fritillary) from *Melitaea celadussa* (Southern Heath Fritillary). There will be several more examples.

Fig. 3 is the underside of what I thought was *Cyaniris semiargus* (Mazarine Blue), but lepido.ch swears blind (69% blind, anyway) that it's *Polyommatus dorylas* (Turquoise Blue). I really thought I'd tripped it up with this one, but a friend pointed out that you can just about make out the heart-shaped orange markings which are diagnostic of *P. dorylas*, and that the confusing veining is coming through from the upperside because the sun is behind it.

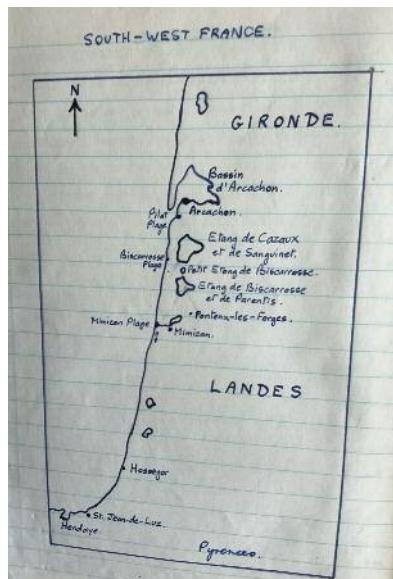
There's a good reason that I've given primacy above to Latin names rather than vernacular names. Although subject to change as taxonomic relationships become better understood, the former are standard the world over, the latter vary. Lepido.ch gives some truly charming vernacular names, some of which I prefer to those used commonly in the UK. For example, *Eumedonia eumedon*, *Geranium Argus* to us, is Argus of the Bloodthirsty. Our *Brown Argus*, is *Coral Necklace* – how sweet is that? *Lysandra coridon*, our *Chalk Hill Blue*, is *Pearly Blue Argus*. *Speyeria aglaja*, our *Dark Green Fritillary*, is *Grand Pearl*. Get in there, and you'll find many more wonderful names!

On logging in, you have the opportunity to select English or French as the language. Then go to 'Identify a butterfly', then 'Automatic identification'. Hours of fun and humiliation lie ahead.

Rikki Harrington

Look out for butterflies migrating

Whilst looking for butterflies on your European travels it is worth keeping an eye open for butterflies migrating especially in spring and autumn, also local dispersal movements.



Northwards migrations in spring are well known, but until ornithologist Dr. David Lack and his wife published (Lack & Lack, 1951) their classic observations of an immense migration of butterflies and other insects over the Port de Gavarnie in the Pyrenees, many entomologists did not believe that a return migration took place, apart from that of the **Monarch** (*Danaus plexippus*) in North America. Subsequently other observers made similar studies in the Pyrenees and in alpine areas in Central Europe. As far as I know few observations, if any, have been made in Eastern Europe. My own experiences include the following: -

D.F. Owen and I travelled to the Landes coast of south-west France in the autumn of 1953 to measure the extent of the bird and insect migration southwards along the coastal dunes (Owen & Burton 1953: Burton & Owen, D.F. 1954). In 1967 I returned to this heavily used migration route to make sound recordings of it for the BBC Sound Archives.



During May 1982 D.F. Owen and I were making a radio programme about the wildlife of Spain for the BBC Radio 4 series "Wild Spain" when we noticed on the pass at the top of the Puerto del Pico in the Gredos mountain range of central Spain

a northwards migration of butterflies through the pass (Burton & Owen 1983). The majority were **Large and Small Whites** (*Pieris brassicae* and *rapae*) and **Clouded yellows** (*Colias crocea*), but with them were smaller numbers of **Green- veined whites** (*P. napi*), **Pale Clouded Yellows** (*C. hyale*), **Berger's Clouded Yellows** (*C. alfacariensis*), **Painted Ladies** (*Vanessa cardui*), **Red Admirals** (*V. atalanta*) and **Long-tailed blues** (*Lampides boeticus*).

So it shows that one may unexpectedly chance upon a migration or local movement of insects almost anywhere.

John Burton

References

Burton, J.F. & Owen, D.F. 1954. Insect migration in S.W. France. Ent. Mon. mag. 90: 66-69
 Lack, D. & Lack, E. 1951. Migration of insects and birds through a Pyrenean pass. J. Anim. Ecol. 20: 63-67
 Owen, D.F. & Burton, J.F. 1953. Observations sur la migration dans le sud-ouest de la France. Alauda 21: 223-239.
 Burton, J.F. & Owen, D.F. 1983. Butterflies in central Spain in May 1982, including a record of northward migration. Ent. Rec. j. Var. 95: 242-246.



Searching for Gran Canaria Grayling (*Hipparchia tamadabae*)

I spent two half days (18th & 20th September 2024) searching out and photographing the Gran Canaria Grayling (*Hipparchia tamadabae*) arriving at noon and departing the site at 17:30.

The friendly Raven



I had arrived on Gran Canaria for a family holiday armed with some good information regarding the Gran Canaria Grayling from a friend, Dave Plowman. Having done some research and looked at Google Maps prior to visiting the island I found an area high up on the island at approximately 1700 metres which looked promising. Aerial imagery showed an area of forest where the ground cover vegetation looked to be just a little denser than the area where Dave had looked and found them a few weeks earlier.

The weather conditions were good, sunny with just the occasional light cloud passing over and very warm, mid to high 20's. As the area I had found was en route to Dave's site I decided to stop and look at "my site" first. As I was parking my car I saw my first flyby Grayling rapidly disappearing down the road in the direction which I had just came from. I hastily got my camera and set off in hot pursuit of this butterfly but to no avail.



Returning to the car to finish kitting up properly for a day in the field a second Grayling was then seen disappearing up through the tree-covered slope behind the parking area. I was readying myself to set off, when I saw on the ground just behind my car there was a Raven (*Corvus corax*) not more than 3 metres away and it seemed totally untroubled by my close proximity to it. I started taking a few photos of it when I was joined by a couple who were passing by and sporting cameras with what looked like 400mm lenses attached, then after a few minutes the Raven flew off up into the trees.

Typical habitat of the Gran Canaria Grayling

Passing the time of day with couple they informed me they were hoping to see the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch (*Fringilla polatzeki*) – one of Europe's rarest breeding birds - and naturally I told them of my quest to see the Gran Canaria Grayling. Happily, as is so often the case, they informed me that they had seen grayling on the top of the ridge above the parking area. After parting company with the couple and not wishing to waste any time, I took the direct route ▼



Searching for Gran Canaria Grayling
(*Hipparchia tamadabae*) cont.

straight up the 15 or 20 metre bank to the ridge line at the top. Finding a vague track running roughly parallel with the ridge line I turned right and started to slowly wander along it. Within five minutes I saw my first Gran Canaria Grayling just where the birding couple had advised me to look. Obligingly the butterfly circled for a time and settled in the pine needles which carpeted the whole of the woodland floor here.



Moving as slowly as a cloud I managed to get down on my stomach and secure my first photographs of this endemic species which prior to the trip I had thought would be a tall order to find this late in the year. The butterfly was in very good condition with just some minor damage to the hind wing.



I was thrilled to bits with my near instant success and my first close encounter with this species; I continued to search with high expectations for more individuals and I spent the next hour investigating the site. I discovered a dirt track which led from the road on which I had parked my car, up along the western extreme edge of the site. This track also acted as a boundary to the site as it had a fence on one side preventing further access westward. However as I walked up this track I spotted my second grayling and photo opportunity as one was flitting about along the wall that edged the path. This was a somewhat more worn individual that would settle briefly on the wall or ground below it, before moving on a couple of feet and resettling again. Thankfully it remained on my side, the sunny side, of the wall and I was again rewarded with some photo opportunities including a partially open wing shot.

For the rest of the first day I continued to wander the site, expanding my search area and continuing to have sightings. By the end of the first day I had managed to photograph seven individuals and had an equal number of flyby sightings or those that were simply out of reach or flying onto private land.

My second day was basically a repeat of day one, with extensions to the search area to include an unproductive adjoining hill side and a few walks along the roads which did give me a few sightings. I also had a brief visit to Dave's site which despite being only about 4 kilometres away, was unfortunately under ▼



Searching for Gran Canaria Grayling
(*Hipparchia tamadabae*) cont.

cloud. My sightings for day two were; photographed eight and flybys etcetera about another ten. In total over the two visits I searched an area of around 500 square metres and approximately 32 **Gran Canaria Grayling** (*H. tamadabae*) were recorded, a far better number than I had ever hoped for when I had first planned the trip.



A rare glimpse of the upper wing

In conclusion the **Gran Canaria Grayling** is still very active even into mid-September in good weather at an altitude of around 1700 metres, with all sightings being within tree covered areas or on the edge of tree covered areas. I also noted that within the forested area there was no or extremely little in the way of flowering plants. Once disturbed in an area during the day butterflies were seldom seen in that area again on the same day.

So if anyone is looking for some late season sunshine and late flying butterflies the **Gran Canaria Grayling** is certainly well worth thinking about.

Keith Woonton





The New European Butterfly Red List

Back in Issue 30 eNewsletter, when I was still working as BC's International Director, I talked about plans for a new European butterfly Red List. I boldly suggested this three-year project would be completed by March 2024. Just over a year and a half later than the original end date, we are finally there!

You can view the assessment of each species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) website (<https://www.iucnredlist.org/search/list?query=Butterflies&searchType=species>) but if you simply want an overview then our recently published summary report is probably your best bet. This is available to download from the Butterfly Conservation Europe website <https://www.bc-europe.eu/webpage.php?name=red-list-butterflies-2025>. In this article I will try and explain a bit more about the process and highlight some of the main findings.

Although most of the work was undertaken by Chris van Swaay, Martin Warren and myself, an awful lot of people from all over Europe helped with this project, either providing data, attending workshops, reviewing the assessments or revising national butterfly checklists. There are too many to name here (they are listed in the report) but special thanks go to our own EBG committee member Martin Davies, who singlehandedly reviewed the endemic status of all 501 species considered.

So, how did we do it? The key objective of a Red List is to identify which species are most at risk of extinction. IUCN has developed five criteria which guide the assessors when they determine in which category of extinction threat to place each species. We mostly just used two criteria: A) a reduction in population size; B) a small geographical range. In the case of the former, this can be a reduction in abundance (as measured by a butterfly monitoring scheme for example) or distribution (as measured from occurrence data). Simply having a small geographic range is not in itself a reason for being red-listed, two of three further conditions must also be met: 1) the range must be severely fragmented OR the species occurs in few locations; 2) a continuing decline in range, distribution, population or habitat must be ongoing; 3) the species experiences extreme fluctuations in range, distribution, population.

In the absence of reliable data, earlier European butterfly Red Lists relied heavily on expert opinion to arrive at their assessments, but now much more occurrence data is submitted to national and international recording platforms such as Observado and iNaturalist. Such data is often collated through the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF) and thanks to open access is available to researchers. Moreover, the establishment of the European Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (eBMS) in 2014, meant that abundance data from across Europe could also be accessed for the analysis. Using these data, we were able to calculate distribution trends for 320 species and population trends for 169 species. Data-based assessments for so many butterflies is an important step forward and we expect by the time of the next Red List an even higher proportion of species will be assessed by these means. However, expert opinion still has an important role, both in interpreting distribution/abundance trends but also in assessing the rarer species for which little data exists.

Whichever assessment criteria are applicable, data analyses and/or expert opinion can only apply to a specific 10-year period - in this case 2012 to 2021. This means that any historical declines are not directly relevant, although they may be referred to when explaining an assessment.

Of the 501 species considered, 59 were designated Not Applicable (NA) because they are of marginal occurrence in Europe (i.e. less than 1% of their global distribution is estimated to occur in Europe) or because they were introduced after 1500 AD (only **Geranium Bronze** (*Cacyreus marshalli*)). In previous European butterfly Red Lists some species were classified as Data Deficient (DD) which could not be assessed but this time, we were confident we had sufficient information to assess the remaining 442 species.

With increasing risk of extinction, the 442 species were classified as Least Concern (LC; more or less stable), Near Threatened (NT; equivalent to a 20-29% decline in distribution or abundance if using the A criterion); Vulnerable (VU; 30-49% decline), Endangered (EN; 50-79% decline) or Critically Endangered (80% or more decline).



The **Madeiran Large White** (*Pieris wollastoni*) is the only European butterfly species to become globally extinct. This male (below) and female (above) are two of only nine specimens in the Museu Municipal do Funchal, Madeira. There are no known photographs of this species in the wild.



If the B geographic range criterion is used, then the smaller the range, the higher the threat category. The range of a Critically Endangered species for example must be less than 100 km² or the number of occupied tetrads within that range would be less than 10 km² in total.

The VU, EN and CR are collectively referred to as the 'threatened' categories. However, a species might also fall into one of three other categories: Regionally Extinct (RE; extinct in Europe but still present elsewhere in its distribution); Extinct in the Wild (EW) and Extinct EX; globally extinct). Thankfully only one European butterfly falls into this latter category: the **Madeiran Large White** (*Pieris wollastoni*) last seen in 1986 despite intensive subsequent survey efforts including some contributed to by EBG.

Of the 441 extant species assessed, 14.7% (65 species) are considered threatened (i.e. VU, EN and CR), with 1.4% being Critically Endangered (6 species), 7.9% Endangered (35 species) and 5.4% Vulnerable (24 species). A further 13.6% (60 species) are classified as Near Threatened. **This means that 28.3% (125 species) of butterflies are now threatened or Near Threatened at the European scale.**

When it comes to endemic species, the situation is even worse. Of the 148 extant European endemic species (the Madeiran Large White was also endemic), 19.6% (29 species) are threatened and 21.6% (32 species) Near Threatened. **Thus over 40% of Europe's endemic butterflies are now threatened or close to being so.**

Comparing the present and previous Red List (Van Swaay et al., 2010) is made a little tricky because the recognition of new species means the number assessed has increased from 435 to 442. Overall, the proportion of threatened species has increased by 73% (from 8.5% to 14.7%). In purely numerical terms the number of threatened species has increased from 37 to 65 species and when Near Threatened species are included, the number of species listed has risen from 81 to 125. Moreover, the number of Endangered and Critically Endangered species has more than doubled from 15 to 41, an increase of 173%.

These changes are partly due to some Near Threatened species becoming threatened in the last 10+ years but also because some of the newly identified species are extremely range-restricted and immediately fall into a threat category. The threat level of a few species has decreased since the previous assessment, often because they went through a period of rapid decline in the 1990s to qualify for threatened or Near Threatened status last time, but their rate of decline has slowed in the last decade, so they do not now reach the threshold to be assessed as threatened.

The six species at most risk of extinction are the Critically Endangered **Piedmont Anomalous Blue** (*Polyommatus humedasae*), **Coenonympha phryne**, **Ponza Grayling** (*Hipparchia sibordonii*), **Karpathos Grayling** (*Hipparchia christensenii*), **Nevada Grayling** (*Pseudochazara williamsi*) and **Macedonian Grayling** (*Pseudochazara cingovskii*). All but **C. phryne** (sometimes known as **Siberian Brown**) are European endemics and only that butterfly and the Macedonian Grayling were listed as CR in the previous Red List. The Nevada Grayling is a newly recognised species and of the others only the Piedmont Anomalous Blue was previously listed as Endangered with the Ponza Grayling and the Karpathos Grayling respectively Near Threatened and Least Concern.

Amongst the drivers of these changes are the usual suspects of habitat loss and degradation which can affect all butterflies, but especially those which breed in grasslands and wetlands. Both agricultural intensification (e.g. conversion to arable crops, drainage, overgrazing) or abandonment can reduce the area and quality of butterfly breeding habitats. A consequence of such changes is increasing fragmentation so that only small habitat areas remain which can only support small populations, greatly increasing the chances of local extinctions occurring. Nitrogen deposition is also a growing threat in parts of Europe, leading to more rapid vegetation growth which in turn affects the microclimate and the abundance of larval hostplants. Pesticides and herbicides are also a threat to species that live close to arable crops, but exposure is low to butterflies breeding in semi-natural habitats.

In recent decades, climate change has begun to have a major impact on Europe's butterflies. In the new Red List, 52% (34) of all threatened species are threatened by climate change, a number which is likely to grow in future. Whilst some species have benefited by expanding their ranges, the habitat of others are changing rapidly due to extended periods of hot weather or extreme events such as drought and fire. Many cold-adapted species have shifted their distributions uphill, with those with mountain top distributions especially threatened as they have nowhere else to retreat. Several endemic butterflies in southern Spain are already threatened by this scenario and it is predicted to worsen with another eight species listed as Near Threatened as they are likely to lose most of their 'climate space' over the next 50 years.

Climate change is also threatening another suite of species in the northern Alpine/Boreal zones where warmer and drier conditions are allowing scrub to spread and encroach on sensitive bog and tundra habitats; several species are now classed as Endangered as a result. In the Mediterranean region, climate change is adding new threats to species because of the increasing frequency of extreme drought and wildfires. This is threatening several endemic species that are confined to islands.



Nevada Grayling (*Pseudochazara williamsi*)

mountain ranges of south-east Spain. EBG organised surveys during 2023 and 2024 for this butterfly which were reported in the last newsletter (No. 36) and a great example of how the new European butterfly Red List can prompt rapid conservation action. Over the next few years, EBG plans to undertake other similar targeted surveys for some of Europe's most threatened species identified in the new Red List. Hopefully, EBG will continue to make a difference for Europe's butterflies over the next decade and beyond.

Sam Ellis

Reference:

Van Swaay, C., Cuttelod, A., Collins, S., Maes, D., López Munguira, M., Šašić, M., Settele, J., Verovnik, R., Verstraet, T., Warren, M., Wiemers, M. and Wynhof, I. (2010). European Red List of Butterflies. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2779/83897>

In summary the new Red List highlights that butterflies in Europe are increasingly threatened and that climate change in particular is making things much worse for species already under pressure from ongoing land use changes. The Red List report makes a number of recommendations for conservation action, including how to improve management of the habitats on which butterflies depend. However, one action that EBG can and does contribute to is listed as: **Undertake targeted surveys for those threatened European species whose distributions require confirmation.**

As already noted, the Nevada Grayling (*Pseudochazara williamsi*) is one of the unfortunate endemic species listed as Critically Endangered and confined to the

Are we facing another European butterfly extinction?

Sam Ellis has contributed an article on the new European Red List outlining the growing number of threatened species. In his article he refers to the first global extinction of a European butterfly the Madeira Large White (*Pieris wollastoni*) which has not been seen since 1986. We reported on searches for the Madeira endemics in Newsletters 31 and 33 but again found no trace of *wollastoni*. So sudden was the disappearance of this once widespread species that we have been unable to find any photographs of it in the wild. The cause of its extinction is unknown but theories include introduction of a parasite.



In the past week I have received the shocking news that another Macaronesian endemic the **Canary Island Large White** (*P. cheiranthi*) on Tenerife is on the verge of extinction or may already be extinct. The species has two extant populations *P. cheiranthi cheiranthi* on Tenerife and *P. cheiranthi benchoavensis* on La Palma. There was a third population on La Gomera but that became extinct in the 1970's.

The Tenerife population was generally restricted to the northern side of Tenerife (although it had also been recorded from one locality in the south of the island) and flies in deep and humid ravines in the laurel forests and on wet cliffs.

We had been alerted to a decline in *P. cheiranthi* numbers in 2011 and various EBG members visited Tenerife in 2012 to investigate. Matt Rowlings wrote a report of their findings in Newsletter 12 which can be found on our website. Mark and Caroline Searle also described their sighting of the species in Newsletter 28.

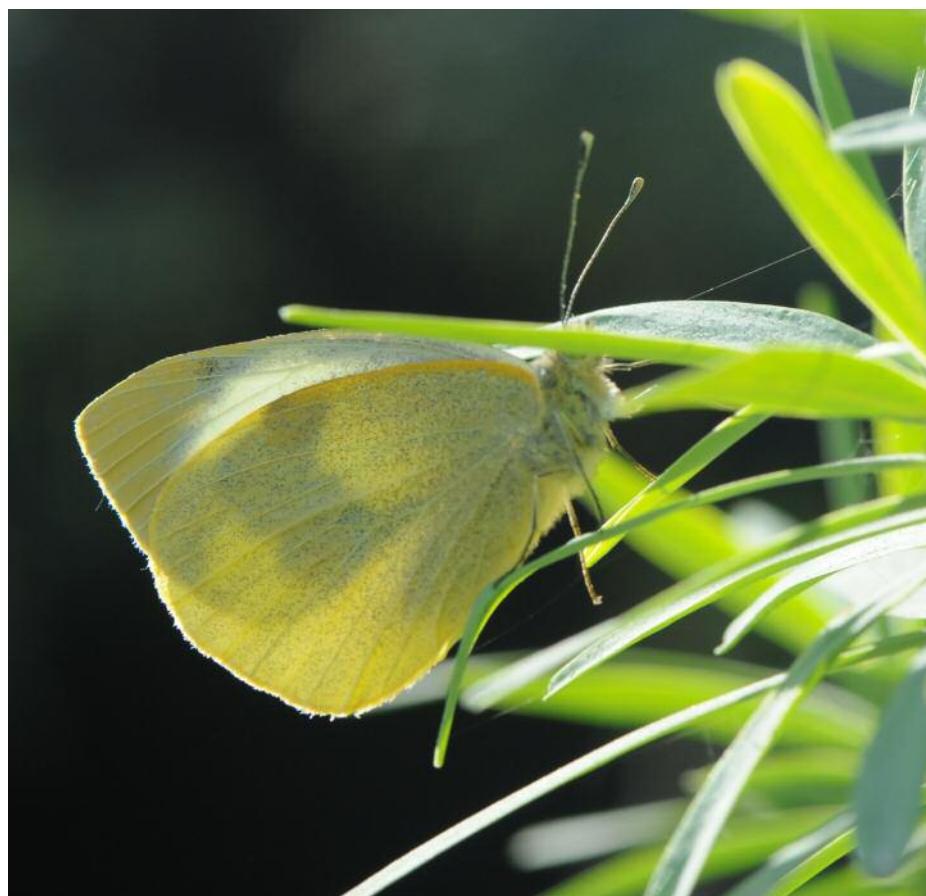
The best-known locality (at least to British lepidopterists) to find *cheiranthi* was the Barranco de Ruiz about 10km west of Puerto de La Cruz and several members reported seeing it there. When I visited Tenerife in 2019 we saw the butterfly in reasonable numbers from the Mirador de la Grimona a couple of kilometres east of the Barranco from a lay-by on the busy highway TF-5 just west of a tunnel. The butterfly was flying on the cliffs above and below the tunnel and down towards the sea below.



The view from the Mirador
de la Grimona

The suggested reasons for the population crash are the prolonged recent drought, coupled with habitat destruction, excessive water extraction and potential high parasitism.

ZERYNTHIA have been carrying out monitoring of the butterflies of the Canary Islands and will be carrying out further searches for *cheiranthi* in 2026. We now see this species as an urgent priority for action and we will help ZERYNTHIA by also organising surveys - please contact me if you are interested in taking part.



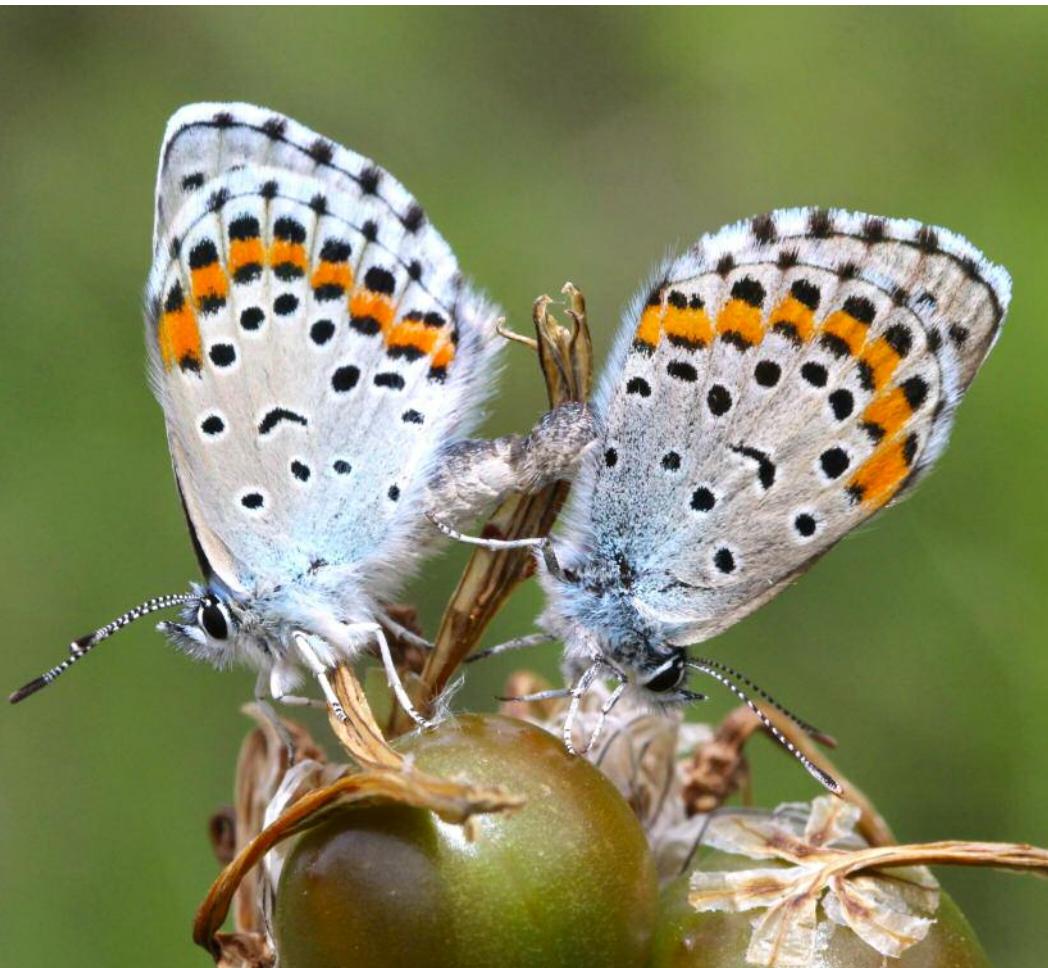
You can also help if you have any records of *cheiranthi* in 2024 or 2025 - if so please send them to me with as much detail as you have preferably supported by photographs. Even if you do not take part in any surveys, if you visit Tenerife please look for *cheiranthi* and submit any records (with photos if possible).

Mike Prentice

All photographs M. Davies

Photographing Europe's rarer butterfly species

I have been fascinated by butterflies for as long as I can remember. My interest in the continental butterfly fauna was kick-started many years ago when I was given a book on European butterflies as a 10th birthday present, and to this day I recall my young mind being blown away by the beauty of the images that leapt from the pages: Poplar Admirals (*Limenitis populi*), Violet Coppers (*Lycaena helle*), Apollos (*Parnassius apollo*), Camberwell Beauties (*Nymphalis antiopa*) and Scarce Swallowtails (*Iphiclides podalirius*), to name just a few. As a child I never imagined that I would get to see such wonders in real life.



Bavius Blue (*Pseudophilotes bavius*), mating pair

with single species or small groups of species so far missing from my entomological experiences. Presented here are some personal highlights from those recent trips, which I hope may be of interest to others.

1. Greece - Kozani region - April 2024

The Kozani prefecture in Western Macedonia, Greece, is not well known as a tourist destination. It is off the beaten track and little English is spoken, but the hills of this region are home to several rather localised Eastern European butterflies, making it highly appealing to the travelling Lepidopterist. My wife Vicki and I spent a thoroughly enjoyable week out here in late April and early May.

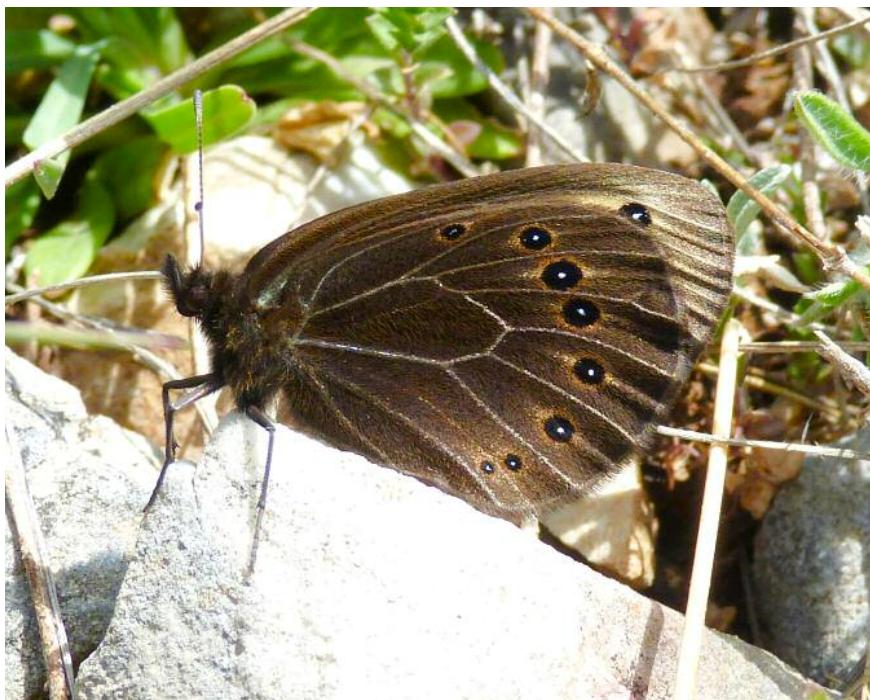
It wasn't until I was in my thirties that family holidays to France with my own young children gave me the chance to begin finding and photographing some of those dreamlike insects from the pages of my childhood book. And as the years progressed, further trips to Spain, Greece, and the Canary Islands enabled me to add more and more species to my collection of photographs and "life-ticks". By the time I reached my early fifties and decided to have a go at semi-retirement, I had racked up a life-list of almost three hundred species, and having already picked most of the low-hanging fruit from the European butterfly tree, new "lifers" were getting increasingly difficult to come by.

Over the past two years I have made a total of nine targeted trips to a variety of continental destinations, aimed at connecting

▼

The first site that we visited was a limestone valley at around 1000 metres above sea level, which, in the space of half an hour on our first morning there, produced a remarkable array of butterflies, including four that I had never seen before, namely **Gruner's Orange-tip** (*Anthocharis gruneri*), **Bavius Blue** (*Pseudophilotes bavius*), **Dalmatian Ringlet** (*Proterebia phegea*) and **Eastern Knapweed Fritillary** (*Melitaea ornata*). The same location also provided me with the opportunity to see and photograph the distinctive spring brood of the **Eastern Wood**

White (*Leptidea duponcheli*) for the first time; I had only seen the summer brood before, which of course is very different in appearance. Adding these new life-ticks to my list so quickly made for a very exciting start to our trip, and there was a great supporting cast of other butterflies including **Blue Argus** (*Aricia anteros*), **Chequered Blue** (*Scolitantides orion*), **Chapman's Blue** (*Polyommatus thersites*), **Escher's Blue** (*Polyommatus escheri*), **Large Wall Brown** (*Lasiommata maera*), and a good selection of Skippers such as **Hungarian** (*Spiralia orbifer*), **Dingy** (*Erynnis tages*), **Oriental Marbled** (*Carcharodus orientalis*), **Grizzled** (*Pyrgus malvae*), **Yellow-banded** (*P. sidae*) and **Olive Skippers** (*P. serratulae*).



Eastern Wood White
(*Leptidea duponcheli*)

Nothing appeared for half an hour; the weather was breezy and cool, with just the occasional sunny spell. Then, during one of those sunny moments a pair of rather dark, flighty skippers appeared in front of me, chasing each other in a rapid ▾



Inky Skipper (*E. marloyi*)

Northern Chequered
Skipper habitat

courtship flight. Could these be our target species? Soon enough one landed, the other disappeared, and as I got my binoculars on the grounded example, I found myself looking at my first ever **Inky Skipper** (*E. marloyi*). Great excitement! The trick now was to get a photograph. I had heard that this butterfly is very camera shy and will disappear at the slightest hint of vibration, footsteps, or the sound of the shutter release, so I took a distance shot to start with and then gradually got closer, fully expecting it to fly off at any moment. But it didn't. It behaved immaculately for me and fulfilled a long-standing dream of mine to see and photograph this very localised butterfly. The holiday was complete, and I would heartily recommend an early spring trip out to this part of Greece to anyone who has yet to visit.

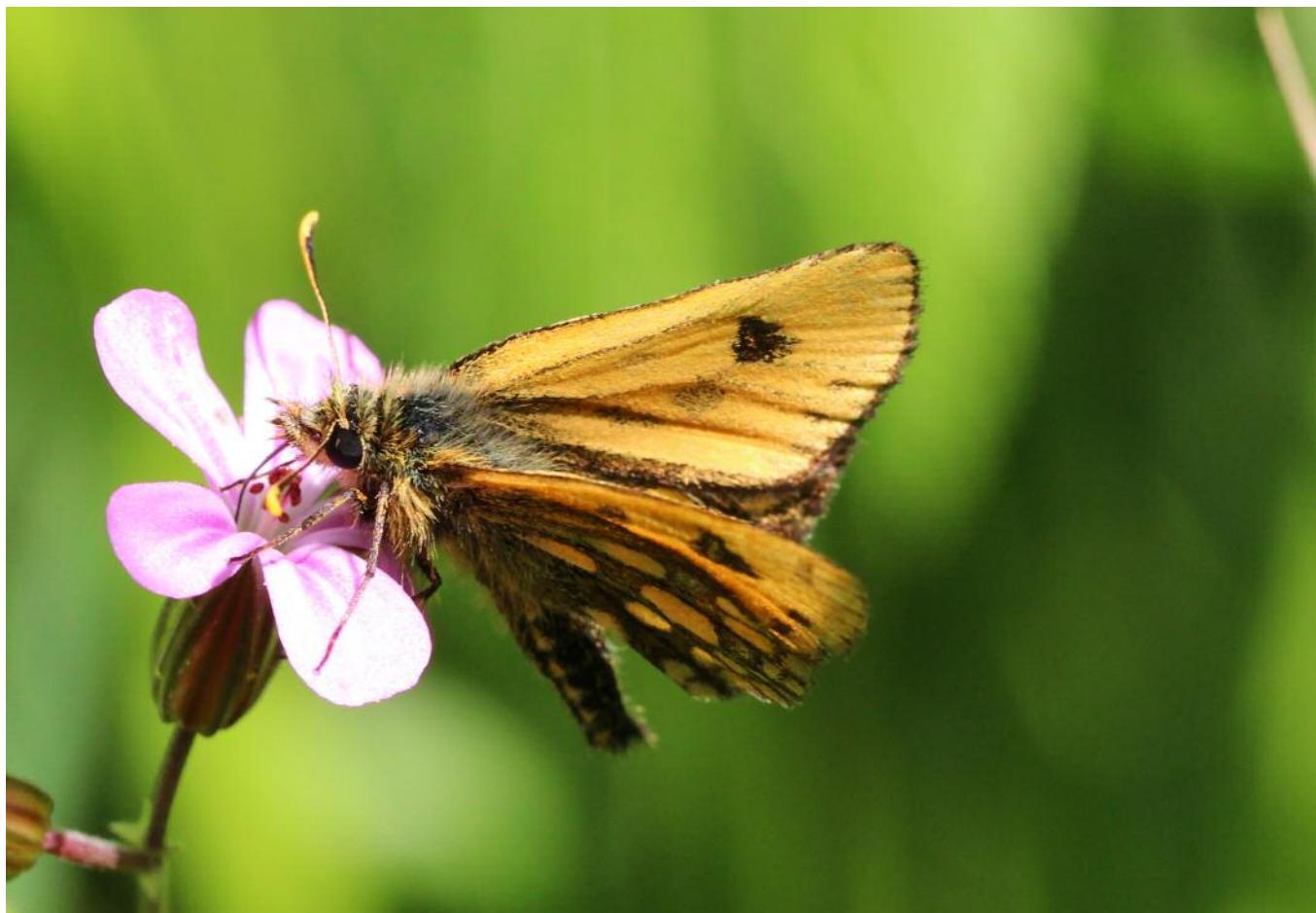


2. Germany – Hamburg – May 2024

During the planning phase for my 2024 travels I had asked myself a simple question: if I could select just one species of European butterfly to see that I hadn't seen before, what would it be? After leafing through my ragged copy of Tolman and Lewington one dark November evening the previous year, I concluded that I would most like to see a **Northern Chequered Skipper** (*Carterocephalus silvicolus*); they just look rather different to any other European species. In theory, the Hamburg area would be the closest, easiest place for ▼



Photographing Europe's rarer
butterfly species cont.



Northern Chequered Skipper *(Carterocephalus silvicolus)*

me to see this butterfly, so I set off on a solo 5-day trip at the end of May. Of course, as always prior to a European trip, I had been keeping my eye on the overseas weather forecast, and as it got closer to departure day, the BBC weather app was showing increasingly bad graphics for Hamburg.

By the time I was due to fly out the predictions were dire. Dark clouds, rain and low temperatures were forecast all week, apart from the first half of Monday, my arrival day, which promised to be mild with some sunshine. It looked like my best chance of success would be if the EasyJet Gods got me into Hamburg airport on time and I could get straight on the road to my first site promptly.

I had an early flight and kept my fingers crossed. The drive from the airport went smoothly and shortly before 11:00 I had parked up and was walking into a large nature reserve to the north of Hamburg, an extensive mosaic of damp woodland, wet meadows, grasslands, and areas of wet heath, covering several square miles. The weather was OK, but there were remarkably few insects on the wing, apart from a plenitude of mosquitos. More alarmingly, many areas of the reserve were off limits, with warning signs indicating access was "verboten".

I walked the woodland tracks for several hours but by early afternoon I had seen just one **Orange-tip** (*Anthocharis cardamines*) and three **Green-veined Whites** (*Pieris napi*). Finally, I got lucky while watching a group of **Banded Demoiselles** (*Calopteryx splendens*) dancing in a sunny clearing. There was a sudden flash ▾



Cretan Small Heath (*Coenonympha thyrsis*)



Cretan Argus (*Kretania psyloritus*)



White banded Grayling
(*Pseudochazara anthelea*)

3. Crete – June 2024

Vicki and I returned to Crete for the second week of June, almost twenty years after our first visit here back in 2006, when we had found **Cretan Festoon** (*Zerynthia cretica*) and **Cretan Grayling** (*Hipparchia cretica*). This time I was hoping to find and photograph the other two Cretan endemics. **Cretan Small Heath** (*Coenonympha thyrsis*) proved easy to find; we encountered them at several locations, and a day spent on Mount Ida gave us **Cretan Argus** (*Kretania psyloritus*) in excellent numbers. Considering this species is only to be found on two mountains in central Crete and nowhere else in the world, it is remarkably common where it does occur – we saw hundreds of them!

I was also delighted to find several **White-banded Grayling** (*Pseudochazara anthelea*), another life-tick for me; **Cretan Grayling** (*H. cretica*) was about at several locations, and we stumbled across a small colony of **Grass Jewel** (*Freyeria trochylus*) in a very hot gorge one day. We didn't stop there long as Crete was in the middle of a heatwave and the temperature in the gorge was in the low forties – way too hot for comfort!

of yellow as a skipper-like butterfly chased one of the Demoiselles away. It could only be one thing. Yes! A male **Northern Chequered Skipper** (*C. silvicolus*) landed right in front of me. My single-species solo trip out to Germany had been a success, just.

The weather for the rest of the week was as bad as forecast and this individual was, and remains, the only **Northern Chequered Skipper** I have seen. Factoring in flights, hire car and hotel costs, it also comes in as my most expensive life-tick to date!



Furry Blue (*Polyommatus dolus*), male



Furry Blue (*Polyommatus dolus*), female



Ottoman Brassy Ringlet (*Erebia ottomana*)



Ottoman Brassy Ringlet (*Erebia ottomana*)

4. Southern France – July 2024

Over the years I have spent more time butterflying in France than any other European country, but there were still a small number of French species missing from my checklist, and for this next adventure, Vicki and I flew out to Marseille with the aim of mopping up some of those missing lifers.

On Monday 8th July we left Marseille airport to begin a 1500km road trip that would take us from Provence, up through the Cevennes, to the Ardeche and then back across the Rhone to mountain habitat in Haute Provence. Over the course of our eight days we enjoyed fabulous scenery, some lovely architecture in Avignon and other towns, the usual delights of French food and wine, flower-rich damp meadows, hillsides and woodlands, and of course many fine butterflies.

Our first success was seeing and photographing the delightful **Furry Blue** (*Polyommatus dolus*) at a well-known site on the Var/Bouche-du-Rhone border, where we were joined by fellow enthusiast John Green. Next, after a long drive ▾



Larche Ringlet (*Erebia scipio*) *scipio*) on the Montagne de Lure, this being a species that I have been trying to locate and photograph for many years.

5. French Pyrenees and Northern Spain – August 2024

My final European trip of 2024 was a week in the French Pyrenees in the company of friend and fellow enthusiast Bob Lambert. The job description for this one was simple – find and photograph the last two *Erebia* species on the French list that I had yet to see. We began with visits to several key sites such as the Col du Tourmalet, the Lac des Gloriettes and the stunning Neouvielle National Nature Reserve. My last two *Erebias* were successfully found and photographed: the **Water Ringlet** (*E. pronoe*), which was about in great abundance, and the **Gavarnie Ringlet** (*E. gorgone*), of which we found just a single male and a single female – phew! ▾



Water Ringlet (*E. pronoe*)



Water Ringlet (*E. pronoe*)

north-west, we spent a good hour examining a range of *Erebia* species before finally spotting a very different looking butterfly on the wing; our main target – **Ottoman Brassy Ringlet** (*Erebia ottomana*). Two lifers in the bag! In the department of Lozere we visited a number of damp flower rich meadows within the extensive forests, seeking out **Cranberry Fritillary** (*Boloria aquilonaris*), but failing to locate it. This species remains on my wanted list – hopefully a 2026 to Switzerland will finally enable me to see it.

Before returning to Marseille, we spent two days searching high altitude sites in Vaucluse and the Alpes de Haute Provence for an *Erebia* that has become increasingly hard to find in France in recent years. After much searching, I was elated to finally manage to get a photograph of the **Larch Ringlet** (*Erebia lathonia*).



Gavarnie Ringlet (*E. gorgone*)



Catalonian Furry Blue
(*Polyommatus fulgens*)

This was an excellent grand finale to my 2024 butterfly travels.

6. Fuerteventura – March 2025

Vicki and I had visited La Palma and Tenerife a couple of times over the years, so I already had a few of the Canarian endemics ticked off, but the most easterly Canary Islands were unknown to us. The main reason for this trip was that I wanted to complete my hat-trick of European Greenish Black-tips. I had been fortunate to see the **Spanish Greenish Black-tip** (*Euchloe baza*) on two occasions in the Hoya ▾

Other species on the wing included **Apollo** (*Parnassius apollo*), **Eros Blue** (*Polyommatus eros*), **Pyrenees Brassy Ringlet** (*E. rondoui*), **Yellow-spotted Ringlet** (*E. manto*) and **Marbled Skipper** (*Carcharodus lavatherae*).

Having achieved our goal, we then took the tunnel through into Northern Spain to a hotel in Ainsa, from where we visited a couple of locations for **Catalonian Furry Blue** (*Polyommatus fulgens*). I had expected to be too late in the year for this species, especially given that the weather had been around forty degrees out here, but we found and photographed several examples, always in the company of the closely related **Ripart's Anomalous Blue** (*Polyommatus ripartii*).



Habitat of Greenish Black-tip and Fuerteventura Green-striped White



Greenish Black-tip (*E. charlonia*)



Fuerteventura Green-striped White (*E. hesperidum*)

de Baza, and the **Eastern Greenish Black-tip** (*E. penia*) three times in various parts of Greece, but had never seen the **Greenish Black-tip** (*E. charlonia*). This was the main target, but I also hoped to find the **Fuerteventura Green-striped White** (*E. hesperidum*).

The first thing that struck us about Fuerteventura was just how barren and arid it is. Most of the island appears completely hostile to butterflies, with just a few small oases of damper greener habitat where vegetation is more abundant. The weather during our trip was unseasonally poor – the Canaries had been having lots of spring rain and just 100 miles west of us Gran Canaria was experiencing devastating flash flooding. We also had some torrential rain on Fuerteventura, and visits to higher altitude were unproductive due to the cool, cloudy conditions.

Our main site where we hoped to find both of our target species was almost completely devoid of butterflies; a three hour walk produced just a single **Small White** (*Pieris rapae*) and a single **Painted Lady** (*Vanessa cardui*). We moved on down the road to another area that I had seen on Google Earth where there seemed to be a bit of greener vegetation. Within ten minutes I had kicked up a **Greenish Black-tip** (*E. charlonia*), which ▾

obligingly settled straight back down again and allowed me some photographs – it would prove to be the only one I saw all week! A few minutes later, our second target appeared – a lovely fresh **Fuerteventura Green-striped White** (*E. hesperidum*); mission accomplished!

We saw very little else during our time here, although we did find plenty of **Plain Tigers** (*Danaus chrysippus*) and a few **Monarchs** (*D. plexippus*) at a handful of locations. It was a pleasurable holiday, but I must confess that I have no desire to return to Fuerteventura any time soon.

7. Greece – Alexandroupoli and Evros – April 2025

False Apollo
(*Archon apollinus*), female



Way back in April 2009, during a week's holiday on the Greek island of Lesvos, I had seen my first ever **False Apollos** (*Archon apollinus*), a couple of males flying in amongst olive groves, but I didn't see any females there, and I didn't get any decent pictures. This species is arguably one of the most attractive of European butterflies and I really wanted to get a chance to find and photograph them again, and to see the female, hence this latest foray out to the far eastern reaches of the Greek mainland, close to the Turkish border. Despite a few battles with the vagaries of the early spring weather, we were successful in our mission to locate and capture images of male and female **False Apollo** (*A. apollinus*) at two separate sites. ▼

False Apollo
(*Archon apollinus*),
male



I wasn't expecting to get any lifers from this trip, but there was a very slim possibility that I could pick one up. The odds were stacked heavily against me – I am speaking about one of Europe's rarest Pierids, highly sporadic in occurrence, very localised, but one that has been previously recorded in the Evros region where we were. Matt Rowlings sums the situation up well on his excellent euroButterflies.com website, where he states: "This is one of Europe's rarest species and is extremely unlikely to be encountered without a targeted search."

We took the hire car for a drive north-east to a site close to the Turkish border. I had been looking at several areas on Google Earth with this rare species in the back of my mind, dry pebbly stream beds being the preferred habitat type, and we pulled up to one such area that I had earmarked.

Small Bath White
(*Pontia chloridice*)



After almost two hours of walking, we hadn't found this near-mythical target and we were heading back to the car for lunch. Suddenly a white butterfly dropped at my feet briefly and I found myself looking at a mint fresh female **Small Bath White** (*Pontia chloridice*). She promptly took to the wing and set off down the track away from me, while I did my best to deal with a huge adrenalin rush and followed her, camera in hand. I was led on a long chase of cat and mouse as she stopped briefly for a few seconds at a time, only to take off again, repeatedly. ▾

Small Bath White
(*Pontia chloridice*)





Habitat of Italian Marbled White



Italian Marbled White (*Melanargia arge*)



Italian Marbled White (*Melanargia arge*)

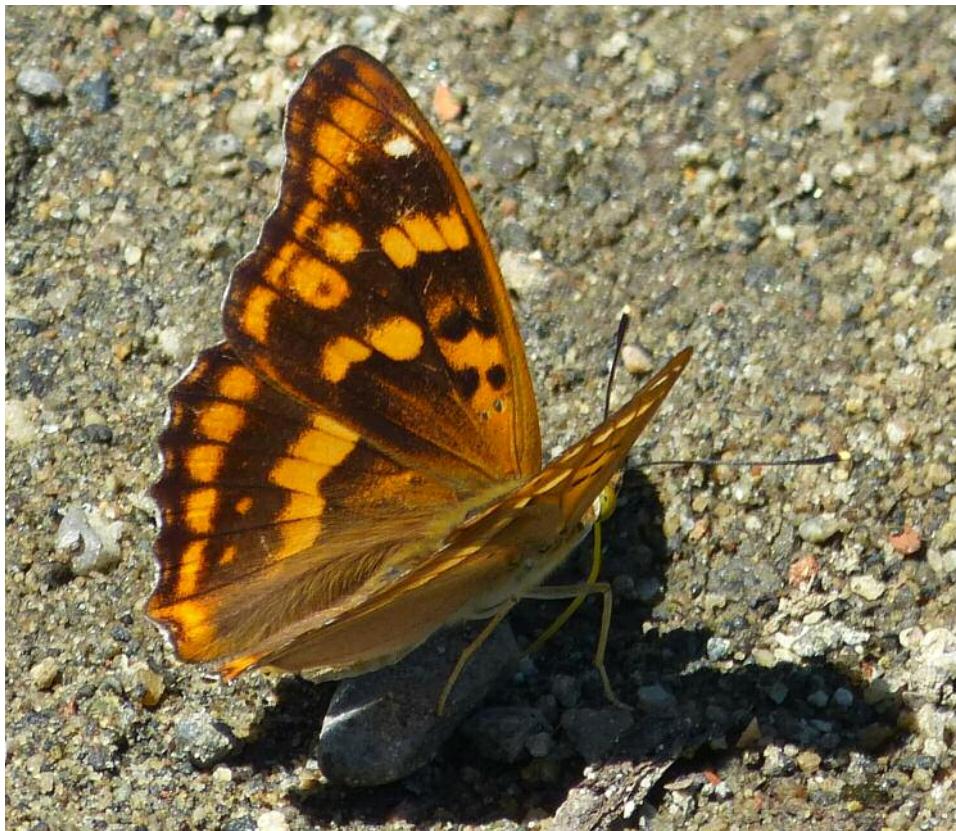
Ten minutes later after one of the most intense butterflying experiences of my life I had managed to capture a few images of this highly rare and difficult to find beauty – it doesn't get much better than this in my world!

8. Italy – May 2025

I am very lucky to have a wife who is happy to follow me around Europe tracking down butterflies – she is very tolerant of my obsessive hobby – but she had been wanting to visit Italy for quite a while, and for some reason, Italy had never really been on my radar as a butterfly destination. Nevertheless, I had promised a few years ago that I would take her there one day soon and this summer, plans were put in place for a tour around Pompeii, Sorrento and the Amalfi coast. By chance (or perhaps not!) this was an area where I might also gain another life-tick if I was fortunate, as the **Italian Marbled White** (*Melanargia arge*) flies here.

During the course of my research prior to arrival I had read about how localised this species is, and how it has the habit of flying relentlessly up and down rocky grassy slopes, so I wasn't expecting an easy ride as we got out of the car into ▾

hot mid-afternoon sunshine on our first day, but immediately our quarry appeared on the wing in front of us and began to nectar on the abundant thistles. Italian **Marbled Whites** (*M. arge*) were flying by the dozens; this was way too easy! I got a few shots in and after an hour of meandering we headed to our hotel to check in and relax. A return visit to the same site earlier the next morning before the heat got going gave me chance for a few more photographs. One of my easiest ever life ticks was in the bag!



Freyer's Purple Emperor (*Apatura metis*)



Common Glider (*Neptis sappho*)

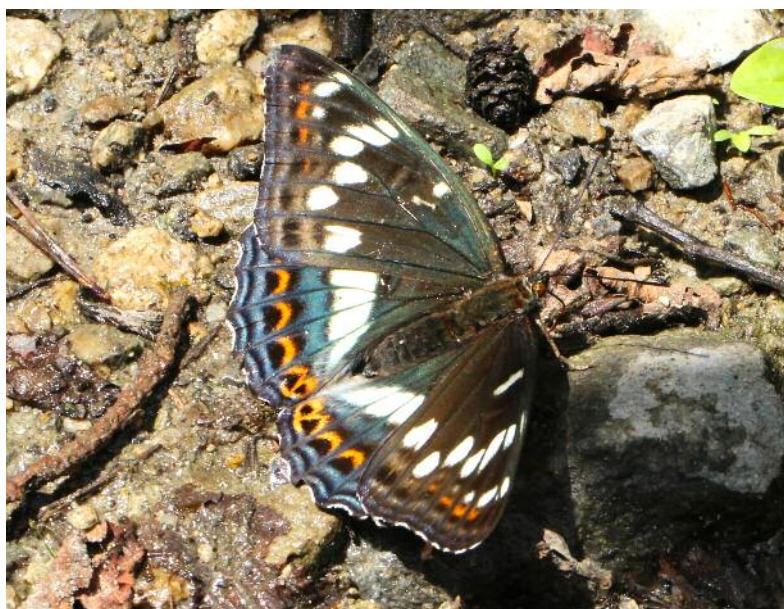
9. Bulgaria – July 2025

Our latest trip was taken in the company of our good friends Bob and Veronica Lambert. Bob is a fellow life-long butterfly enthusiast. We spent seventeen days driving around south-west Bulgaria, starting off in Samokov, then travelling west to Kyustendil, before heading south to Melnik, then back towards our starting point via Bansko and Borovets. Our travels took us to riverine woodlands and meadows, limestone valleys, sandstone hills and high alpine grasslands, and the butterflies encountered were incredible. I picked up ten lifers, Bob picked up several more than me. The countryside was wild, beautiful and almost completely unspoilt, the natives were very friendly, plus the food and wines were cheap and delicious.

The first few days were dominated by Admirals, Emperors, and Gliders, with **Freyer's Purple Emperor** (*Apatura metis*) and **Common Glider** (*Neptis sappho*) being life-ticks for us all. We had the unforgettable experience of all three Emperor species mud-puddling together; **Freyer's** (*A. metis*), **Lesser Purple** (*A. ilia*) and **Purple Emperor** (*A. iris*) side by side on the same damp patch; we also found ▾



Balkan Copper (*Lycaena candens*)



Poplar Admiral
(*Limenitis populi*), female

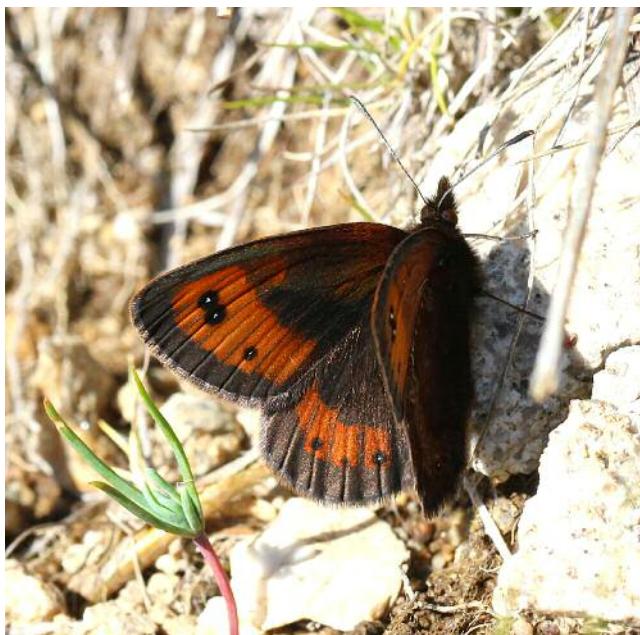
Higgin's Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus nephoiptamenos*), Nicholl's Ringlet (*Erebia rhodopensis*) and Bulgarian Ringlet (*E. orientalis*) made our days very special, along with Cynthia's (*Euphydryas cynthia*) and Balkan Fritillaries (*Boloria graeca*); numerous other blues and fritillaries were in constant attendance throughout.

I think it would be fair to say that our Bulgaria trip ranks right up there with my best European butterflying expedition of all time, and if anyone has yet to experience the pleasure and is contemplating a visit, please don't hesitate – I can highly recommend it! I may well have to go back again in fact, to mop up a few species that we were too late in the season to see.

There is an ever-proliferating number of tour companies out there who will take you on butterfly tours to several of the above places, and this is a great way to get to see a good number of European species, with the bonus of knowledgeable guides ▼



Higgin's Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus nephohiptamenos*), pair



Nicholl's Ringlet
(*Erebia rhodopensis*)

who will take you to known sites. However, if you prefer, as I do, to do your own thing, and are confident driving abroad, you can emulate many of the tours yourself for a fraction of the cost, and have total control of your own itinerary, although of course not always the weather (I am not sure the tour companies have cracked that aspect yet either)! It just takes a little research to find some of the sites, and some inside information is helpful for the particularly rare and localised species. I am fortunate to have developed a good network of like-minded European butterflying associates over many years, with whom a two-way flow of tips and information has been, and continues to be, invaluable.

I hope you have enjoyed this summary of my recent travels, and the photographs of the butterflies that I have encountered.

Pete Smith

Poplar Admiral
(*Limenitis populi*), male

