



Italy

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Local Recording Scheme	
Butterfly List	

Books

As far as I am aware there are no books written in English specifically devoted to Italian butterflies. The standard field guides in English such as Tom Tolman and Richard Lewington’s *Butterflies of Britain and Europe* (HarperCollins, 1997 and updated 2008), and Tristan Lafranchis’ *Butterflies of Europe: new field guide and key* (Diatheo, 2004) cover all the Italian species. Dr Otakar Kudrna’s *Distribution Atlas of European Butterflies* (Oedipus 2002) is a useful distribution guide.

In 2009 the Istituto per Beni Artistici Culturali e Naturali della Regione Emilia-Romagna published (in Italian) *Farfalle d’Italia* an illustrated guide to the Italian butterflies with photographs of the imagines and some ovae, larvae and pupae. The book also contains some information on distribution for Italy as a whole and Emilia-Romagna in particular although there are no distribution maps. The text also covers (briefly) flight times, habitat requirements and larval foodplants. Whilst it is an attractive volume it does not yield much more information than can be gleaned from the standard field guides.

Websites

Again I am unable to find any websites devoted only to Italian butterflies but Matt Rowlings excellent photographic website *Matt’s European Butterflies* - <http://www.eurobutterflies.com> covers many of the species you will encounter.

Holidays Sites & Species

Italy (including the islands of Sardinia and Sicily) covers an area of just over 300,000 km² and has a rich and varied landscape and vegetation. It is home to over 260 resident species with around 20 Italian endemics and Italy has more Prime Butterfly Areas (32) than any other European country. The country has 2 major mountain chains; the Alps and the Apennines in addition to mountain ranges in the main islands of Sardinia and Sicily all of which are important for butterflies. Climate varies significantly from the north, with cold winters and cooler summers to very warm areas in the south with little summer rain.

By amalgamating information from various sources I have compiled a list of endemics for the Italian mainland, for Sicily and for the Tyrennian islands of Sardinia and Elba (Corsica which is of course French shares many species with the Italian island of Sardinia):

Mainland Endemics

- Piedmont Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus humedasaе*) – restricted to one small area in one valley in Northern Italy
- Gallo's Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus galloi*) – flies in the region of the Monte Pollino National Park; Campo Tenese, Campolungo and Orsomaro Mountains areas
- Italian Furry Blue (*Polyommatus dolus virgilius*) a sub-species of Furry Blue. Flies from Bolgna to Calabria
- Italian Marbled White (*Melanargia arge*) Western and Central Italian mainland •

Italian Grayling (*Hipparchia neapolitana*) endemic to the area around Naples



Piedmont Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus humedasaе*)



Sicilian Endemics

- Sicilian Marbled White (*Melanargia pherusa*) only flies in NW Sicily
- Sicilian Grayling (*Hipparchia blachieri* = *H aristaeus blachieri*) split by some from Southern Grayling

Tyrennian endemics

- Corsican Swallowtail (*Papilio hospiton*)
- Corsican Dappled White (*Euchloe insularis*)
- Sardinian Blue (*Pseudophilotes barbagiae*) – only recognised as a species in 1982 this butterfly flies low to the ground and is difficult to find
- Bellier's Blue (*Plebejus bellieri*) – endemic to Corsica and Sardinia
- Villa's Blue (*Plebejus villai*) – a species recently described and endemic to Elba
- Corsican Fritillary (*Argynnis elisa*)
- Corsican Grayling (*Hipparchia neomiris*)
- Southern Grayling (*Hipparchia aristaeus*) – Lafranchis believes this to be a Tyrennian endemic
- Sardinian Meadow Brown (*Maniola nurag*)
- Corsican Heath (*Coenonympha corinna*)
- Elban Heath (*Coenonympha elbana*)
- *Spialia therapne* – this has now been named Corsican Red-underwing Skipper in the new taxonomy
- Corsican (or Sardinian) Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais ichtusa*) – recently split from *A. Urticae* this has no post-discal spots on its upper forewing

There are also many near-endemic species (since butterflies do not recognise national borders) which fly only in the Alps. Species such as **Rätzers Ringlet** (*Erebia christi*), **White Speck Ringlet** (*Erebia claudina*), **Lorkovic's Brassy Ringlet** (*Erebia calcaria*), **Mnestra's Ringlet** (*Erebia mnestra*) and **Warrens Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus warrenensis*) fly in confined areas of several countries in the Alps and should perhaps be considered as Alpine endemics.

The principal butterfly areas are:

The Alpine region

The Apennines

Monte Pollino

Sicily

Sardinia

Other places of specific interest – Elba and Tuscany coast

The Alps

The Alps form the border for much of northern Italy with neighbouring countries of France, Switzerland, Austria and Slovenia. The Alps cover a large area and are the best place to visit to see the maximum number of species with more than 200 species on the wing in the peak season of late June and July. The variety of sites and species is enormous and too large to cover in detail here. The descriptions below represent a selection of areas worthy of visiting (starting in the West and working towards the East) with a guide to the species which you might see followed by the other areas of interest shown on the map.



1. Maritime Alps

This area contains the Regional Park delle Alpi Marittime which protects an area of 27,000 hectares and is twinned with the Mercantour National Park in France together protecting 100,000 hectares. One of the valleys which has been studied over a lengthy period is Valdieri, part of the Valasco valley south-west of Cuneo, which is home to over 75 species including **Balkan Fritillary** (*Boloria graeca*), **Titania's Fritillary** (*Boloria titania*), **Tufted Marbled Skipper** (*Carcharodus flocciferus*) and **Apollo** (*Parnassius apollo*) although over the past 30 years it has lost **Mountain Clouded Yellow** (*Colias phicomone*) and **Peak White** (*Pieris callidice*)



Blind Ringlet (*Erebia pharte*)

2. Gran Paradiso

Still further north is the Parco Nazionale del Gran Paradiso. Easiest access is from the north where there are several valleys running off the Aosta valley. If you go north, you can travel up to Breuil- Cervinia at the base of the Matterhorn (Monte Cervino in Italian) or you can venture south with a choice of several valleys running into the National Park. Perhaps the best valley running south is the Cogne valley which is home to the Piedmont Anomalous Blue which flies in a small area near Pont D'Ael and is probably at risk from collectors. Further up the valley beyond Cogne there are several delightful areas where butterflies are numerous – in a day's easy walk up the valley I have seen 47 species including **Small Apollo** (*Parnassius phoebus*), **Turquoise Blue** (*Plebicula dorylas*), **Eros Blue** (*Polyommatus eros*), **Marbled Fritillary** (*Brenthis daphne*) **Lesser Marbled Fritillary** (*Brenthis ino*), **Alpine Grayling** (*Oeneis glacialis*), **Blind Ringlet** (*Erebia pharte*), **Almond-eyed Ringlet** (*Erebia alberganus*), **Darwin's Heath** (*Coenonympha darwiniana*) **Alpine Heath** (*Coenonympha gardetta*) and **Carlina Skipper** (*Pyrgus carlinae*)



Small Apollo (*Parnassius phoebus*)

3. Central Alps

The Central Alps are home to many of the alpine specialities including most of those mentioned above and below but also **Eriphyle Ringlet** (*Erebia eriphyle*) **Yellow-banded Ringlet** (*Erebia flavofasciata*), **de Prunner's Ringlet** (*Erebia triaria*), **Sooty Ringlet** (*Erebia pluto*). **Ratzer's Ringlet** (*Erebia christi*), a very rare species which flies in only a very few places in Northern Italy and Switzerland, can be found in the Central Alps.



Almond-eyed Ringlet (*Erebia alberganus*)

4. Stelvio

The Stelvio National Park and Val Venosta to the north-east of Bormio are good areas to see a wide variety of butterflies. Species that can be seen here include **Apollo**, **Small Apollo**, **Titania's Fritillary**, **Thor's Fritillary** (*Boloria thore*), **Grisons Fritillary** (*Mellicta varia*), **Asian Fritillary** (*Euphydryas intermedia*), **Swiss Brassy Ringlet** (*Erebia tyndarus*), **Alpine Heath**, **Darwin's Heath** and **Dusky Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus cacaliae*).



Grisons Fritillary (*Melitaea varia*)

5. Dolomites

Further east the Dolomites run up to the border with Austria and Slovenia. The area is notorious for thunderstorms even in the height of summer which can make for frustrating butterflying. The area contains many alpine species including **Apollo** (*Parnassius apollo*), **Clouded Apollo** (*Parnassius mnemosyne*), **Alcon Blue** (*Phengaris alcon*), **Thor's Fritillary** (*Boloria thore*), **Yellow-spotted Ringlet** (*Erebia manto*) and **Large Chequered Skipper** (*Heteropterus morpheus*).



Large Blue (*Phengaris arion*)

6. Julian Alps

Further east are the Julian Alps which straddle the borders of Italy, Austria and Slovenia where **Lorkovic's Brassy Ringlet** (*Erebia calcaria*) flies although its main strongholds are over the border in Austria and Slovenia.



Mountain Fritillary (*Boloria napaea*)

7. The Apennines

The Apennines are the major mountain chain which runs from near Genoa in the North to Calabria in the south (although there is also a move to include Sicily's mountains in the chain). For butterfly enthusiasts the parts of greatest interest are the high central Apennines especially around Monte Sibilla (2,173m) the Gran Sasso (at 2,912m the highest peak in the range) and Campo Imperatore a plateau at about 2,000m which is 27km long and 8km wide. Species to be seen here include **Apollo**, **Clouded Apollo**, **Scarce Copper** (*Lycaena virgaureae*), **Alcon Blue**, **Damon Blue** (*Polyommatus damon*), **Eros Blue**, **Shepherd's Fritillary** (*Boloria pales*), **Grisson's Fritillary**, **Eastern Large Heath** (*Coenonympha rhodopensis*) and **Foulquier's Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus bellieri*).



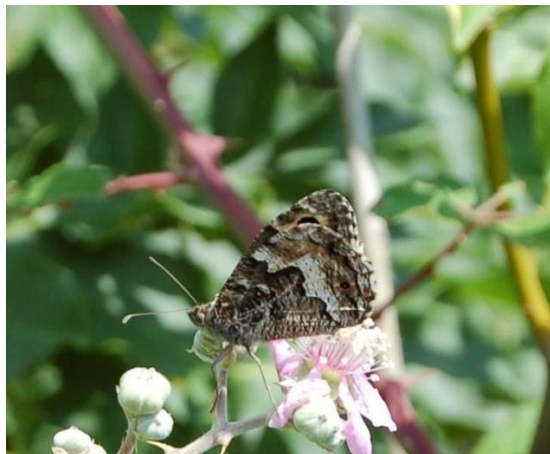
Damon Blue (*Polyommatus damon*)

8. Monte Pollino

Monte Pollino is in reality another part of the Apennine chain some 450km south of the Gran Sasso. The mountain (2,248m) is at the heart of the National Park del Pollino which is the largest protected area in Italy. The area contains the species you would expect to find in southern Italy including **Esper's Marbled White** (*Melanargia russiae*) but is also home to **Gallo's Anomalous Blue** (*Polyommatus gallo*) -see Bernard Watts' article in EIG newsletter Issue 3 and **Italian Furry Blue** (*Agrodiaetus dolus virgilius*).

9. Sicily

Sicily has a butterfly list that includes virtually all of the species you can see on the southern mainland but with a few extra species. There are also several species that fly in the north of the country and in Sicily with no localities in between. As noted above it has 2 endemics: **Sicilian Marbled White** and **Sicilian Grayling** but is also home to **Southern Swallowtail** (*Papilio alexanor*) on Mt Pelitorani, **Eastern Orange-tip** (*Anthocaris damone*), **Common Tiger Blue** (*Tarucus theophrastus*), **Weavers Fritillary** (*Boloria dia*) which is otherwise only found in the far north of Italy and **Aetherie Fritillary** (*Melitaea aetherie*) which is generally found in N Africa or southern Spain.



Sicilian Grayling (*Hipparchia blachieri*)

10. Sardinia

Sardinia has a number of endemics (see list above) most of which are shared with Corsica. The best butterfly areas are around Monte Gennargentu where it is relatively easy to find **Corsican Heath** and **Sardinian Meadow Brown**. **Sardinian Blue** is more difficult to find as it is very dark in colour and flies very low to the ground amongst dark vegetation.

Although it does seem theoretically possible to arrange one trip to see all of the Sardinian/Corsican endemics, since all species do fly at some point in June, it is likely that at least 2 visits will be required to be able to see the early-emerging species such as **Corsican Dappled White** (generally March/ April but with a less abundant second brood in May/June) as well as the **Corsican Grayling** which flies mid-June to August.

11. Elba and the Tuscany Coast

The particular reason to visit this area is to see the **Elban Heath** and **Villa's Blue**. The former flies both on Elba and the mainland - one of the easiest places to find it is on the Grosseto promontory on the road (SP77) up to the radio mast. **Villa's Blue** was only described in 2005 and is endemic to Elba.



Elban Heath (*Coenonympha elbana*)