



EUROPEAN  
BUTTERFLIES  
GROUP

# eNewsletter

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**Spring Ringlet (*Erebia epistygne*),**  
Sierra de Albarracin, 23 April 2023

Welcome to the Spring 2023 Newsletter. The main focus this time is Northern Spain, and there are two liberally illustrated articles by Mark Searle and Keith Hamilton which showcase the fine butterflies to be

found in this part of Europe. I have myself just returned from a Greenwings tour to Central and Northern Spain, led by our Treasurer David Moore and Jon Dunn, and can add images of two more specialities from the area, namely **Spring Ringlet (*Erebia epistygne*)** and **Sooty Orange-tip (*Zegris eupheme*)**. The latter is a particularly difficult

insect to find settled so I was pleased with the shot alongside. Sadly we failed to find the northern subspecies of **Spanish Greenish Black-tip (*Euchloe bazae iberae*)** on the hills nearby, probably because the flight period was over by late April.



**Sooty Orange-tip (*Zegris eupheme*),**  
Los Monegros, 27 April 2023

I hope you enjoy the read.

**Nigel Peace, Newsletter Editor, May 2023**





# Notices and News

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[EuropeanButterflyGroup/](https://www.facebook.com/EuropeanButterflyGroup/)

## Members Day, 21 October 2023

The European Butterflies Group Members Day and AGM will be held in the George Stephenson room at the Ibis Hotel in Birmingham on Saturday 21 October, from 14.00 to 17.00. The hotel is known as the Birmingham New Street Ibis. Further details will be circulated to members nearer the time, and will be placed on the website.

## 2024 EBG Calendar

Entries for the 2024 calendar competition should be sent to Anne Spencer by 1st September 2023. **The correct email for entries is [rhoslan.anne@gmail.com](mailto:rhoslan.anne@gmail.com)** (they will get lost if sent in any other way). Maximum 3 photos per entry. The size of the photo must be 1 MB or more. Please ensure that the English common name of the butterfly is included with each photo, and details of where the photo was taken.

## News from France

Jude Lock reports that two additional regional Red Lists have been published, for Normandie and Pays de la Loire. They can be consulted on the EBG website on the Country Page for France, together with existing regional Red Lists. The link is <http://www.european-butterflies.org.uk/countries.html>

Otherwise, Jude has no news items this time. She comments that her contacts may be busy working on regional action plans.

## Corrections to EBG 32

Three errors in the last Newsletter (EBG 32, November 2022) have come to light:

Page 14, bottom image: the Hawk-moth captioned as a **Poplar Hawk-moth** (*Laothoe populi*) is an **Eyed Hawk-moth** (*Smerinthus ocellata*).

Page 18, third image: the Burnet identified as **Woodland Burnet** (*Zygaena osterodensis*) is probably not this species but a Burnet from the *Z. purpuralis* group.

Page 20, middle image: the insect captioned as **Lesser Fiery Copper** (*Lycaena thersamon*) is a female **Violet Copper** (*Lycaena helle*). ▾





## Marsh European Lepidoptera Award 2022

The Marsh European Lepidoptera Award 2022 was awarded to Professor Josef Settele. Since 1993, Josef has worked at the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) in Germany. He has been a driving force in conserving butterflies in Germany and helped to start the German Butterfly Monitoring Scheme in 2005. He has also been Chair of Butterfly Conservation Germany since 2010, and was a founding Board member of Butterfly Conservation Europe in 2005. For more details, see:

<https://www.marshcharitabletrust.org/award/marsh-european-lepidoptera-award/>

## Two new free online butterfly guides

Contributed by Hilary Raeburn

### The Great Malaga Path – GR 249

The first guide describes all the butterflies which can be found along The Great Malaga Path, a long-distance footpath that encircles Malaga Province in Andalusia, Spain. This delightful little book published in 2017 can be downloaded as a free pdf from the Malaga website:

[https://static.malaga.es/malaga/subidas/archivos/4/8/arc\\_281884\\_v4.pdf](https://static.malaga.es/malaga/subidas/archivos/4/8/arc_281884_v4.pdf)

### Butterflies of Bulgaria

The second is the long-awaited guide to the Butterflies of Bulgaria. Only 300 copies were printed when the book was published in 2022 but the book is available online as a free pdf on the website of the National Museum of Natural History, Sofia. Either enter the title in your search box: Butterflies of Bulgaria Photographic Field Guide, or go to the web address

[https://www.nmnh.com/22021401-news\\_en.html](https://www.nmnh.com/22021401-news_en.html)

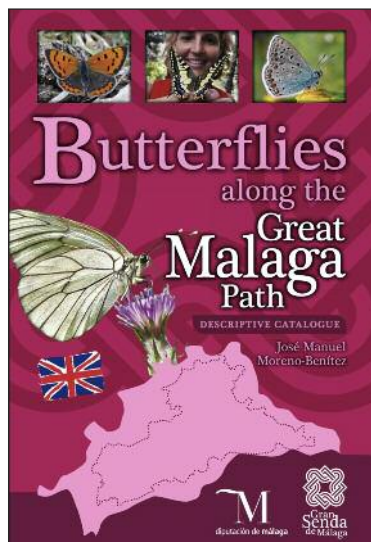
## And a third free guide

from the European Butterflies Group website

### Butterflies of the Parque Natural Sierra de Huétor, Andalusia, Spain

Butterfly Conservation Europe, together with the Parque Natural Sierra de Huétor, have created this Field Guide of the 109 butterfly species occurring there. The Sierra de Huétor is a mountain range close to Granada in Andalusia, Spain. The guide is available to download as a free resource (in Spanish)

[https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/portal//documents/2015/1/2d\\_a9cbaa-7efb-1f33-6190-e92cad7ae3a7](https://www.juntadeandalucia.es/medioambiente/portal//documents/2015/1/2d_a9cbaa-7efb-1f33-6190-e92cad7ae3a7)





## Taking on the Blues!

Contributed by Bill Raymond

Following completion of the the Pyrgus Group Guide, I am now working on a Key to the Blues. This is proving to be a daunting task as the Polyommata group of Lycaedinae consists of approximately 89 species in Europe, many of which are very local in their distribution. To simplify the process, I plan to produce a primary key to determining the 41 'Commoner Species' which are relatively widespread and most likely to be encountered, followed later by a second part covering the remaining 'Localised Species'. The two parts will then be combined into a single guide.



Female **Mazarine Blue**  
(*Cyaniris semiargus*)  
– would you have known  
without the caption?

The bewildering array of very similar looking brown and blue uppersides make this a confusing group to identify. I am sure you will be experiencing this once again this summer - whatever your level of experience! Despite having access to the libraries of numerous excellent photographers, obtaining a good representative image is surprisingly difficult, even for common species. Photos of females appear to prove considerably more difficult to obtain than males, presumably due to them spending less time on the wing.

The three main problems appear to be [i] the considerable variation present amongst this group; [ii] colour in photographs being dependent on the intensity of the light and the viewing angle, making blue scaling appear as light blue, dark blue, silvery blue and all colours in between. Similarly, orange markings can appear yellowish or red; and [iii] the reluctance of many butterflies, especially females, to open their wings fully. This applies to both upper and undersides. As the markings on the underside are in many cases the key to differentiating the species it is vital in many instances to have a good view of both upper and underside for a positive identification.

So, when you have the opportunity this year to photograph a Blue, see if you can get both upper and underside and an image where the lighting renders the colour as accurately as possible. Also, you might want to persevere a little longer to see if your butterfly opens its wings a little further....

I am always searching for new image sources so if you have a collection of photographs you would be willing to share, please let me know.

**Bill Raymond**  
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To download the current guides please go to  
<http://www.european-butterflies.org.uk/species.html>





# Dils' Grayling

## Is Dils' Grayling Europe's most threatened butterfly?

by Simon Spencer

When Matt Berry of Greenwings asked me to help lead their Parnassus and Chelmos tour I suggested staying on in Greece to combine a butterfly tour with surveying for **Dils' Grayling** (*Pseudochazara orestes*), which had been my intention earlier but had been postponed because of COVID. This species has long been a priority for the European Butterflies Group and I had made two previous visits in late July to look for it. On each visit only one butterfly was seen and we had come to the conclusion that we were looking at the wrong time of year. In 2018 Dave Plowman visited the area in late June and found a few. We suspect that the species aestivates, emerging in late June but hiding most of the hot summer months. It is a European endemic restricted to the Falakro area north of Drama up to the Bulgarian border.



### *Changes to landscape and the local economy*

My wife Anne and I flew up from Athens to Thessaloniki on 24 June 2022 and were relieved to pick up the five guests at the airport in spite of difficulties at UK airports and drive them to Volakas. What surprised me most is how much the landscape had changed since my previous visits. There were always a few marble quarries but now there were dozens creating huge white scars on the landscape.

In terms of butterflies, the direct impact of quarries is minimal. What it does change is the local economy. There are now lots of jobs for quarry workers and truck drivers. Compared to shepherding these are proper jobs and most of the remaining shepherds are over 60 if not 70. Not long ago big flocks of goats and sheep roamed the hills of Greece attended by shepherds. For some of the year these were milked to produce feta and Greek yoghurt. Overall numbers are way down and though in the Falakro area there are still flocks, many places, ▼

**Dils' Grayling**  
(*Pseudochazara orestes*),  
near Pirgi, Falakro, 31 July  
2010 (photo by Nigel Peace)



A marble quarry near Volakas





Mt Falakro area



Typical *orestes* habitat



**Koley's Anomalous Blue** (*Polyommatus orphicus*),  
(photo by Helen Barker)

especially near busy roads, are ungrazed. This is particularly true along the Drama to Bulgaria road which used to be grazed but is now so busy no shepherd will let his flock anywhere near it. Near quieter roads there are now herds of beef cattle, especially round Volakas and up to the Ski Centre. In the UK the roads are mainly fenced to keep livestock off the road but in Greece fencing has to be metal posts as wooden ones are quickly destroyed by termites. Fencing is reserved for night compounds.

#### ***Effect of lack of grazing***

The lack of grazing is initially good for many butterflies with formerly bare fields a riot of wild flowers. However, the mosaic of scrub and grass is dependent on goats particularly, to keep it open and if the grazing pressure is removed the scrub takes over. The thorny shrub *Paliurus spina-christi* seems to be spreading rapidly, which may good for **Little Tiger Blue** (*Tarucus balkanicus*), which feeds on it, but not for keeping the habitat open.

#### ***2022 survey findings***

The Greenwings group surveyed a number of sites that were either known locations for Dils' Grayling or where we had found it before. We were joined for a couple of days by Michael de Courcy Williams who lives locally. We covered many different sites in the week from the Bulgarian border to just north of Drama. The new roads to quarries made access easier.

We did think we had found our target but it turned out to be **Great Sooty Satyr** (*Satyrus ferula*) which looks very similar on the underside even to having two white dots between the black ocelli on the forewing which is characteristic of Dils' Grayling. The upperside of Dils' Grayling has a broad yellow patch. We saw 87 species of butterfly including **Koley's Anomalous Blue** (*Polyommatus orphicus*) (confirmed by Koley) and **Freyer's Purple Emperor** (*Apatura metis*), but no Dils' Grayling.

Lazaros Pamperis, the author of the Butterflies of Greece and an old friend of EBG, said that the season was at least a week late so we may have been too early. A Dutch group led by Albert Vliegthart of de Vlinderstichting were looking at the same time and also failed to find it. They returned in early July and found one. It remains an EBG priority and I am hoping that a Greenwings group will try again in late June/early July this year (2023). •

**Simon Spencer**

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# Northern Spain

## Butterflies of the Mountains of Burgos and Soria in Northern Spain:

25th June to 10th July 2022

by Mark and Caroline Searle

After several false starts, courtesy of Covid, this proved to be 'third time lucky' for our trip to Northern Spain to explore the mountainous region roughly sandwiched between Burgos and Soria in the Castilla y Leon region. We stayed in two areas, the first week in the hillside hamlet of Casarejos on the edge of the limestone plateau of the Parque Natural Cañón del Río Lobos, followed by a second week 70 km or so further north in Villoslada de Cameros in the hills of the Sierra de Cebollera in La Rioja.

### *A stop at Salas de los Infantes*

Our ferry from Portsmouth arrived in Bilbao on the morning of 25th June and we wasted no time heading south to reach our target area by lunchtime. A convenient stop at the small town of Salas de los Infantes, 50 km south east of Burgos, got us off to a flying start! A quiet spot for lunch, followed by a few hours of exploration along a kilometre or so of riverside meadows, scrub, and a few neglected agricultural plots, yielded 30+ species, with highlights including **Spanish Chestnut Heath** (*Coenonympha glycerion iphioides*), **Pearly Heath** (*Coenonympha arcania*), and a handful of Hairstreaks such as **Spanish Purple** (*Laeosopis roboris*), **White-letter** (*Satyrium w-album*) and **Sloe** (*Satyrium acaciae*).

With plenty of vetches in flower, **Short-tailed Blue** (*Cupido argiades*), **Long-tailed Blue** (*Lampides boeticus*), **Mazarine Blue** (*Cyaniris semiargus*) and **Escher's Blue** (*Polyommatus escheri*) were evident in small numbers, and in the drier scrubby areas **Small Skipper** (*Thymelicus sylvestris*), **Lulworth Skipper** (*Thymelicus acteon*), **Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper** (*Pyrgus armoricanus*), **Marbled Skipper** (*Carcharodus lavatherae*) and **Large Skipper** (*Ochlodes venatus*) were in action. **Knapweed Fritillary** (*Melitaea phoebe*), **Marbled Fritillary** (*Brenthis daphne*) and **Spotted Fritillary** (*Melitaea didyma*) also put in an appearance, representing just some of the highlights. ▼



Spanish Chestnut Heaths (*Coenonympha glycerion iphioides*)







Northern Spain cont.



Spanish Purple Hairstreak (*Laeosipis roboris*)



Sloe Hairstreak (*Satyrium acaciae*)



Short-tailed Blue (*Cupido argiades*)



Escher's Blue (*Polyommatus escheri*), female

### *Casarejos & the Canyon del Rio Lobos*

Dragging ourselves away, we pressed on to complete the 40 kms to Casarejos, our base for the next week to explore the stunning limestone landscape and mosaic of habitats around the Canyon of the Rio Lobos.

The canyon is a spectacular 25 km long gorge carved through a limestone plateau and designated a 10,000 hectare 'Parque Natural' in 2000. In particular, it is a Special Conservation Area for Birds, with a large resident colony of Griffon Vultures, which were evident most days spiralling high on the thermals above the canyon. The canyon lies at the eastern end of the Castilla y Leon region, one third in the province of Burgos and two thirds in the province of Soria. The most spectacular landscapes lie at the bottom end of the canyon, close to the village of Ucero in Soria where it opens into an arable flood-plain.

The protected zone includes large areas of pinewoods, particularly *Pinus nigra* and *Pinus sylvestris* in the northern and western part of the park, and juniper (*Juniperus thurifera*) woodlands and scrub in the eastern and southern part, along with a ▼





Casarejos



Rio Lobos

few greener riverside meadows, all offering a variety of butterfly habitats. Patches of land are given over to agriculture and cattle pasture, but the heart of the park is the spectacular gorge of the Rio Lobos and its myriad of caves and chasms, the limestone pavements, and connecting gullies and valleys that cut across the plateau.

#### *Exploration via the GR-86*

We began the week exploring the local hillside tracks and clearings within walking distance of our base, following the GR-86 trail north and south from the village in to the surrounding countryside. The sparse vegetation in small clearings, and along field margins soon yielded **Gatekeeper** (*Pyronia tithonus*), **Spanish Gatekeeper** (*Pyronia bathseba*) and **Southern Gatekeeper** (*Pyronia cecilia*) flying side-by-side, fleeting fly-bys from **Cardinals** (*Argynnis pandora*), **Clouded Yellows** (*Colias crocea*), **Marbled White** (*Melanargia galathea*), a few of the less common **Iberian Marbled White** (*Melanargia lachesis*), **Southern White Admiral** (*Limenitis reducta*), **Silver-washed Fritillary** (*Argynnis paphia*) and a selection of **Grayling** (*Hipparchia semele*), **Great Banded Grayling** (*Brintesia circe*) and **Rock Grayling** (*Hipparchia hermione*) basking in sunny spots.

Drainage channels, trackside gullies and an abandoned quarry area produced some of the richest floral diversity, attracting **Esper's Marbled White** (*Melanargia russiae*), **Bath White** (*Pontia daplidice*) and **Cleopatra** (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*), alongside **Dark Green Fritillary** (*Speyeria aglaja*), **Niobe Fritillary** (*Fabriciana niobe*), **Southern Heath Fritillary** (*Melitaea celadussa*) and **Weaver's Fritillary** (*Boloria dia*). **Berger's Clouded Yellow** (*Colias alfacariensis*) and a few **Black-veined White** (*Aporia crataegi*) also added to the mix, the latter quite a rarity on this trip. **Blue-spot Hairstreak** (*Satyrium spini*) and **Purple-shot Copper** (*Lycaena alciphron*) also made their first appearances, together with **Turquoise Blue** (*Polyommatus dorylas*) and **Sage Skipper** (*Muschampia proto*), probably the most abundant skipper on the trip.







Northern Spain cont.



Spanish Gatekeeper (*Pyronia bathseba*)



Southern Gatekeeper (*Pyronia cecilia*)



Weaver's Fritillary (*Boloria dia*)



Black-veined White (*Aporia crataegi*)



Purple-shot Copper (*Lycaena alciphron*)



Turquoise Blue (*Polyommatus dorylas*)







The GR-86 heading south led us to the head of a long gorge draining towards the main canyon. Open scrub and grassland at the northern end, adjacent to a small brook, produced some spots of lush vegetation attracting **Silver-studded Blues** (*Plebejus argus*), **Escher's Blues** (*Polyommatus escheri*) and **Southern Brown Argus** (*Aricia cramera*), and in adjacent shrubbery a small colony of **False Ilex Hairstreak** (*Satyrium esculi*), the only ones seen on the trip. Other newcomers in the surrounding scrub included **Dusky Heath** (*Coenonympha dorus*), **High Brown Fritillary** (*Fabriciana adippe*), **Queen of Spain Fritillary** (*Issoria lathonia*), **Iberian Scarce Swallowtail** (*Iphiclides feisthamelii*) and several Meadow Brown species. The latter are easily overlooked, but thanks to a digital camera and Collins Butterfly Guide, identification becomes much easier after the event, revealing a mix of **Meadow Brown** (*Maniola jurtina*), **Dusky Meadow Brown** (*Hyponephele lycaon*) and the related **Oriental Meadow Brown** (*Hyponephele lupina*) all active in the same area, and difficult to separate in the field. This was a selection from the 47 species seen in one day in this spot. ▼



**False Ilex Hairstreak** (*Satyrium esculi*)



**Dusky Heath** (*Coenonympha dorus*)



**Dusky Meadow Brown** (*Hyponephele lycaon*)



**Oriental Meadow Brown** (*Hyponephele lupina*)





Northern Spain cont.

The highlight came a few days later when we revisited the same area early morning to see **Red-underwing Skipper** (*Spialia sertorius/rosae*), and the first of several subsequent sightings of **Oberthur's Anomalous Blue** (*Polyommatus fabressei*) basking wings-open in the morning sunshine, revealing its beautiful metallic bronze sheen. Later in the day, a mating pair of **Marbled Skippers** (*Carcharodus lavatherae*) were spotted alongside **Mallow** (*Carcharodus alceae*), **Sage** (*Muschampia proto*), **Lulworth** (*Thymelicus acteon*) and **Oberthur's Grizzled Skippers** (*Pyrgus armoricanus*) in the same grassland area.



Red-underwing Skipper sp (*Spialia sertorius/rosae*)



Marbled Skippers (*Carcharodus lavatherae*)



Sage Skipper (*Muschampia proto*)



Oberthur's Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus fabressei*), female

Late that afternoon, we returned to our accommodation to find that the owner had visited to water a few plants, leaving damp patches on the drive that were attracting several more 'mud-puddling' **Oberthur's Anomalous Blues** (*Polyommatus fabressei*), a few **Turquoise** (*Polyommatus dorylas*) and **Common Blues** (*Polyommatus icarus*), and to our delight four **Ripart's Anomalous Blues** (*Polyommatus ripartii*) with the distinct underwing white stripe well developed, a feature not seen (or very weak) in *P. fabressei*.







Northern Spain cont.



Oberthur's Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus fabressei*)



Ripart's Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus ripartii*)

*Villoslada de Cameros, Parque Natural Sierra de Cebollera*

For week two, we first headed west to Soria and then north in to La Rioja and the hills of the Sierra Cebollera, with the higher peaks of the Picos de Urbion lying to the west. Our base in the picturesque village of Villoslada de Cameros within the Parque Natural Sierra de Cebollera gave us access to wooded hillsides, open scrub, mountain pastures and forestry tracks (4000 – 5000 ft) offering a variety of habitats amongst deciduous and conifer woodland.

We saw many of the species seen further south. However, the hillside tracks also revealed **Southern Brown Argus** (*Aricia cramera*) and the **Mountain Argus** form (*Aricia montensis*), equivalent to our **Northern Brown Argus**, flying in relatively close proximity. **Wood White** (*Leptidea sinapsis*) was spotted in small numbers, along with **Small Heath** (*Coenonympha pamphilus*), a relative rarity, and a number of **Common Blues** with well-developed marginal spots typical of the southern *celina* variant. An open, marshy hillside meadow on a damp afternoon after a morning of mist and rain yielded large numbers of roosting **Meadow Fritillary** (*Melitaea parthenoides*), **False Heath Fritillary** (*Melitaea diamina*), a few **Weaver's Fritillary** (*Boloria dia*) and the one and only sighting of a **Western Dappled White** (*Euchloe crameri*).



Common Blue resembling *Polyommatus celina*



Meadow Fritillary (*Melitaea parthenoides*)





Northern Spain cont.



False Heath Fritillary (*Melitaea diamina*)



Western Dappled White (*Euchloe crameri*)

The following day we explored a mountain forest track (4800 ft) on the edge of the Parque, north of San Andres, which produced a few higher altitude specialists including good numbers of **Piedmont Ringlet** (*Erebia meolans*), a fresh **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary** (*Boloria selene*), our only **Scarce Copper** (*Lycaena virgaureae*) of the trip, and good numbers of other Fritillaries. The sunny clearings with flowering brambles were attracting a variety of Skippers, including a stunning fresh female **Safflower Skipper** (*Pyrgus carthami*), as well as **Purple-shot Copper** (*Lycaena alciphron*). **Pearly Heath** (*Coenonympha arcania*) was abundant in these higher woodland clearings, including several mating pairs. ▼



Piedmont Ringlet (*Erebia meolans*)



Piedmont Ringlet (*Erebia meolans*)



Safflower Skipper (*Pyrgus carthami*)



Pearly Heaths (*Coenonympha arcania*)





Northern Spain cont.



Duoro Valley, Soria

### Soria

Based only an hour and a half north of the medieval romanesque town of Soria, we took the opportunity to explore the town and the dry, rocky hillside meadows and slopes of the river valley along the Rio Duoro to the north east of Soria. These meadows and rocky slopes, though fairly dry in early July, yielded a rich variety of Blues, including **Turquoise** (*Polyommatus dorylas*), **Adonis** (*Lysandra bellargus*), **Silver-studded** (*Plebejus argus*), a solitary **Spanish Chalkhill** (*Lysandra albicans*) and a stunning male **Meleager's Blue** (*Polyommatus daphnis*) at the river's edge. After several hours of searching, and a return visit a few days later, we were unable to discover any other Meleager's Blues in this area.

Both varieties of 'Anomalous Blue', **Oberthur's** and **Ripart's**, were in evidence along the baking-hot riverside track, which also supported good numbers of **Berger's Clouded Yellow** (*Colias alfacariensis*) and **Clouded Yellow** (*Colias crocea*), including many form *helice*, and a few **Iberian Scarce Swallowtail** (*Iphiclides feisthamelii*), a species which lived up to its name by remaining very elusive for most of the trip. A variety of Hairstreaks and Skippers were easy to spot. Several shaded river side stretches of the track supported lush vegetation where we had our only sightings of **Green-veined Whites** (*Pieris napi*), along with a few **Wood Whites** (*Leptidea sinapsis*) and **Bath Whites** (*Pontia daplidice*).



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



**Iberian Scarce Swallowtail** (*Iphiclides feisthamelii*)

10th July, well satisfied with our exploration of this fascinating mountainous region and its impressive array of butterflies. •

### Mark and Caroline Searle

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More images can be seen on flickr:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/135189540@N07/albums/72177720297543466>



# Sierra de Gredos

## Butterflying the Gredos

by Keith Hamilton

### *The Sierra de Gredos, our new home*

The Regional Park of the Sierra de Gredos in central Spain is a wonderfully diverse, natural area which is part of the much larger Sistema Central. The geology is that of granite and it covers an area of approximately 3600km<sup>2</sup>. The highest peak, Almanzor, at 2592m, towers directly above the place which we now call home, La Sayuela, Candeleda in the province of Avila. It is only 2hrs from Madrid Barajas Airport and is a relatively easy area to visit.



Valle del Tietar, one of my favourite valleys, close to La Sayuela. It will also be my first eBMS transect.

It is a far cry from our previous life up in Cumbria, counting Marsh Fritillary larval webs at Ennerdale as part of the very successful re-introduction project, or searching for Small Blue at Oldside, Workington, and the WCBS transect at Threlkeld. Two years ago we finally made the move to this area of Spain, an area which I have visited many times over recent years. Now I spend my spare time searching the hillsides on the sunny southern slope of the Sierra de Gredos and around the Valle del Tietar. This is proving to be a very enjoyable, though steep, learning curve, a pastime enjoyed amongst the company of singing Golden Orioles and Nightingales or being watched over by the many Vultures and Eagles that soar above.

### *Species count*

Here in the region of Castilla y León we can find at least 168 of the 230 or so species of butterfly that are regularly seen on the Iberian Peninsula. This provides me with a wonderful opportunity to learn more about and record butterfly species in this very much under-recorded area of Spain.

In the two years we have been here I have recorded 53 species; that is without going too far from home. In reality until recently we have been busy with the refurbishment of our holiday letting cottages, and now they are complete I am very much looking forward to the springtime of 2023 to start exploring more seriously.

### *Early butterflies*

It is possible to see butterflies here at any time of the year although diversity of species is limited in the winter time. The very-cryptic looking **Nettle-tree Butterfly** (*Libythea celtis*) overwinters as an adult and as such can be seen on the wing during the warmer days of winter. It is perfectly camouflaged to hang on to dry leaves until the start of its flight period at the end of February or early March. ▼



**Nettle-tree Butterfly** (*Libythea celtis*)





The next photo shows a landscape typical of the lower elevations of the area. In springtime I found **Marsh Fritillary** (*Euphydryas aurinia*) here, not what I was expecting in this fairly dry habitat... there are surprises around every corner. The Sierra de Gredos has a very varied range of habitats, from high mountain, scrubland, to meadow and extensive woodland both coniferous and deciduous.



Typical landscape of lower elevations.



**Marsh Fritillary** (*Euphydryas aurinia*)

One of our early butterflies is the **Spanish Festoon** (*Zerynthia rumina*). Jane, my wife, says this stunningly colourful butterfly reminds her of the colouring of a Moroccan carpet. It is very common around the garden in springtime, always a delight to see.

The **African Grass Blue** (*Zizeeria knysa*) is seen in our garden from February to November. We are very lucky to have a wide range of species to see within only a few hundred metres from the house. Directly bordering the property is the enormous area of the Regional Park, where there is 'open access' to explore freely. ▼



**Spanish Festoon** (*Zerynthia rumina*)



**African Grass Blue** (*Zizeeria knysa*)





### *Fritillaries*

The landscape is perfect for finding Fritillaries. Below are a few examples that I have found here.



Spotted Fritillary (*Melitaea didyma*)



Marbled Fritillary (*Brenthis daphne*)



Niobe Fritillary (*Fabriciana niobe*)



Knapweed Fritillary (*Melitaea phoebe*)



Provençal Fritillary (*Melitaea deione*)





### Blues

In the winter time we can have extensive snowfall on the high mountain, so as the melt water of springtime arrives, coupled with the spring showers and rising temperatures, this creates a lush flower/herb rich environment perfect for butterflies, particularly Blues. A visit to the Gredos would not be complete without seeing some 'Blues'!



**Black-eyed Blue** (*Glaucopsyche melanops*)



**Panoptes Blue** (*Pseudophilotes panoptes*)



**Green-underside Blues** (*Glaucopsyche alexis*)

I have found **Green-underside Blue** (*Glaucopsyche alexis*) to be abundant in the right conditions; there were around 20 of them along with many other species in a very small area taking nutrients from the damp soil when I took this photo.



**Long-tailed Blue** (*Lampides boeticus*)



**Lang's Short-tailed Blue** (*Leptotes pirithous*)

### Zerynthia and the eBMS

I have recently joined Zerynthia, a Spanish organisation dedicated to the study of butterflies and their habitat. It is one of 21 chosen partners spread through 19 different countries that help to coordinate the European Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (eBMS). Zerynthia follows the same goals and values as Butterfly Conservation, supporting ▼





Sierra de Gredos cont.



The **Cardinal** (*Argynnis pandora*). A very common butterfly here from mid-May through to mid-September, always spectacular.

interaction with local communities to raise awareness through education, projects, activities, lobbying local government/land owners and participation in events to help create amongst many other things 'safe havens' for invertebrates.

To be able to help to create a plan for the protection and conservation of species which are struggling in their natural environment, it is necessary to collect as much information as possible relative to the growth/decline of species so as to be able to direct help to where it is needed most.

Since April 2016 the eBMS has been collating information from the various European country monitoring schemes on to a central database. This scheme helps me and many others contribute in a way that is simple and very importantly 'accessible', that is almost anyone anywhere can take part even without the need to commit to regular transects.

Not being an 'ologist' or 'opterist', this scheme is great for me. I am firmly in the 'citizen science' camp, I love nature and want to protect it, and this way I can submit data which is useful and as such I can play my part.

**A wonderful area**

This area in the centre of the Iberian Peninsula is a true jewel - the varied landscapes, easy accessibility and low population, coupled with the fact that we have seasons, changing from the chilly winter mornings to the long hot summer days, through the misty days and sultry colours of the autumn to the fabulous explosion of life and vibrancy of the springtime.

There is far more to see than I can show here, so why not come and see for yourselves? If you would like more information please contact us, we would love to hear from you..... •

**Keith and Jane Hamilton**

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Finca La Sayuela holiday cottages are owned and managed by Keith & Jane Hamilton. Bird and butterfly guiding is available on request.

Photographs by Keith Hamilton ©



Typical landscape at around 1200m



Las Hermanitas de Tejea



Pantano de Rosarito





Sierra de Gredos cont.

A small gallery of other butterflies we can see here in the Sierra de Gredos



**Dusky Heath**  
(*Coenonympha dorus*)



**Spanish Purple Hairstreak**  
(*Laeosopis roboris*)



**Mallow Skipper**  
(*Carcharodus alceae*)



**Lulworth Skipper**  
(*Thymelicus actaeon*)



**Western Dappled White**  
(*Euchloe crameri*)



**Spanish Gatekeeper**  
(*Pyronia bathseba*)



**Purple-shot Copper**  
(*Lycaena alciphron*)



**Red Underwing Skipper**  
(*Spialia sertorius/rosae*)



**Southern Gatekeeper**  
(*Pyronia cecelia*)





# Madeira

## Conserving Madeira's threatened endemic butterflies

by Sam Ellis

Mike Prentice reported in Issue 31 of the Newsletter on our trip to Madeira in September 2021 to help survey the island's butterflies. The main focus of the survey was the three threatened endemic species, but we also recorded all other butterflies we encountered. The project was developed and delivered by Butterfly Conservation Europe (BCE) in partnership with Madeira Fauna & Flora (MF&F) and funded by LIFE4BEST. Along with several BCE colleagues, I was lucky enough to return to Madeira in October 2022 to bring the project to a successful conclusion with a conference held at the University of Madeira.

### *Recording in 2022*

As well as the conference we also undertook further surveys on most days using the 15-minute Count method, which has the advantage of being easy to use and a very effective way of recording both the distribution and abundance of the butterflies. Being a few weeks later than we were in 2021 and with more variable weather, we were less successful recording our target species. In fact, we saw only two **Madeiran Brimstone** (*Gonepteryx maderensis*) all week. One male, although seen several hundred metres away, was easily identifiable by the bright ▼



Madeiran Speckled Wood (*Pararge xiphia*), male upperside and underside



Madeiran Speckled Wood (*Pararge xiphia*), female upperside and underside





orange forewings. The much more elusive and paler female I encountered for the first time ever on my last day – despite being at close quarters it did not loiter long enough to photograph! The **Madeiran Speckled Wood (*Pararge xiphia*)**, however, was more abundant and I managed to photograph both male and female upper and undersides.

### ***Drones***

Our data analysis was based only on that collected in August/September 2021 when we recorded butterflies on 49 survey routes, again using the 15-minute Count method. We sampled mainly in the primary humid laurel forest but also in mixed and exotic forests and in montane heathland. Much laurel forest on Madeira is quite inaccessible on foot, so we experimented with drones to see if we could record out of reach areas. However, this proved quite challenging because it is difficult to fly close enough to the tree canopy to obtain good quality images of butterflies, whilst ensuring the drone does not crash land. As the drone pilots become more proficient this problem may be overcome but for now our data has all been collected in the old-fashioned way!

### ***Summary of results***

The Madeiran Speckled Wood was recorded on 80% of survey routes and at high densities, especially in the higher altitude laurel forests in the island's central region. Earlier concerns about competition from the invasive **Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*)** were allayed to some extent, as the ratio of the Madeiran Speckled Wood to the Speckled Wood was 44:56% overall with the proportion of the former rising to 75-100% in the humid laurel forest. Overall, the Madeiran Speckled Wood was the third most abundant species in our survey. On the other hand, the Madeiran Brimstone has a much more restricted distribution being confined to the northern half of the island and occurring only at low densities on 33% of survey routes. Sadly, we were unable to find the **Madeiran Large White (*Pieris wollastoni*)** and this species, last recorded in 1986, must now be presumed to be globally extinct, the first European butterfly in this unenviable category.

### ***Proposed actions: Macaronesian Buckthorn***

The Macaronesian Buckthorn (*Rhamnus glandulosa*) is the sole larval hostplant of the Madeiran Brimstone and this tree itself is rare on Madeira. It is confined to riparian vegetation in the primary humid laurel forest and this habitat has been negatively affected by changing water abstraction regimes and by invasive alien species (IAS). We proposed a number of conservation actions that should benefit the Macaronesian Buckthorn, and the Madeiran Brimstone in turn, including adjusting water abstraction rates and removing IASs from more degraded habitat. The Macaronesian Buckthorn is relatively easy to grow and its population could be boosted by a propagation and planting programme, activities that could easily be undertaken by volunteers and schoolchildren.

Our proposed actions were all developed in consultation with the local stakeholder groups and also included suggestions for further research. For example, it is not even known whether a particular growth form (i.e. sapling, shrub or mature tree) is preferred for breeding or whether Madeiran Brimstone females select hostplants growing under different conditions (e. g. shaded or unshaded). Nothing is known about ▼





Madeira cont.



Habitat of the Madeiran Brimstone at Seixal, one of its best sites. You can see our Chairman looking towards a solitary Macaronesian Buckthorn on the opposite bank but indistinguishable from the surrounding trees at this scale. Note the more or less dried up riverbed – water abstraction has an important impact on the butterfly’s hostplant.

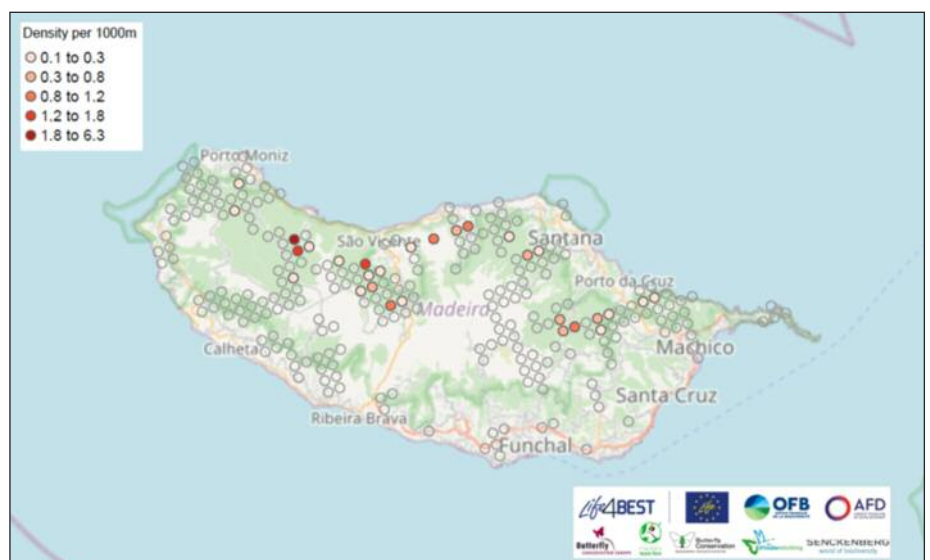
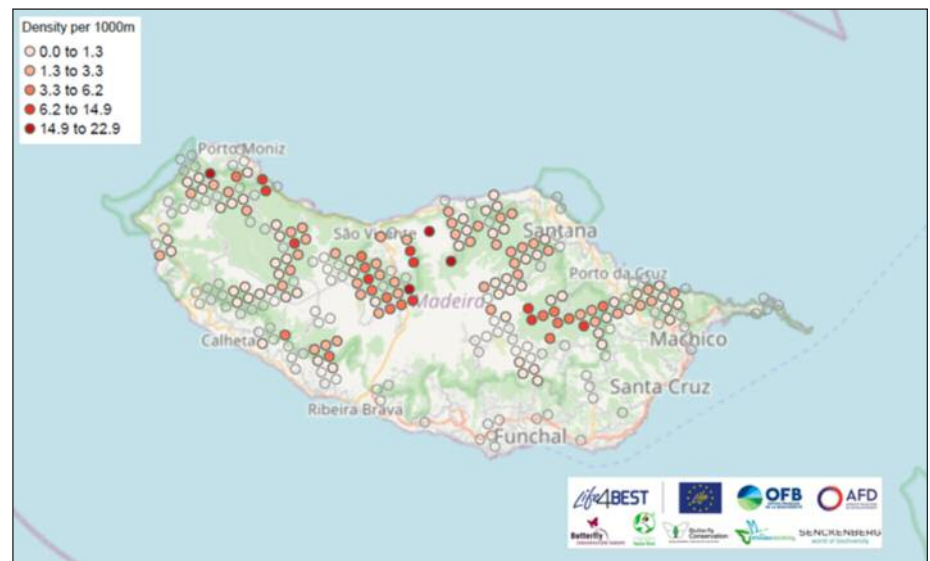
the butterfly’s population structure either - do individuals remain in the same valley or are they quite mobile? So there is still much to learn about one of Europe’s rarest butterflies.

### Madeira Butterfly Monitoring Scheme

The 15-minute Count data were also used to build Species Distribution Models (SDMs) and to identify Key Butterfly Areas (KBAs) on Madeira. The SDMs predict where each species might occur and therefore help target future butterfly surveys. Within the KBAs, 20 transect routes were identified and staff from the Institute of Forests and Nature Conservation and other volunteers have been

trained to undertake butterfly transect counts. Monitoring began in 2022 and these transects form the core of the new Madeira Butterfly Monitoring Scheme (maBMS). A Madeiran butterfly ID guide and a dedicated WhatsApp group provides support to 25+ registered volunteers and the maBMS is coordinated locally by Sérgio Teixeira of Madeira Fauna & Flora. Data accrued will also feed into the European Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.

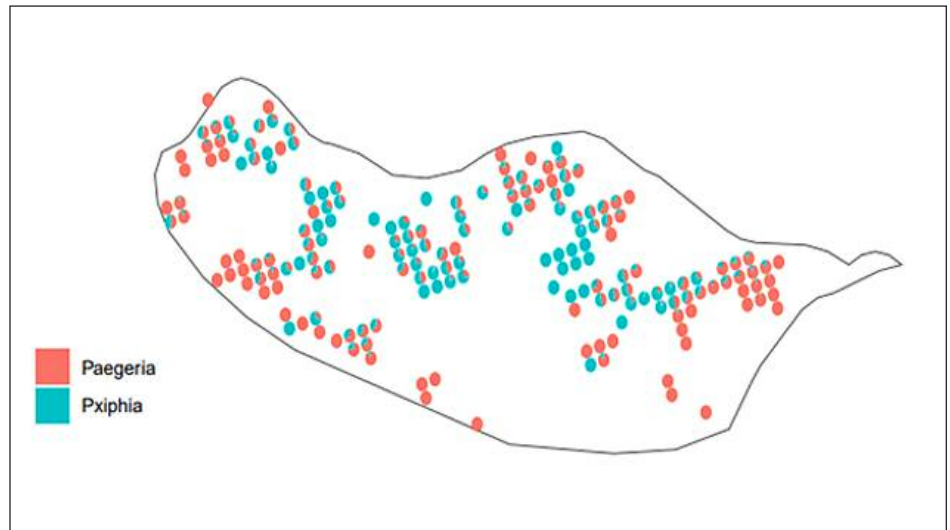
Data from 15-minute Counts can be analysed to produce maps which illustrate both the distribution and density of the butterfly species at the 1km<sup>2</sup> scale on Madeira Island. In these examples, the Madeiran Brimstone (lower map) clearly has a more restricted distribution than the Madeiran Speckled Wood (upper map). The Madeiran Brimstone map also allowed the project team to identify several key areas for the species where future conservation action could be focused.







This map shows the relative proportion of Madeiran Speckled Wood (*P. xiphia*) to Speckled Wood (*P. aegeria*) at the 1km<sup>2</sup> scale across Madeira Island. In the higher altitude sites towards the island's centre, the endemic species is still much more abundant than its invasive congener.



### *Species Recovery Plans*

Species Recovery Plans were produced for the target species together with a short project video which can be accessed at <https://www.vlinderstichting.nl/butterfly-conservation-europe/projects/butterflies-madeira-life4best/>

Of course, the report for the Madeiran Large White is not a 'recovery plan' at all, but it describes what is known about this species. Extinction happened very quickly, probably the result of an introduced virus or possibly parasitism. Its demise is a reminder that island endemics are amongst our most vulnerable butterfly species and they deserve our continued attention. The Canary Islands also support several threatened endemic butterfly species and BCE could consider applying for the next round of LIFE4BEST to fund a similar project there. •

**Sam Ellis**

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