

NEWSLETTER

Issue 2

October 2007

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PART 2 - To be sent as a separate Pdf file

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The Year in Provence – Butterflies of Var – Roger Gibbons

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PART 3 – To be sent as a separate Pdf file

Pyrgus warrenensis (Warren's Skipper) near the Bernina Pass – Bernard Watts

The EIG Website www.bc-eig.org.uk

Send us anything that you think should go on the website – it's your website. Please email any thoughts, ideas, or whatever you have, to webmaster@bc-eig.org.uk. Thank you.

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INTRODUCTION

EIG has got off to a reasonable start and now has 110 members, which is way beyond the critical mass needed to make the organisation effective. The inclusion of an application form in the summer mailing of 'butterfly' gave us a great boost and we hope that we can widen the membership as more BC members hear about us. Neil Thompson has done a really good job on the website (bc-eig.org.uk) which we hope will develop further over the winter. Check it out regularly as there is lots of good stuff there including a downloadable EIG membership application form that your friends can fill in.

The first EIG newsletter was well received and I was delighted (almost overwhelmed) with the response for this newsletter. We aim to make these topical and interesting and I can see us doing more than two a year. As a medium for disseminating information on butterflies it is rather useful as it is cheap to produce and we don't mind if it is distributed widely to partners in Europe.

Mike Williams, Neil Thompson and others put a lot of time and effort into responding to an NGO in Turkey that wanted assistance with a butterfly survey. Despite considerable efforts it was a great disappointment that research visas were not forthcoming and the project collapsed (See Neil's article page 10).

This issue contains reports of the EIG Ecrins survey for *Boloria graeca* and details of forthcoming trips to Mount Chelmos in Greece and Hungary. We have circulated members about these separately. We would encourage other members to consider leading EIG events in Europe.

I am off this weekend representing EIG at the first conference of Butterfly Conservation Europe in Laufen, Germany. Butterfly or conservation organisations from most European countries will be represented. This is a real opportunity to promote the conservation of butterflies across Europe and together influence things like the Common Agricultural Policy at a European level.

Simon Spencer

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Dates for your Diary

17th November 2007 - BC AGM and EIG AGM

Please note that EIG will have a stall at the Butterfly Conservation Annual General Meeting (**AGM**) and Members Day that will be held at the Trident Technology and Business Centre near Leamington Spa in Warwickshire on Saturday 17th November. The BC **AGM** will be followed by several exciting presentations on the work and achievements of the Society.

URL: <http://www.butterfly-conservation.org/news/article.php?id=68>

EIG will hold its own AGM at the same venue afterwards at approximately 5.30PM.

Items for discussion to Simon Spencer (Chairman EIG)

17-19th April 2008

International Symposium Future of Butterflies in Europe II (Wageningen)

<http://vlinderstichting.bureaupost.nl/>

24th - 31st May & 31st May - 7th June 2008

EIG Trip to Hungary. Contact Mike Williams

21st June - July 1st 2008

EIG Field Trip to Peloponese (Greece) - Contact Simon Spencer

NETS!

I nearly got arrested this year for using a butterfly net! Well I did look rather suspicious and emerged from the long grass without the large net that I had been carrying when first observed by these well armed police officers. Memories of Franco's 'Guardia Civilia' came flooding back. They were quite young, very polite but fortunately they actually thought I was trying to catch fish in the river a few yards away. There were notices saying fishing was strictly forbidden. I always carry the 'Key to the Butterflies of Europe' by Tristan Lafranchis in my pocket and was soon able to assure them that I was only an eccentric Englishman looking for butterflies. What I did not know at the time was that it was actually illegal to catch butterflies in that country without a permit. My sheepishness was because I was not sure whether I was still in a National Park where I was fairly certain that using nets is forbidden. Fortunately the Police Officers had forgotten that bit of their training as they did not tell me to put the net away.

There are blanket bans on catching butterflies in many European countries though permits can be obtained for bone fide purposes. It is always best to get a permit and send in your records afterwards. I have successfully obtained permits to use a net in a French National Park – the Ecrins where incidentally I was also challenged but able to show the challenger my permit. It takes a little time and effort to get permits but worth the effort. I try and write in French rather than assume that everybody can read English. My written French is not good so it is quite an effort. Rather than repeat the process for several different places and authorities that may be visited on a three week trip in languages that I am even less familiar with I tend to be discreet about using a net unless I am fairly sure I am unobserved or unlikely to attract more than ridicule. The Greeks for example have a relaxed attitude to petty restrictions on an individual's liberty, which is why driving in Greece, is rather hazardous. Greece is one of the few places in Europe where collecting can be a problem and seriously threatens some butterfly species but no one is likely to stop you using a net.

The pocket folding net with a spring steel frame is invaluable in these circumstances. It can be ready for use in seconds and be concealed very quickly. The problem is twofold: without capturing, handling or boxing, then keying out and conferring with others you never learn and though you may be fairly certain of your identification through close focus binoculars for many species certainty requires a really good look. I cannot do spines on tibia through binoculars. For *Mellicta spp* and some *Hipparchia spp* examination of the male genitalia with a hand lens adds greater certainty. With practice the live insect can then be released unharmed. Some genera including *Colias spp* are just too active to be accurately determined without a net as they rarely settle let alone sit there with their wings open.

Where butterflies are nectaring or mud puddling then the net is often counter productive as they can often be seen better through binoculars than in a box. My Opticron Verrano 10X42 binoculars focus down to about 1.5m. Binoculars are especially good with blues. These are often quite good about opening their wings, especially in dull weather or early or late in the day. Similarly *Pieris spp.* even if settled with their wings closed are often easier to determine through binoculars than in a net. Their scales are easily damaged.

Having caught a butterfly there is then the decision as whether to box it or hold the thorax from below gently between the thumb and forefinger. I always box *Pyrgus* as they take time and are difficult to handle. Fritillaries and Satyrids I usually handle rather than box as they are mostly quite large and it is often necessary to see both upper side and underside. In a box they tend to flutter or sit with their wings closed. I often use a piece of grass stalk to gently open the wings. Confirmatory photographs are best done on boxed specimens but photos through perspex or glass are rarely satisfactory. What is difficult is to get both upperside and underside shots of the same insect. On large butterflies they can be photographed in the hand but twenty minutes in the fridge before being photographed is often the best way to achieve this with boxed

specimens. Take the lid off the box to release the butterfly and hope it spreads its wings before flying off. All butterflies should be released where they are found.

In my opinion there should be EU wide bans on the collecting of some Red Data Book species but national bans on catching almost all butterflies with nets are counterproductive. They inhibit the flow of accurate records and deter the recruitment of new citizen scientists. Perhaps EIG could issue 'Letters of Accreditation' stating that the holder was a member of Butterfly Conservation's European Interest Group and was not a collector and that the holder required to use a net for the purpose of identifying butterflies. However this would be no use in protected areas such as National Parks and would have to state that catching butterflies was illegal in certain countries. Where practical obtain written permission in advance. That is something EIG might be able to help with. I think I will carry a glass tube containing dead horse flies (Tabanids) in future. Everybody kills horse flies!

Simon Spencer

EIG TRIPS IN 2008

HUNGARY - May 24th - June 7th 2008



Poplar Admiral (*Limenitis populi*)

EIG members will already be aware of the links that have developed between Butterfly Conservation UK and national parks in Hungary over the past few years. After a very successful initial visit by West Midlands branch members in 2006, a group of students from Stourbridge College and Wolverhampton University visited Hungary this summer and carried out survey and practical management work in Aggtelek and Bukk Hills. This was followed by a further group led by Nigel Spring in the autumn to the Aggtelek national park. A return visit is now planned for next spring to undertake further survey and monitoring work. The first week 24th-31st May will be in Aggtelek NP using the same accommodation as West Midlands branch used in 2006 and, the following week, 31st May-7th June in Bukk Hills staying at Sajomercse like this year's college students. Target species both weeks include early flyers like Poplar Admiral, Southern Festoon and Scarce Fritillary which are increasingly scarce in their European range but still occur in north-east Hungary. Volunteers are needed to help carry out this important project and participants can come either week or stay for the full fortnight. There are only seven places still available for the first week and five for the second so anyone interested is asked to register their interest as soon as possible. A separate flyer about this trip has already been circulated and further information can be obtained via Mike Williams (mike@stagborough.fsnet.co.uk) or by visiting the EIG website (www.bc-eig.org.uk)

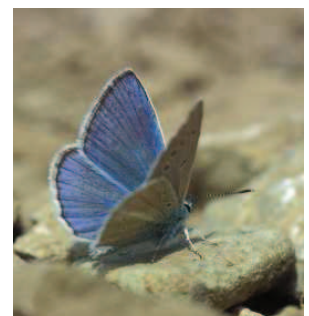
MOUNT CHELMOS, GREECE June 21st – July 1st 2008

EIG members have recently been invited to participate in a research and conservation working holiday in mainland Greece mapping the habitat of certain rare butterflies and surveying for them on Mount Chelmos in the Peloponnese.

Mount Chelmos is the only site for the rare Chelmos Blue (*Agrodiaetus iphigenia*) in Europe. This species feeds as a larva on Sainfoin (*Onybrichis alba*), which is vulnerable to overgrazing and is never abundant. We would map the distribution of the adult butterfly using a GPS and also map the food plant. Mount Chelmos also has an unusual habitat of *Acantholimon androsaceum* which grows in dwarf cushions amongst the rocks at high altitude.



Mount Chelmos (photo: Tristan Lafranchis)

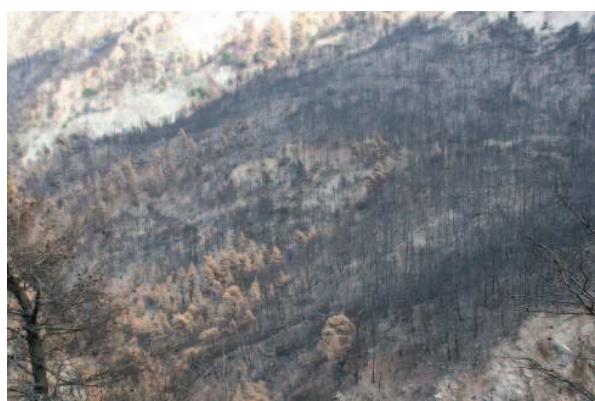
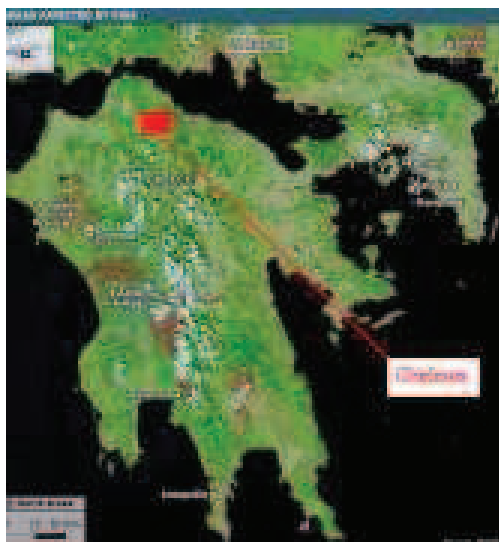


Chelmos Blue (*Agrodiaetus iphigenia*)

This allows it to withstand extreme desiccation and high winds as well as browsing goats. This unusual plant is the larval food-plant of both Fiery Copper (*Lycaena thetis*) and Odd Spot Blue (*Turanama endymion*), which occur together in the few hectares of this habitat found on Mt Chelmos and some nearby mountains. A major purpose of the trip would be to map these habitat patches. These last two species are two of the few European species vulnerable to collectors despite being protected by presidential decree and the known sites are regularly visited by collectors. The Peloponnese endemic Pontic Blue *Neolysanda coelestina* feeds on a vetch *Vicia tenuifolia* often growing under the protection of *Crataegus* bushes.

This species is widespread on Chelmos and neighbouring mountains but we would endeavour to assess its range. Mount Chelmos is a Natura 2000 site (GR 2320002) and we would hope both the publicity associated with our visit and a confidential report supplied to the authorities in Athens on returning to the UK might help to put the case for it to be a national park. All butterflies would be recorded by the expedition and there will be opportunities to see many of the 109 species recorded on Chelmos above 1500m as well as others found at lower altitude. The use of a moth trap at the hotel or elsewhere is not contemplated.

The 2007 fires in the Peloponnese (see Map) devastated many semi natural areas including the parts of the gorge linking Kalavrita to the coast along the track of the narrow gauge railway and also the neighbouring Mount Glokhos. We would try to make some assessment as to whether the damage has significantly affected the rarest butterfly species.



Burnt area in the Kalavrita Gorge Sept 2007

Liaison with local organisations

We have been in contact with a number of local organisations and individuals in Greece including the Agricultural University of Athens (AUA) and the Hellenic Zoological Society and also Tristan Lafranchis who lives locally. We would invite some of these to visit us as our guests if they are available. We may get help with mapping using GIS from AUA.

Accommodation and Flights

We are looking for a team of 10-12 people to undertake this project. We would be based at the Filoxenia hotel in Kalavrita a small town on the slopes of Mount Chelmos. Breakfast would be included and taken in the Hotel, packed lunches would be purchased locally and dinner would be taken in a suitable taverna. We would fly by Easyjet to Athens from Gatwick early morning picking up one or more hired vehicles from the airport for the 3 hour journey to the Hotel. Overnight accommodation in the Travel Lodge in Gatwick would be arranged for the outward flight.

Cost

Approximate Cost: Approximately £750 per person for persons sharing a double room. Single person supplement £100. Expedition members will make their own hotel bookings and book their own flights with most of the party going on the early Easyjet flight from Gatwick. Anyone wishing to stay on or travel independently could be accommodated but they would need to make their own way to Kalavrita.

Applicants would need to be fairly fit as we would be spending long days in the field and much of the interesting habitat is on the top of the mountain. Temperatures above 40C are not uncommon. Proper walking boots and suitable clothing would be essential. As elsewhere in Greece there is a risk from snakes etc and shepherd's dogs. Applicants would need full insurance. We would be working in small teams and team members would need to look after each other, adopt safe working practices and not take risks. Persons with GPS or mapping experience would be useful, as would persons with experience of driving in Greece. Applicants with a good knowledge of Botany or others specialist skills such as written Greek or mountaineering would be especially welcome. We would expect a reasonable expertise on European butterflies from most of the group but not necessarily experience of Greek butterflies. Simon Spencer will lead the expedition and the decision as to who would make a suitable member of the team will be up to him. Though there will be opportunities to see and photograph a number of rare butterflies this will not be the primary aim of the expedition. A number of tour companies' run led tours to the Peloponnese and for some people these may be a better alternative.

Expressions of interest in the first instance to Simon Spencer (Telephone 01691 648339) or cerisyi@btinternet.com.

2007 EIG TRIPS

THE ECRINS NATIONAL PARK, FRANCE JULY 2007

The British storm clouds seemed to chase us across France. After a long drive from Calais we pitched up at a campsite south of Grenoble in torrential rain. After a night punctuated by more rain, thunder and lightning, we awoke to a freezing cold morning and fresh snow on the tops of the mountains- yes in July. After stocking up on supplies we headed up in to the mountains to the same campsite we had used in mid June last year (10th-17th).



Balkan Fritillary (*Boloria graeca*)

The aim was to survey some of the Ecrins national park for Balkan Fritillary (*Boloria graeca*). So our intrepid party of seven were based for the first week (10-17 July) at Les Faures near Valjouffrey, the last campsite in this quiet valley. Anne and myself returned to another part of the park for a few days later on that month. We had the list of previous records for the Balkan Fritillary,

which was not long and some were several years ago and had planned to survey the most likely parts of this big national park. We obtained permits to use nets in the park and aimed to make some high altitude walks (those over 2000m) where we thought *graeca* was most likely to be seen. There is good access to the interior of the park on long distance footpaths from several points nearby.



Les Faures, Valjouffrey

My first impression was that the season was very late and the butterflies flying were not much different to what we had found a month earlier the previous year. Orange-tip (*Anthocaris cardamine*) was still flying and although High Brown Fritillary (*Argynnis adippe*), Silver-washed (*A. paphia*) and Dark Green Fritillary (*A. aglaja*) were already common at lower altitudes, Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria euphrosyne*) was still the main fritillary at higher altitudes. As in 2006 Black-veined Whites (*Aporia crataegi*) were everywhere and Apollos (*Parnassus Apollo*) drifted through the campsite. Scarce copper (*Lycaena vigaurae*) was common but not as abundant as previous years.

We had fun trying to separate the *Mellicta* and *Melitaea* species with False Heath Fritillary (*Melitaea diamina*) the most abundant at high altitude. On the basis of genitalia we also had Heath Fritillary (*M. athalia*), a few Provencal Fritillary (*M. deione*) and one Meadow Fritillary (*M. parthenoides*) (22/7)

However the Balkan Fritillary (*Boloria graeca*) eluded us despite the long treks and wild sprints across steep slopes with net in hand. We had Weaver's Fritillary (*Boloria dia*) in small numbers in a few places including the campsite and later on the 22nd one Titania's Fritillary (*Boloria titania*) was seen. For the high altitude species, Silvery Argus (*Pseudoaricia nicias*) and Glandon Blue (*Agriades glandon*) were seen occasionally and of the ringlets, Almond Eyed Ringlet (*Erebia alberganus*) was fairly widespread as was Arran Brown (*E. ligea*) and Scotch Argus (*E. aethiops*). Large Ringlet (*E. euryale*) occurred at some sites and at higher altitude Mountain Ringlet (*E. epiphron*), Lesser Mountain Ringlet (*E. melampus*), Western Brassy Ringlet (*E. arvenensis*) and occasionally Mnestra's Ringlet (*E. mnestra*) occurred. One

Piedmont ringlet (*E. meolans*) was seen. We also failed to find another hoped-for species seen in 2006 the Alpine Grayling (*Oenis glacialis*).

In all we had 392 records for 88 species. I suspect that we might have seen a higher figure if we had come a week later, for although we had fine sunny weather for most of the time it was initially cold. I cannot recommend this quiet little part of France more highly. There is accommodation locally or the cheap, adequate campsite (Camping Les Faures) that we used. For the less energetic Lepidopterist the species list for the campsite alone is impressive!



Group photo - Campsite restaurant
Simon, Russel, Caroline, Peter, Joyce & Sue

My thanks to Russel Hobson and Caroline French, Peter & Joyce Gay and Sue Reed for a very enjoyable trip. Thank you to Didier Brugot of the Ecrins National Park for authorisation to use nets.

Simon Spencer

EIG PROJECT IN TURKEY

The EIG had been contacted by DKM, a Turkish NGO specialising in ecological surveying and systematic conservation planning, to provide butterfly recorders for a project they were engaged in. Mike Williams had subsequently organised for four groups of recorders to visit Turkey to assist with the project, spanning May to early August. The first group (which was to include Mike Williams and Neil Thompson) was due to be recording in Turkey in early May, but this trip had to be aborted as the necessary research visas were not obtained in time.

In order to learn more about the project and to attempt to expedite the visa applications, Mike & Neil were invited out to Ankara by DKM and this report details that visit.

Project Details

- The project is funded by BTC, a company that was responsible for the building of the oil pipeline which takes crude oil from Azerbaijan to the Turkish Mediterranean coast, via Georgia. The pipeline very roughly follows the Anatolian Diagonal, a transition line between major ecoregions and an area of high species diversity.
- Along the route of the pipeline, the project aims to provide a Gap Analysis (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gap_analysis_%28conservation%29) of biodiversity, leading to the cost-efficient use of further funds to carry out conservation activities such as extending existing or establishing new protected areas or developing sustainable use projects.
- Total project funding is approximately US\$1 million, over two years.
- Current knowledge of butterfly distribution in Turkey is largely based on Hesselbarth *et al*'s *Die Tagfalter der Turkei*, although some of the records in this are over 40 years old and records only span 23% of all the 10km squares in Turkey, centred largely on the road network.

- Over 420 taxa of butterfly are recorded in Turkey, 91 of them endemic. It is thus richer than any European country, while sharing a significant proportion of its butterfly fauna with Europe.
- The project covers an area of 87,000 square kilometres and given the time, logistical and cost constraints, a systematic approach to assessing biodiversity is essential. The methodology for the project has been designed by DKM with technical support from an assistant professor at the Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara.
- Surrogates have been selected for the purpose of assessing overall biodiversity – large and small mammals, birds, herpetofauna, butterflies and threatened endemic plants.
- 10km squares are selected by stratified semi random sampling, using a variety of GIS layers including ecoregions, vegetation types, soils, climate data, topography, current surrogate knowledge, etc.
- For the butterfly surveying, four half hour surveys are to be carried out in each 10km square, covering as many of the main vegetation types as possible. All taxa (including subspecies) are recorded, along with their approximate numbers, the vegetation type, GPS reading, site photographs, etc.
- Following the abandonment of the first recording trip, the area covered had to be adjusted. This essentially affected the Mediterranean coastal region which is, however, quite well recorded and has a lower biological diversity.

Conclusions of the Visit

Despite a detailed meeting with the relevant Turkish Ministry, no conclusion was reached regarding the issuing of visas. The main problem appeared to be that the recorders were not academic researchers and this applied to the RSPB/BTO bird recorders as well as the BC butterfly recorders.

However, DKM felt that Mike & Neil's visit had been very useful in terms of discussing the overall project, meeting the Ministry and passing on some field identification tips. Mike & Neil similarly felt that the visit had been very useful; in particular their understanding of the project and what was required of the field workers was greatly enhanced.

Several weeks after the visit to Turkey, DKM received a formal letter indicating that the research visas would not be issued and the field recording work was therefore largely abandoned for 2007. However, as of September 2007, the project is still going ahead and field recording is planned for 2008, but the question of research visas has yet to be resolved.

Neil Thompson

A New Species of Melitaea in Europe

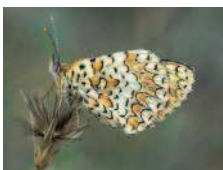
Most of you who now regularly use Tristan Lafranchis' 'Butterflies of Europe' (Lafranchis 2004) as their primary field guide and key may have noticed that the new French edition 'Papillons d'Europe' (Lafranchis 2007a) now splits the ubiquitous *Melitaea phoebe*, the Knapweed fritillary, into two species - *Melitaea phoebe* and *Melitaea ogygia*. Taxonomy does not stand still and though the two species are very similar as adults there are consistent differences in their larvae (See photos). Originally recognised from Hungary by Zoltan Varga (Varga et al 2005), *M. ogygia* has also been recorded from Sicily and southeast France (Russell et al 2005, 2007, under the names *Melitaea emipunica* and *M. telona*) and from Greece (Lafranchis 2007b). It appears that *M. ogygia* has a more southerly distribution and prefers a drier habitat to *M. phoebe* so one might suggest it is called 'Southern Knapweed' by those of us who habitually use English names. There is even the suggestion from genetic studies that *M. phoebe* might be further split (Lafranchis 2007b). Understandably much more information is required on the distribution of *M. ogygia*.

There seems to be no definitive feature to separate *M. ogygia* from *M. phoebe* adults but, on the underside of the hind wing, the outer submarginal black markings between the veins are usually larger and more continuous in *M. phoebe* and smaller and more discrete in *M. ogygia*. Only the larvae can be separated with certainty. Tristan Lafranchis (Lafranchis@yahoo.fr) would be pleased to receive photos of ogygia/phoebe larvae from around Europe with location details and dates.

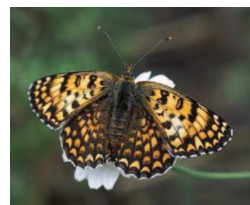
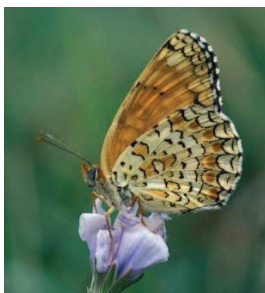
Editors note: Though many people might wish to purchase Papillons d'Europe (Lafranchis, 2007) for the photographs the 2004 English edition (Lafranchis 2004) remains the favourite field guide and key for most EIG members. Unless your French is very good indeed you will struggle with the keys in the French edition. It is already stimulating interest in butterflies in France. It has also been translated into Polish. Both editions are available from Lafranchis@yahoo.fr and see special offer to EIG members on the bc-eig.org.uk website. EIG now has 4 copies of the English edition that can be borrowed by academic or BC field trips etc.

Simon Spencer

M. ogygia (Photos: Tristan Lafranchis)



M. phoebe (Photos: Tristan Lafranchis)



Lafranchis T., 2007a Papillions d' Europe. Diatheo

Lafranchis T., 2007b *Melitaea ogygia* FRUHSTOFER, 1908 et *Melitaea phoebe* DENIS and SCHIFEREMULLER, 1775 en France et en Europe (*Lepidoptera, Nymphalidae*). Bulletin des Lepidopteristes Parisiens et d'Ile-de-France Vol 16, No 36, pp 38-43, 2007.

Lafranchis T., 2004 Butterflies of Europe. Diatheo

Russell, P., Gascoigne-Pees, M., Pateman, J., & Tennent, W.J., 2005 – *Melitaea emipunica* (Verity, 1919) stat. nov.: a hitherto unrecognised butterfly species from Europe (*Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae*). Entomologist's Gazette, No 56, pp 67-70.

Russell, P., & al., 2007 - Further investigations into *Melitaea telona* Fruhstorfer, 1908 (= *ogygia* Fruhstorfer, 1908; = *emipunica* Verity, 1919) (*Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae*), with observations on biology and distribution. Entomologist's Gazette 58: 137-166.

Varga, Z., Szabo, S. & Kozma, P., 2005 – *Melitaea ogygia kovacsi* Varga 1967 (*Lepidoptera: Nymphalidae*) in the Pannonia region: taxonomy, bionomy, conservation biology in Kuhn, E., Feldmann, R., Thomas, J.a & Settele, J (Eds), Studies on the Ecology and Conservation of Butterflies Europe, pp 65-68. Pensoft, Sofia – Moscow, 2005.

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

A chance to help - Drome

Do you have any butterfly records for the French department of Drome?

A comprehensive biological survey of the department is being carried out by the equivalent in Drome of one of our county natural history societies, to update the basis of their conservation advice to the department's public authorities. They would welcome any records, and in the light of our own recent experience EIG members might like to consider Drome as a holiday destination that could be useful as well as enjoyable.

Over each of the last few years we have spent several days exploring the department and find it a most attractive and varied area with a good range of butterflies. We have recorded about 100 species -- over a dozen Fritillaries; many blues including Meleager's, Green-underside and Baton Blues; Dryads, various 'Graylings' including False and Striped Graylings and Hermit; Large Tortoiseshell, Southern White Admiral; Eastern Wood White; Ilex and Blue-spot Hairstreaks; Swallowtail and Scarce Swallowtail; and the occasional Apollo.

It is surprising that a department so close to the main holiday hotspots is so little known. It benefits from being virtually at the meeting point of several major biological types, the Atlantic, Mediterranean and Central European elements on the outskirts of the French Alps, and the diversity of the butterflies reflects that. Drome extends from the Vercors national park in the north to Mont Ventoux in the south, and from east to west runs from the Col de Cabre to the Rhone. It has mountains to over 1400m, gorges, woods, marshes and grasslands and there are still plenty of rougher, traditionally farmed areas. There are enough roads to penetrate the wilder, out-of-the-way hinterland. The towns and villages are mostly small and few and far between, and there are several conveniently located camp-sites -- which is what we use. Records should be sent to the organiser M. Jean-Michel Faton who can be contacted [through the web site www.sympetrum.org] or by e-mail on ramieres@espaces-naturels.fr and he will advise on the preferred format for your records. Any correspondence should preferably be in French.

Joyce and Peter Gay

Majorca

I live in Bristol and have been a 'Butterfly Conservation' member for several years. I have recently bought a house in the east of Mallorca and will be spending a lot of time there from next spring. I plan to start recording Butterfly species on the Island (particularly in my own area near the City of Manacor) and wonder if my records might be of any interest. Do you know of anyone else that is recording in Mallorca and anywhere where I might be able to find recent recordings / species lists?

Andy Britton – email: andy.britton@hp.com

Little Fritillary, *Mellicta asteria*, a possible target survey species?



Little Fritillary (*Mellicta asteria*)

Of the *Mellicta* or small fritillaries, *asteria* is undoubtedly the most restricted in currently known range, at least as far as widely published literature is concerned. Eastern Switzerland with parts of western Austria and N E Italy appear to be the known extent. Phrases like “small & scattered populations”, “very local”, “extremely sporadic & very local” attempt to describe its occurrence within its range.

Having encountered most *Mellicta* species on travels in Europe over the years, our small group was very pleased this year to be able to report finding just one individual at each of two sites in second half of July. These were near the Fluelapass, between Davos and northern Engadine, and also in the Julierpass, near the southern Engadine valley. We also came across *Parnassius phoebus*, *Plebejus optilete*, *Erebia mnestra* and *Erebia tyndarus* at the first site, so wouldn't need much encouragement to return there, but it does beg the question of just how much is known of current *asteria* localities.

Incidentally, a decade or so ago Higgins & Riley and early editions of Whalley (Mitchell Beazley) reported “foodplant unknown”. More recent publications list Alpine Plantain, *Plantago alpina*, with the comment that eggs are laid on underside of leaves. Given the name “*asteria*”, we weren't surprised, at the time, that the first of our sightings was of a female sat on an aster family (possibly *Arnica montana*) flowerhead, appearing to be probing with her abdomen possibly towards egg-laying. Having left the site, reading later of larval foodplant, we hoped that photographs might reveal some eggs, but they didn't!

Hotel Aurora in Ardez have put us in touch with a Swiss butterfly group which regularly visits the Engadine, so we hope to hear of their knowledge of *asteria* distribution. However, given the published data, we'd be pleased if members might be interested in helping with some surveys. Do please let me have any recent records or other information which may be relevant.

Editors note: - Some EIG members may visit this area of Switzerland in July 2008.

Arctic circle for butterflies?

In the first EIG newsletter, one of the countries mentioned as especially keen to receive records is Finland. Despite a widespread academic research reputation e.g. Hannski et al, it seems there is a dearth of visitors reporting butterflies across the country. Yet of the Scandinavian nations, Finland has the highest proportion of its land mass within the Arctic circle. Perhaps, you may think, that explains it. But looking again at distribution maps of European butterflies will show that around 15 species mostly occur within the arctic circle. Another 10 or so are more widespread in Scandinavia than elsewhere in Europe, so it should perhaps be a more popular destination for butterfly watchers, photographers and naturalists.

A small group of us are intending to visit in the next couple of years, so if you've any experience to pass on, particularly any more up to date than the summer 1992 visits written up in the AES journal, please do contact us. If you haven't found a home for any records, do please let myself know and we will endeavour to put you in touch with the most relevant country contacts.

Editors note: We hope to keep the BC-EIG.org.uk website posted about where to send records. We would like to know of any new schemes not mentioned in EIG Newsletter 1.

Richard Smith – email: rgsoverton@boltblue.com

GETTING THE GAVARNIE BLUES



Habitat below the Cirque de Troumouse, just east of Gavarnie

Gavarnie is a very special place. It has two butterflies named after it. So far as I know, it's the only place that does. The Gavarnie Blue (*Agriades pyrenaicus*) – one of the rarest butterflies in the world – and the Gavarnie Ringlet (*Erebia gorgone*) are both named after this small skiing resort high up in the French Pyrenees. At 1,370 m, it is higher than the summit of Ben Nevis (the highest mountain in Britain, which is 1,344 m). And surrounding it are huge natural amphitheatres of rock. The rocky Cirque de Gavarnie, Cirque d'Estaubé and Cirque de Troumouse, all tower over Gavarnie. They lie within the National Park of the Pyrenees and shelter high meadows which form an eldorado for butterflies.

Gavarnie village is crowded with tourists, but the valley leading to Gavarnie is huge and there are connecting valleys, Ossoue, Haas and Bué, all with their own fragrant meadows and small farms that provide peaceful oases. These high meadows hold a profusion of butterfly species throughout the year. Even the high road to the Spanish border point, at 2270 m, called Port de Boucharo, has Mountain Clouded Yellows and several different species of Mountain Ringlet on the wing on fine summer days.



Gavarnie Blue basking



Gavarnie Blue mud puddling

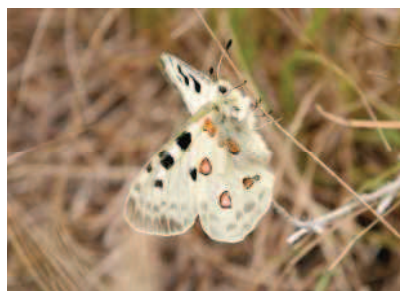
The Gavarnie Ringlet you may never positively identify, because it is very similar to the other *Erebia* genus Ringlets on the wing, except for its slightly duller underside. But, if you go at the right time and look along the muddy edges of mountain streams in the Ossoue Valley or in the valley above the Lac des Gloriettes, you should find some Gavarnie Blues. Although called a “Blue”, a clearer description would be the Gavarnie Silver. They are tiny silver butterflies which congregate on the edge of mountain streams and probe the mud with their tongues. The theory is that they absorb nutrients from the mud, although I am not sure how much is known about this behaviour. Do we know what nutrients are taken up, or why some butterfly species like to congregate on the edge of watercourses or around large puddles and “mud puddle”, while other species apparently have no interest in doing this? I would be very interested in comments and suggestions on this topic.

There is an enormous number of other butterflies to discover too. When I was there this summer (early July 2007), I met a Naturetrek tour, led by Mark Galliot. He deftly wields a butterfly net to identify specimens and this year had netted 65 different species in a week. In 2006, he had found no less than 87 different species, but 2007's poor summer weather had stretched right down to the Mediterranean and had apparently deterred migrants from further south. Neither of us saw a single Painted Lady, usually one of the commonest species, or any Long-tailed Blues, which you would normally expect to find at least occasionally.

One of the first butterflies that I did see in the Ossoue valley was a beautifully fresh Large Blue. This was quickly followed by a Swallowtail, and there were many different Mountain Ringlet species, including our own Small Mountain Ringlet (*Erebia epiphron*), numerous different fritillary species, frequent Clouded Yellows, and, of course, also Apollos and Clouded Apollos. These magnificent large white butterflies swoop down the hillsides, moving so fast and so far that photographing them becomes an athletic challenge.



Large Blue in the Ossoue valley



Apollos fly regularly across the hillsides around Gavarnie

The over-riding impression is of the sheer density of butterflies in the mountain valleys around Gavarnie. There are just so many butterflies, of so many different species. We have nothing like it in Britain. High meadows that have remained the same for generations, sometimes grazed by sheep or cows, or cut annually for hay, are the places to go if you enjoy seeing butterflies. The number of butterflies per square metre, the range of different species, and the ease of seeing them provides a wonderful experience. What a pity we don't have the equivalent conditions here.

Gavarnie is a small skiing centre in the far south of France close to the Spanish border. It is about 40 km south of *Lourdes*, which is 150 km south-west of *Toulouse*.

How to get there: You can fly to Toulouse or Lourdes or reach Lourdes by train, but thereafter you will need a car. Cycling is possible, but the gradients are steep and long, and this is only possible for the super-fit.

Where to stay: There are hotels in Gavarnie and in the village of Gèdres, which is about 10 km north of Gavarnie. Gavarnie itself is a car-free resort, but you will probably not want to spend much time in the resort itself unless you are staying in a central hotel.

When to go: Any time is good, but Gavarnie Blues fly from June to early August.

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David Newland is the author of *Discover Butterflies in Britain* (WildGuides, 2006)

www.discoverbutterflies.com.

Butterflies of the Croatian Islands

Rudi Verovnik (Slovenia) and I have recently reviewed the literature for records of butterflies from the islands in the Adriatic off the coast of Croatia. Together with our own records between 1981 and 2007 - and some from Rob Parker, when he was based in the former Yugoslavia, a total of 110 species has been recorded. The full results and analysis will be published in the *Entomologist's Gazette* in 2008.



Stiniva Bay - Vis

There are 15 islands larger than 30km², from Cres and Krk in the north to Korčula and Mljet in the south. Most are accessible by car ferry from ports such as Brestova, Zadar, Split and Dubrovnik. Krk is connected to the mainland by a road bridge to the south of Rijeka. A relaxing holiday by the sea can be combined with some serious butterfly watching, at any time between late April and September. It may be best to avoid late July and August, when Italian tourists arrive en masse, and it gets very hot.

Habitat changes have occurred, even in the 26 years since I first visited the islands. Due to the reduction of grazing by sheep and goats and abandonment of walled fields, Mediterranean scrub and forest is taking over from open grassland. Since the mid-1980s, there have been no records of Dusky Meadow Brown (*Hyponphele lycaon*), and only two of The Hermit (*Chazara briseis*), both characteristic butterflies of extensive grassland. Nevertheless, these islands still have a rich butterfly fauna, to enjoy and hopefully conserve.



Invasion by Juniper Scrub - Cres

Our observations have added 88 new species for individual islands over-and-above those recorded in the literature, but only eight for the islands as a whole: High Brown Fritillary (*Argynnis adippe*), Map Butterfly (*Araschnia levana*), Dusky Meadow Brown (*H. lycaon*), Sloe Hairstreak (*Satyrium acaciae*), Short-tailed Blue (*Everes argiades*), Idas Blue (*Plebeius idas*), Oriental Marbled Skipper (*Carcharodus orientalis*) and Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*).

The distribution of Graylings (*Hipparchia* spp) in Croatia is beginning to be better understood, but more investigation is needed. A study by Zdravko Lorković in 1976 demonstrated that Rock Grayling (*H. alcyone*) does not occur in Croatia and provided the first distribution map of Eastern Rock Grayling (*H. syriaca*). Our observations confirmed the latter species on Dugi otok and added the islands of Kornat, Brač and Vis. Lorković found the very similar Woodland Grayling (*H. fagi*) on Cres, Krk, Brač and Hvar. We found it additionally on Dugi otok. Tristan Lafranchis (*Butterflies of Europe*, 2004) gives useful tips on separating these species in the field by examination of the Julien organ.

The record of Macedonian Grayling (*H. senthes*) on Cres (Branko Micevski, 2005), 200km north west of its formerly known range, throws doubt on all the records of Grayling (*H. semele*) from these islands. Certainly, I have observed Graylings on Cres which are much brighter and larger than our own Grayling and those I have found along the Slovenian coast.

Regression analysis by Roger Dennis has shown that the butterfly fauna of Hvar, Korčula and Mljet is probably under-recorded, although these islands are popular holiday destinations. We are sure that there are more species to be found and old records to be re-confirmed. The spectacular Dalmatian Ringlet (*Proterebia afra*) - see photo - was known to occur on Korčula

and was found on the island of Pag by our Slovenian contributor Valerija Zakšek on 27 April 2004.

Dalmatian Ringlet (*Proterebia afra*)



Another puzzle to be solved is the absence of some species that are widespread on the Croatian mainland - Dark Green Fritillary (*Argynnis aglaja*), Knapweed Fritillary (*Melitaea phoebe*), Mazarine Blue (*Polyommatus semiargus*), Chalkhill Blue (*Meleageria coridon*) and Essex Skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*).

One disappointment to us in undertaking this review was the lack of input from Croatian lepidopterists. Our main contact went on maternity leave. We hope that better collaboration can be achieved with Croatia in future, perhaps through Butterfly Conservation Europe. If any readers have contacts in Croatia or unpublished observations of butterflies on the islands, I would be pleased to hear from you. I can also provide species lists for particular islands if you are thinking of visiting (david.withrington@ntlworld.com).

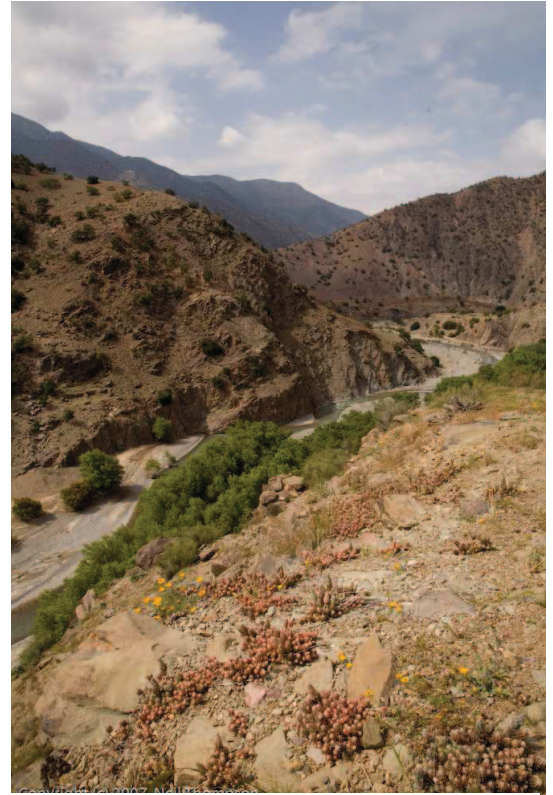
David Withrington

Spring In Morocco

An account of a one-week trip, 15-22 April 2007

This was a privately arranged trip with just 3 of us. We flew into Marrakech and rented a car there, firstly driving north to the Middle Atlas Mountains and staying in Ifrane, then back south to the High Atlas Mountains (photo, right), staying in Ouirgane.

We arrived in Marrakech on a perfectly clear, sunny day with the snow capped High Atlas Mountains providing an impressive backdrop. After picking up our rental car we navigated out of Marrakech and onto the open road leading north towards the Middle Atlas Mountains. On the way we travelled through a flat, agricultural plain, seeing several unidentifiable Whites, but also a few small, yellow butterflies that we assumed were probably Greenish Black-tip. We had been warned that the Moroccan traffic police were much in evidence and we were unfortunately stopped for exceeding the speed limit while coming out of a village into a desolate looking, rocky area. The policemen were very understanding however and let us on our way. As we pulled away I saw a definite Greenish Black-tip on the road in front of us, but we couldn't stop as this would have been too difficult to explain to the policemen! The story was to resume however several days later.



High Atlas Mountains

As we got closer to the mountains some more promising habitat appeared and we made our first voluntary butterfly stop. The steep, rocky gully next to the road gave us a number of species, including Moroccan Orange Tip and the *cramera* subspecies of Brown Argus, which was to prove to be the local form. By the time we arrived in Ifrane however, we were somewhat concerned about an apparent lack of good habitat and or the fact that we may have been too early in the season.



Chapmans Green Hairstreak

Nevertheless, our first morning dawned bright and sunny and before breakfast Peter found an excellent site not ten minutes walk from the hotel. All three of us returned there after breakfast to record Moroccan Hairstreak in excellent numbers, along with Rosy Grizzled Skipper, thirty or more nectaring Brimstones, Western Dappled Whites, Green Hairstreaks and others. There were also some beautiful flowers. However, over the next couple of days we explored further

afield and nowhere had the diversity of flora or fauna that this first site had. The hand of man was everywhere and I don't think I've seen a landscape that was so grazed and or cultivated – and this is not a rich landscape in terms of soils or mildness of climate.

We visited several sites mentioned in the Collins field guide and wondered how any butterflies could exist there, let alone ones with specialist requirements. There were however a few highlights, singletons of Chapman's Green Hairstreak (photo above) and False Baton Blue being notable. The weather was also starting to deteriorate, so in view of the paucity of butterflies we decided to head south one day early. This proved to be a good decision as the following day began with some heavy rain.



Greenish Black-tip

The drive south was a long one, we estimated ten hours. As lunchtime approached, we neared the spot where we had been stopped for speeding several days before and decided to stop to look for Greenish Black-tip. As if by magic, the clouds parted and the sun came out. We parked the car and after a few minutes a Greenish Black-tip was seen, but far better was to come, as up to half a dozen Greenish Black-tips literally converged on, and flew round, the vehicle. All we could assume was that our car was

providing a wind break on the open, rocky plateau, as the butterflies stayed for the duration of our stop, often basking to allow photographs to be taken. We finally tore ourselves away and headed further south, the clouds reforming and the drizzle restarting as we did so.

We arrived safely in the High Atlas, the habitat looking a little more promising as it was too precipitous in places for agriculture or even grazing. We did learn however that the village we were staying in would be under water next year due to the construction of a dam. Exploration over the next few days proved not so disappointing as in the Middle Atlas, but numbers of butterflies were still low. At that time, it was actually warmer in the UK, and coupled with the fact that the Moroccan winter rains still hadn't ceased, a month after they normally did, made us think that the season was probably late.

On one day we went right over the High Atlas, essentially into the Sahara desert itself, where goats were climbing several metres into the thorn bushes to graze the fresh shoots. The butterfly highlight of this day was a small colony of Allard's Silver-line (photo, right) on the south slope of the mountains. Probably the best site though was again very close to our hotel, although this time about ten minutes drive away. Highlights were probably False Mallow Skipper in good numbers and Desert Orange Tip, the latter being identified after being "caught" on the wing with a camera! After seeing the Desert Orange Tip we also found its larval foodplant clinging to the nearby rock face, with a possible mature larva there also.



Allands Silver-line

On the final day the weather again deteriorated, the hail being so thick on the ground it looked like it had snowed. The rain was also torrential, with red, soil-laden water pouring off the hillsides, erosion happening before our eyes. Overall we only saw 32 species of butterfly and the number of individuals also seemed to be low. However, we saw a number of species that are very restricted in Europe and therefore not easy to see. Of biggest concern however was the desolation of the mountain landscape, crops often being grown on wafer thin, rocky soil and grasslands grazed to a (brown) snooker table finish.

Neil Thompson

BULGARIA



Introduction

This self-organised European trip, the latest in a long series, was planned to combine visits to recognised and recommended sites plus an element of exploration based on map analysis and a helping of serendipity. Whilst Rila and Pirin feature on most published trips, the Rhodopi mountains receive less attention and so became the focus for the second part of the trip. The map above shows areas 1, 2, and 3 centred on our hotels in Bansko, Melnik, and Siroka Laka respectively and these form the three sections of this report. To avoid repetition, the report does not list species noted from every location but adds new species incrementally as and when they occurred.

Wednesday 11 July: transit to our first destination, Bansko

Our departure involved an early start for the flight to Sofia followed by a slow drive around the busy and bumpy southern ring road to the route south down the Struma valley. At least the road south of the Pernik turn was excellent due to recent EU money and Dupnica was reached in good time but with black skies and thunder rumbling our planned stop near Rila looked fated. The junctions did not accord with the map and the expected Rila turn did not appear. So we took a right towards Bobosevo instead and passed over Route 1 stopping shortly thereafter around 4pm. The sun came out to greet us and so did Marbled Whites *melanargia galathea*, Short-tailed Blues *everes argiades*, Idas Blue *plebejus idas* or Silver-studded Blue *plebejus argus*, and Common Blues *polyommatus icarus*, and Brown Argus *aricia agestis*. Inspection through a lens of the male sequined blues proved inconclusive as the diagnostic foreleg spur was absent suggesting Idas but the fairly broad dark blue upperside outer margins pointed to Silver-studded. Rightly or wrongly Idas became the default mode for the rest of the trip and this uncertainty was to stay with us until the last day.

At the first Rila sign on Route 1 south of Kocerinova we turned left along poplar-lined roads through Rila taking the next left to Padala, chosen because it was not a through road and therefore likely to be quiet. The vegetation was lush here with much bramble blossom and dwarf elder *sambucus ebulus*, and we stopped a couple of hundred metres up the lane in overcast humid conditions. Here were three Woodland Grayling *hipparchia fagi* that regularly returned to rest on the same tree trunk, White-letter Hairstreaks *satyrium w-album*, Sooty Coppers *lycaena tityrus*, Eastern Baton Blue *pseudophilotes vicrama*, Holly Blue *celastrina argiolus*, and Chapman's Blues *polyommatus thersites*.



Woodland Grayling (*hipparchia fagi*)



White-letter Hairstreak
(*satyrium w-album*)

Greatly encouraged we pushed on to our hotel in Bansko.

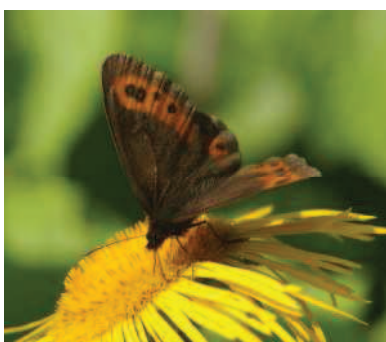
PART 1: PIRIN FROM BANSKO **Thursday 12 July: to Vihren Hut**

After yesterday's drive we opted for a fairly local trip today taking the road south from Bansko steadily climbing through mixed woodland aiming for the end of the road at the Vihren Hut.

Although quite 'piney' there was plenty of floral attraction, particularly *inula*, and we stopped by a clump of this growing alongside a trough. Although there were no puddlers – probably too early in the day – Large Ringlets *erebia euryale* were abundant.

Stop two was on a sharp left bend and despite the cool breeze coming up the valley it 'looked good'. And so it proved: male and female Large Blues *maculinea arion* were here along with male Silver-washed Fritillary *argynnis paphia*, Large Wall Brown *lasioommata maera*, and Clouded Yellow *colias crocea*.

Stop 3 was made at the coach park near the ski lifts where the tarmac extends to a vast apron cleared in the woods creating a flowery habitat. Mazarine Blues *cyaniris semiargus* were here along with several Painted Ladies *Vanessa cardui*, the ubiquitous Large Ringlets in an increasing range of forms, and a Peacock *inachis io*. Another left hairpin became stop #4 and produced Pearl-bordered Fritillary *boloria euphrosyne*, and an unidentified (though photographed) 'blind' Ringlet.



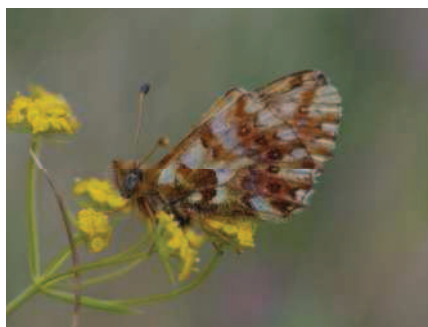
Large Ringlets *erebia euryale*



Out of the trees now and not too far from the Hut around 2,000 metres we made a further halt at the roadside in grassy meadowland and were treated to the stunning fast-flying, fiery red male Balkan Copper *lycaena candens*, a solitary Clouded Apollo *parnassius mnemosyne*, Turquoise Blues *polyommatus dorylas*, Weaver's Fritillary *boloria dia*, Ottoman Brassy Ringlets *erebia ottomana*, Eastern Large Heaths *coenonympha rhodopensis*, Woodland Ringlet *erebia medusa*, and an unidentified large Grizzled Skipper type.



Balkan Copper, male (*lycaena candens*)



Weaver's Fritillary (*boloria dia*)



Eastern Large Heath (*coenonympha rhodopensis*)



Ottoman Brassy Ringlet (*erebia ottomana*)

A couple of hundred metres further on we stopped again to inspect a puddling spot and located a Small Copper *lycaena phlaeas* in the grass nearby.

The Hut was reached by 2.30pm where we duly parked. Butterflies had 'died' at this altitude at c2,000 metres and there was very little about, including erebias. (The word 'hut' is a misnomer as the large, two-storey stone building is more like a hotel). Our stroll upstream took us through a herd of horses and some of their associated flies but after about half a mile we decided to turn back as the only thing happening was the views.

Friday 13 July: the road to Semkovo north-east of Bansko

Our deliberations over the map last night led us to take a look at the road to Semkovo not too far east of Razlog. We liked the fact that it was on the south-facing slope of Rila, was not a through road and therefore unlikely to be carrying much traffic.

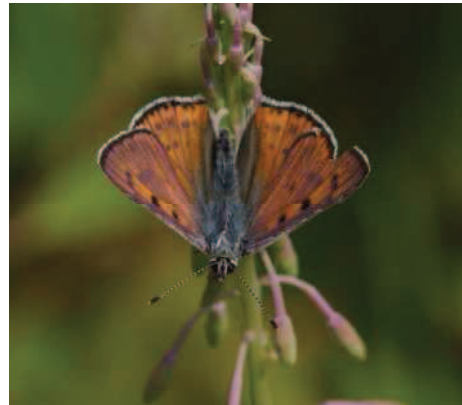
By-passing Razlog, we turned left some 10k further on and entered a wide agricultural vale towards Belica, a medium-sized town. A short first stop at the weedy roadside yielded Small Heath *coenonympha pamphilus*. Belica town was plain and busy with nothing to commend it. The intensive agriculture continued north of the town but the valley was becoming narrower.

As the road narrowed further through a gorge we stopped again and located Essex Skipper *thymelicus lineolus* and some Frits that rode the updraughts so well that we couldn't catch/identify them. Our next stop was to prove the hot-spot of the day parking at the roadside across from the short driveway to a redundant water works bearing the name

'Vitkovice'. Here we found Marbled *Brenthis daphne* and Heath Fritillaries *mellicta athalia*, Eastern Wood White *Leptidea duponcheli*, three Coppers including Purple-shot *Lycaena alciphron*, Comma *Polygonia c-album*, and Clouded Yellow *helice*. We stayed here a good while before pushing on through the 'horrible Centreparc' development of Semkovo (though there were some interesting floriferous meadows created by the building process).



Eastern Wood White (*leptidea duponcheli*)



Purple-shot Copper (*lycaena alciphron*)

On our descent we stopped across from some of the developments and found Queen of Spain Fritillaries *Issoria lathonia*, Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius*, and Wood White *Leptidea sinapis*. On our return journey, stopping again at the gorge, the Frits turned out to be Knapweed *Melitaea phoebe* and the earlier species were still there sitting, it seemed, on the same flower heads. Our final stop was made a bit further on and produced a Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*.

Saturday 14 July: transit to Melnik and PART 2

Away from the building site known as 'Bansko' by 9.15 for the journey to our second destination at Melnik with opportunistic stops intended en route. We had heard that 'the bridge at Predel' was a good place but we couldn't find it almost certainly due to the extensive road widening scheme underway in the valley. So we took a right towards Dolno Osonovo and a short way up it found male Meleager's Blues *Meleageria daphnis* sitting attentively for the camera. The habitat was unpromising as it was largely agricultural fringe so we turned back before reaching the town.

The road down the Struma valley is good and progress was rapid. We made our second stop alongside the river where the old road follows a meander to the right but it was very windy and not much was on the wing, other than Dingy Skippers *Erynnis tages* and a Scarce Swallowtail blown along at speed.

As soon as we saw a potential stopping place after lunch we took it, this being the left turn to Dolna Gradesnica, and we parked up as soon as we had crossed the railway on a track that led down to the river. Tiny Lesser spotted Fritillaries *Melitaea trivialis* no larger than a Small Heath were here as well as Southern White Admirals *Limenitis reducta* patrolling up and down the path and frequently jousting with Mallow Skippers *Carcharodus alceae*. The riverbank was very quiet apart from hordes of Beautiful Demoiselles and other damselflies.



Lesser-spotted Fritillary (*Melitaea trivia*)



Southern White Admiral (*Limenitis reducta*)

Our next stop was planned for Ilindenci, mentioned in the literature. Before reaching the town we pulled in at the roadside to investigate some windy field margins. We spent a long time trying to determine whether we had found Reverdin's Blue *Plebejus argyrognomon* – they somehow seemed to be different to what we believed to be Idas Blues – but in all honesty we could not reach an absolute conclusion on the matter. The car was parked in the shade of a tree and we did the Idas/Silver-studded/Reverdin's routine all over again on some butterflies nectaring on a patch of mint.



Reverdin's Blue (*Plebejus argyrognomon*)



Meleager's Blue (*Meleageria daphnis*)

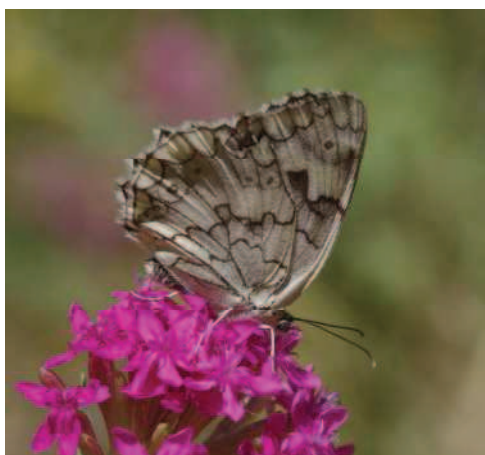
We wandered down to the famed Arts Centre and continued on the level down a track. This was a lovely spot, well vegetated, and sporting several blues including Anomalous Blues *Agrodiaetus admetus*, plus Southern Comma *Polygonia egea*, Eastern Bath White *pontia edusa*, and was it an Olive or Grizzled Skipper? We never found out for sure.

Back on the road again, by-passing the large town of Sandanski on our left, the turn to Melnik appeared. Ahead of us lay the strangest landscape, soft alluvial deposits weathered into steeples and razor-backed ridges. It was pleasing to note that agriculture had not encroached too much on the natural habitat. Melnik is a picturesque town with a canalised river running down the main street, as at Bansko, but altogether more attractive. We found our hotel at the top end of town and a Southern White Admiral glided past us as we got out of the car.

PART 2: MELNIK

Sunday 15 July: on foot to Rozen Monastery

At 1pm we made our third attempt to find the footpath through the woods and over the ridge to Rozen, having spent the entire morning looking for it, and this time we were in luck! The path led up the dry river bed into thick deciduous woodland mercifully cool on a very hot day. The butterflies en route were excellent and new species included Nettle-tree *Libythea celtis*, 'regular' and Balkan Marbled Whites *Melanargia larissa* (a woodland species?!), a fleeting Cardinal *Argynnis pandora*, Wall *Lasiommata megera*, Small *Thymelicus sylvestris*, and Large Skippers *Ochlodes sylvanus*, some very large Eastern Bath Whites, Large White *Pieris brassicae*, and many Meadow Browns *Maniola jurtina*.



Balkan Marbled White (*Melanargia Larissa*)



Sooty Copper (*Lycaena tytirus*)

Once out of the woods in fierce heat the climb to the ridge was quite steep and slippery on the loose gravel. Steady lines of tourists led to and from the monastery and car park and we joined them for a brief peer inside but not before we'd topped up our water bottles from the fountain/trough in the courtyard, pushing-in through the many honey bees that were also taking-in moisture.

Back in the woods on the return leg a solitary Chequered Blue *scolitantides orion* suddenly dropped in to nectar on scabious. Once again, this beautiful butterfly had turned-up for us unexpectedly as a singleton with no evidence of its larval host plant *sedum* and on the wing later than usual.

Monday 16 July: Kamenica via Jane Sandanski

We had chosen today's destination from perusing the map seeking a location on the south-facing slopes of Pirin, having already experienced the north side from Bansko.

We made our first stop before Liljanova in a lush wooded area with damp uncut meadows and stumbled upon a lovely spot. Marbled *Brenthis daphne*, and Dark Green Fritillaries *Argynnis aglaja*, a solitary Map *Araschnia levana* visiting dwarf elder, and many other species were here and we stayed for an hour until 11am before moving on. Once through Jane Sandanski above the deciduous belt we stopped again amongst pines then pushed on through unpromising pines to the end of the road at Kamenica, a settlement that seemed to be semi-derelict and yet with much new building taking place. The clearings around the village were, however, very floriferous and we walked up the forest track for a while coming across a colony (probably a wrong term for this wandering species) of fresh Queen of Spain Fritillaries and several Nettle-trees puddling where a stream crossed the track. Horse flies liked this spot too. Silver-washed Fritillaries patrolled the rides.



Queen of Spain Fritillary (*issoria lathonia*)



Nettle-tree (*libythea celtis*)

Peter Bygate

The year in Provence - butterflies of Var

Var is a “département” of southern France which stretches broadly between Toulon in the west and Frejus to the east. It extends inland northwards to include part of the Gorges du Verdon, thus making it an extensive département in terms of area, and very varied in terms of terrain with the Med to the south and rocky wilderness to the north at an altitude of around 1000m. The vegetation is largely dominated by evergreen cork oak in the Med region, with pine and evergreen holm oak further north.

As such, Var is host to some 155 species of butterfly, out of a total of some 240 for France in total. I have been fortunate enough to spend from mid-April to end-September in Var in both 2006 and 2007 and have, by extensive exploration, seen 146 of the Var species. This has enabled me to get a good picture over two years of the species that fly here, their preferred terrain, broods and flight periods.

Although there are butterflies on the wing for some ten months of the year, the season starts in March and by April there are quite a few species out in the south of Var. At this time, flowers are in bloom everywhere and the vegetation is quite verdant. By the end of June, however, the area within 30km of the Med becomes quite baked as the temperature reaches 35C regularly and often 40C, and very few butterflies can cope with these conditions.

It is a curious region in that many species that are widespread and “common” elsewhere in France do not occur (or are uncommon) in the south-eastern corner, including Var. In some cases they have been “replaced” by more heat-loving species; white admiral (*Limenitis camilla*) does not occur and is replaced by the often-common southern white admiral (*Limenitis reducta*); similarly there is no small-pearl bordered fritillary (*Boloria selene*), while pearl-bordered fritillary (*Boloria euphrosyne*) is often common; brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) is uncommon but it's more colourful cousin, the cleopatra (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*) is ubiquitous in the region. Other species such as purple emperor (*Apatura iris*) and map (*Araschnia levana*) do not occur in Var and small tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) and peacock (*Inachis io*) are rarely encountered.

The most impressive spring butterflies include the beautiful provence orange tip (*Anthocharis euphenoides*), and both southern and spanish festoons (*Zerynthia polyxena* and *Z. rumina* respectively). *Polyxena* has an easterly distribution in Europe extending west as far as central southern France, and *rumina* extends eastwards from Spain, so that Var and the surrounding départements are the only areas where both occur. Both are amazing butterflies, the margins of *polyxena* always appear to me to have been drawn with a spiograph. *Euphenoides* is very similar to the more usual orange tip (*A. cardamines*) but the male has a beautiful yellow pastel colour instead of the more familiar white of *cardamines*.

Early blues include the tiny baton (*Pseudophilotes baton*), chapmans (*Polyommatus thersites*), and Osiris blue (*Cupido osiris*). Osiris is generally stated in books to be very localised, although I have found it in quite a few localities, but never more than a few in one place. The same is true for yellow-banded skipper (*Pyrgus sidae*), a large pyrgus species with a helpfully distinct underside to assist identification; there are some twelve pyrgus (grizzled skipper) species in France and identification can sometimes be difficult or impossible without resorting to examination of genitalia, which I would not do as I have no scientific need to. Another early-emerging pyrgus in Var is rosy grizzled skipper (*Pyrgus onopordi*), also considered in books to be uncommon, but is often out in April which limits the number of species it



Rosy grizzled skipper (*Pyrgus onopordi*)

could be confused with. Other April rarities I have been fortunate enough to see this year are provence hairstreak (*Tomares ballus*), the underside (it always settles with closed wings) looks like the forewing of a small copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*) and the hindwing of green hairstreak (*Callophrys rubi*). Another highly localised April species is chapmans green hairstreak (*Callophrys avis*) which is very similar to its ubiquitous cousin *rubi* except for a more reddish tinge generally and characteristic red hair around the palpi.

In May, an excellent butterfly month in Var, the provence chalkhill blue (*Lysandra hispana*) emerges, thoughtfully some two months before its widespread cousin chalkhill blue



Two-tailed Pasha (*Charaxes jasius*)

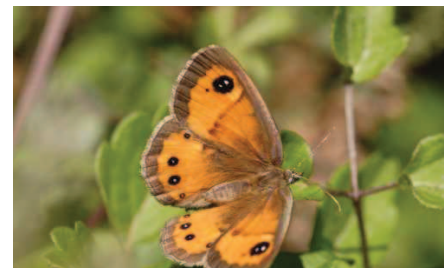
(*Lysandra coridon*), making identification a lot easier. *Hispana* does have a second brood in late August when it often flies with *coridon*. Two of the more exotic species make an appearance in May: two-tailed pasha (*Charaxes jasius*), a butterfly the size of a small aeroplane, and the nettle tree butterfly (*Libythea celtis*) a butterfly with strange shaped forewings, square at the tips and with a large bump on the hindwing costa, and very long palpi, making it unmistakable. *Jasius* is not particularly common, but it is so large and has such a powerful flight, that even in small

numbers it is frequently seen. It is well known that it is attracted to rotting fruit because of the fermenting alcohol, and it has been seen sitting on wine glasses; I use a "bait" of rotting banana mashed with port (any strongly alcoholic brew seems to work just as well) which *jasius* cannot resist, and once it has been savouring the mixture (its proboscis is like an oil pipeline) for a few minutes, it becomes quite approachable, and has been known to break into a few verses of "show me the way to Amarillo".

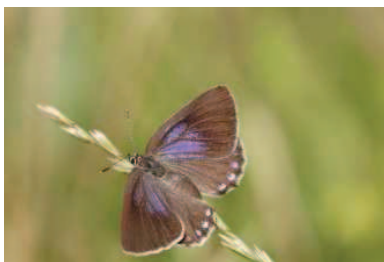


Large tortoiseshell
(*Nymphalis polychloros*)

An occasional large tortoiseshell (*Nymphalis polychloros*) may put in appearance, having just emerged from hibernation, and in very good years also a camberwell beauty (*Nymphalis antiopa*) or two. I was lucky enough to find a local site for amandas blue (*Polyommatus amandus*) at an altitude of 250m, whereas *amandus* usually seems to occur at higher altitudes of 1000m or so.



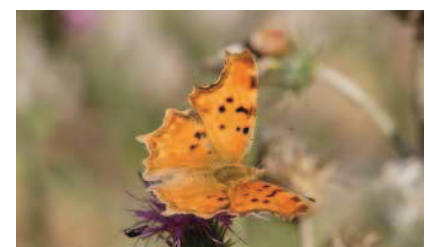
Spanish Gatekeeper (*Pyronia bathseba*)



Spanish Purple Hairstreak (*Laeosopis*)

Another site in central Var is home to two Iberian species to emerge in May, spanish gate keeper (*Pyronia bathseba*) and spanish purple hairstreak (*Laeosopis evippus*). The books suggest that *bathseba* is widespread in Var, but that has not been my experience.

Although not actually seen in Var, I was fortunate enough to see a southern comma (*Polygonia egea*) in the neighbouring département of Alpes Maritimes, and it is such a rarity that I have included mention and a photo here.



Southern Comma (*Polygonia egea*)

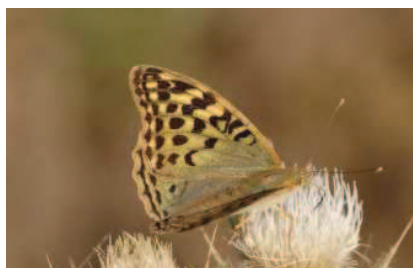
In June, there is a mass emergence of *satyrium* hairstreaks, and at one site in particular it has been possible to count fifty or more each of blue spot hairstreak (*Satyrium spini*), which is usually encountered in singles, similarly sloe hairstreak (*Satyrium acaciae*), ilex hairstreak (*Satyrium ilicis*), false ilex hairstreak (*Satyrium esculi*), and a few of the rarer but widespread white letter hairstreak (*Satyrium w-album*), which the books suggest is uncommon, but this has not been quite

my experience. The most common satyrium in the dryer south is *esculi*, which can sometimes be counted in hundreds. The satyrium species are strongly attracted to yellow *helichrysum* flowers, and in areas where *helichrysum* is present, this is all they appear to nectar on. The very localised twin-spot fritillary (*Brenthis hecate*) emerges in late May as does pearl-bordered fritillary (*Boloria euphrosyne*) which is often common, and the eerily-named great sooty satyr (*Satyrus ferula*).

As mentioned earlier, from the end of June until early September, southern Var is baked dry. Temperatures reach 35C or more on most days in high summer and rainfall is sparse. In fact, this year it has not rained since 6 May (this article was written on 13 September). Most butterflies disappear completely, and those that are rash enough to emerge seem to spend all their time trying to escape the heat of the direct sun, often settling deep in vegetation or by resting end-on to the sun to minimise their profile. In late August a few species re-emerge as a second brood possibly augmented by migrants. The most common butterfly in September by far is lang's short-tailed blue (*Leptotes pirithous*), which appears everywhere on cultivated flowers, and can be counted in hundreds.



Lang's short-tailed blue (*Leptotes pirithous*)



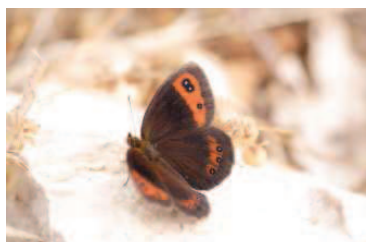
Cardinal (*Argynnis Pandora*)

Not as common, but so large it can't be missed, is the cardinal (*Argynnis pandora*), a close relative of the silver washed fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*) which it resembles in terms of markings for both sexes, although *pandora* is slightly larger and a beautiful deep bronze green, magnificent when fresh. It is a powerful flyer and females seem to outnumber males about 5 to 1.



Bath White (*Pontia daplidice*)

Bath white (*Pontia daplidice*) second brood emerges in September, looking very fresh, so it assumed that this is a second brood, not just a late migration.



Autumn Ringlelet (*Erebia neoridas*)

Many satyrid species come into their own in September, with false grayling (*Arethusana arethusa*) emerging in mid-August, in thousands in one northern Var locality at least, and tree grayling (*Hipparchia statilinus*) emerging in similar numbers at the end of August. Autumn ringlet (*Erebia neoridas*) emerges across most of northern Var in early September and is quite common and unmistakable, appearing almost black in flight and the only *erebia* species flying at the time. Another quaintly named satyrid, the hermit (*Chazara briseis*), emerges in late August; *briseis*' range in France is reducing alarmingly and it is now quite a rarity. Although a satyrid species, it appears almost white in flight and glides effortlessly over higher-altitude meadows in the manner of a large fritillary.

This is only a small selection of the species that fly in Var, which is fortunate to have such a wide diversity of species and, on occasions, great numbers. A great place to spend a summer or two butterfly-watching!

I keep a record on the website butterfliesoffrance.com, although the 2007 sightings and photos will only be included in late October after I return to the UK.

Roger Gibbons

Pyrgus warrenensis (Warren's Skipper) near the Bernina Pass, 2007

Bernard Watts

This note describes one aspect of a recent visit with Ted Benton on 3 and 4 August to look for *P. warrenensis* in a valley close to the Bernina Pass, SW Switzerland. The valley is typically glacial with wide-open slopes on one side and steeper screes on the other. A large stream runs down the valley bottom cutting into it to produce calcareous rocky outcrops in several places with sheltered areas near them. The flora is diverse with plenty of nectar plants and, in particular, *Helianthemum nummularium* (Rock Rose), a larval foodplant of *P. alveus* (Large Grizzled Skipper) and, I understand, of *warrenensis* too. Many *Pyrgus* insects were found in the more sheltered areas by the stream, at about 2100 m altitude, though a few were also seen on the more exposed slopes nearby.

Most *Pyrgus* spp in Europe have one or more external signature characteristics that allow an insect to be identified in principle, given a clear enough view. Unfortunately, though, there is often individual variation, and in order to discriminate between some similar species it can be necessary to weigh up a set of characteristics, possibly on both the upper- and underside, and consider circumstantial evidence, too, such as geographical location, flight time and altitude. For a photographer who does not capture insects, and rarely has a long series from one site, identification can be particularly tricky since it is hard to get a decent underside picture when *Pyrgus* spp are active and vice-versa when they are roosting.

Warrenensis is usually described as being like a small version of *alveus* with very small white spots on the upper-forewing. Therefore, it would seem that *warrenensis* ought to be easy to identify. As an aside, though, it should be noted that *alveus* is in fact rather difficult to identify from external appearance alone because it has no notable signature characteristic. Furthermore, it is probably the most variable *Pyrgus* sp in Europe, both inter- and intra- racially. Thus, as often as not, *alveus* is identified by eliminating other possibilities. Also, the variability of *alveus* in size and spotting may result in confusion with *warrenensis*, especially in photographs with no record of size.

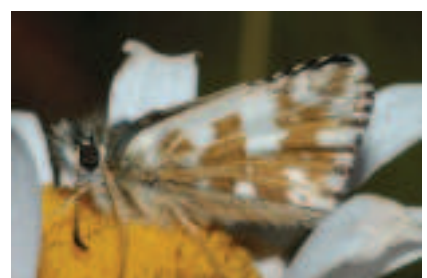
On 3 August the weather was overcast and rather cold. Nevertheless, it was eventually possible to find quite a number of butterflies, especially *Pyrgus* spp, by diligently searching the tops of grass stems and certain tall Daisies used for roosting. Very fortunately there was a short period in the afternoon when the cloud cover thinned and the temperature rose a little. In those conditions it was possible to photograph the under-hindwings of a number of roosting insects and then their uppersides after placing them on a rock, where there was just enough warmth for them to open their wings and yet not fly; or, if they did, it was just a short distance.

Nine good picture pairs are shown (1 to 9), and it is clear that some have notably small upper-forewing white spots, which are comparable to or even smaller than those of male *warrenensis* illustrated by Lewington (1) or in the photograph shown by Lafranchis (2).

As regards wing-size, I was able to record the magnification of my photographs; the measured size



1. male, fw = 14.0 mm





2. male, fw = 13.6 mm



3. male, fw = 14.3 mm



4. male, fw = 14.2 mm



5. male, fw = 14.9 mm



6. female, fw = 14.0 mm





7. male, fw = 14.3 mm



8. female, fw = 15.0 mm



9. female, fw = 13.3 mm



of each insect's forewing is stated to an accuracy of about 0.4 mm. There is thus no doubt that all nine insects were of a similar size that corresponds to, say, *alveus*. (If all goes well through the various stages of production, the pictures should reproduce to a common scale, 2.5 times life size on A4 paper).

Even without identifying the species, it is clear that size rules out *warrenensis* as a possibility. I must confess, however, that in the field I was inclined to think that one or two of these insects might have been *warrenensis*.

The next day was fine and sunny, and three seemingly very small insects with small spots were found in the morning, about 100 m from the roosting site found the previous afternoon. These insects were



10. female
fw = 11.6 mm

11. male
fw = 11 mm
approx





12. female, fw = 11.5 mm

quite active, of course, so there was no easy way to get both good upperside- and good underside pictures of them all, but with one female I was successful. The pictures of these insects (10 to 12) are produced to the same scale as all the others.

Compared to the roosting insects found the previous day, the measured wing-sizes are confirmed to be much smaller. Also the upper-forewing white spots are both minute and incomplete in number.

Warren (3 and 4) makes a number of important remarks about *P. warrenensis* (which, at various times in the past, has been regarded as a subspecies of other species, as well as being inadvertently confused with a race of what is now regarded as *P. alveus*). The gists of certain of these remarks are:

alveus may sometimes have small ups spots and/or a small wing-size (the latter at high altitude), but *alveus* is never as small as *warrenensis* nor are its upper-forewing white spots ever quite as small as typical *warrenensis*. Nevertheless, *alveus* has been confused with the latter;

the female cited for the type-specimen (4) (and illustrated in (3)) had a more or less complete series of small upper-forewing white spots, but this insect is not an ideal exemplar as usually *warrenensis* has some missing spots;

and *warrenensis* emerges about a fortnight before *alveus*.

It is worth recording that the female *warrenensis* illustrated by Lewington (1) closely resembles the type-specimen and thus the literature is tending, it seems, to perpetuate a description of females with better developed spotting than the norm.

I believe there can be little doubt that insects 10 to 12 were *warrenensis*, taking note particularly of their small wing-size and the incomplete series of small upper-forewing white spots. Their generally worn condition compared to some insects shown earlier is consistent with the earlier emergence of *warrenensis* compared to *alveus*.

The last sentence tacitly assumes *alveus* figures among the larger insects shown earlier, which display appreciable variation, though found within about 30 m of each other. It is quite a challenge, I think, to identify them all with reasonable certainty, even though the picture pairs contain about as much information as photographs could. Maybe EIG members would like to comment?

I thank Tristan Lafranchis, who helpfully suggested looking near the Bernina Pass for *warrenensis*, and Ted Benton, whose persistence was invaluable.

(1) Tolman T. and Lewington R., 1997, *Butterflies of Britain and Europe*, (Harper Collins, London)

(2) Lafranchis T., 2004, *Butterflies of Europe*, (Diatheo, Paris)

(3) Warren B.C.S., 1926, Monograph of The Tribe Heperiidae, *Trans. Ent. Soc. Lond.*, 1-170

(4) Warren B.C.S., 1953, Three Unrecognized Species of the Genus *Pyrgus*, *Entomologist*, **86**: 90-103