

European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 11-Sep-19 04:08 PM GMT

I've been thinking of beginning some sort of personal diary on here for a while. But for various reasons, I haven't had the time. One of the biggest reasons has been my involvement in the Sheffield street tree campaign, which some of you may have read about in the national media. I've spent the last four years at the heart of that campaign. Fighting to prevent 50% of Sheffield's 36,000 street trees from being felled, by Sheffield Council and its contractor, as a result of a contract obligation written into the 25 year PFI contract.

Interestingly, it was partly butterflies that drew me into that campaign. Five minutes from my house is a wonderful 120 year old Huntingdon Elm tree in the middle of the Sheffield suburbs, with resistance to Dutch Elm Disease. Importantly, it has a colony of White Letter Hairstreak butterflies.

The primary subject of this diary will be my European butterfly odyssey over the last three years, which has so far allowed me to see just over half the roughly 460 European species. But before that, I'll write a brief introductory post about what sparked my interest in butterflies initially, and about my UK based travels in the 2008 to 2012 period.

Hope you enjoy the read
Paul

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 11-Sep-19 04:09 PM GMT

My interest in nature and wildlife more generally began as a child. I was lucky in that both my parents were interested in birds, as were my Aunt and Uncle, who lived two doors away. I was a birdwatcher throughout my childhood and teenage years, up until I turned about 25 in 2007. From that point onwards, I would now class myself as primarily a butterfly enthusiast.

It is hard to trace why my interest in butterflies really began, but I think I can trace it back to two events, indeed two spectacular butterflies.

The first was the long hot summer of 1995, when my brother and I were on four days holiday in the Lake District. We were walking up the side of Grange Fell in Borrowdale when we spotted a large butterfly. My uncle recognised it as unusual, having bright white edges to its mainly black body, but didn't know what it was. It flew through the dappled wood/scrub and out of sight. Later that evening, on the evening news, there was a feature about an unusual number of sightings of a migrant butterfly across the UK called the Camberwell Beauty. Lo and behold, the picture of this butterfly matched what we had seen. There's nothing like rarity to spark human interest.

But it wasn't until summer 2006 when my interest in butterflies really took off. Most of our family holidays before then had been in the north of the UK, with the limited number of butterfly species that brings. But that year we were in Devon, and on the holiday I saw a number of species I'd never seen before. Most spectacular were the bright orange Silver Washed Fritillaries gliding through Haldon Forest. From that point on I kept a UK list.

For Christmas 2007 I received the book called "Discover butterflies in Britain" by D. E. Newland, which outlined the best sites in the UK to see the 59 UK species it describes. And so, for the next five summers, between 2008 and 2012, I spent my limited annual leave and rare free weekends timing them to see the remaining UK species I hadn't seen.

Highlights include seeing the incredible Painted Lady invasion of late May 2009 in Hampshire whilst on Martin Down and Durlston Head. Also seeing the last proper year of the High Brown Fritillary in the Dunsford valley in Devon in 2008, before they went extinct there in either 2009 or 2010.

It took two trips to Scotland to see the Chequered Skipper. The first, in late May 2011, was a disaster. I arrived the day after 80mph winds had wreaked lots of damage, and whilst mainly dry, the temperature never rose above 10°C. Thankfully I was compensated for with incredible weather in late May 2012, my desired Chequered Skipper at Glasdrum woods, and glass still Lochs under clear blue skies. Locals said it was the best week of late May weather in 25 years.

My final UK "tick" was the Lulworth Skipper in July 2012. This had taken three visits, as I hadn't realised how its flight period had significantly shifted over the years.

Thankfully my obsession was not all consuming. The summer of 2013 brought the invasion of Long Tailed Blues to the south coast, with late September seeing the first proper recorded emergence of a UK generation of the species. I nearly made a mad dash drive to the Kent coast that last weekend of September that year, but the weather forecast was mixed, so decided not to go. Had I gone, I'd have needed to cancel a first date with what turned out to be my current partner. On such small twists of fate.....!

But as I said in my first post in this diary, it is not going to be about the UK species I saw in that 2006 to 2012 period, it is going to be about my European adventures. So my next post will begin that journey.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 12-Sep-19 05:13 PM GMT

I enjoyed reading that preliminary background information, Paul, and I will very much look forward to seeing half of the European butterfly species on the pages to come!

Like you, my current interest was stimulated by a change of environment, although mine was a permanent relocation. All of a sudden, I was seeing Marbled Whites, Small Skippers, Purple Hairstreaks and Brimstones as a matter of routine, butterflies I'd never been familiar with before having lived in the north west of England. It felt like I was 12 years old again!

I have a feeling I'll eventually be seeing some familiar Spanish butterflies? 😊

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 13-Sep-19 08:11 AM GMT

David M wrote:

I enjoyed reading that preliminary background information, Paul, and I will very much look forward to seeing half of the European butterfly species

on the pages to come!

Like you, my current interest was stimulated by a change of environment, although mine was a permanent relocation. All of a sudden, I was seeing Marbled Whites, Small Skippers, Purple Hairstreaks and Brimstones as a matter of routine, butterflies I'd never been familiar with before having lived in the north west of England. It felt like I was 12 years old again!

I have a feeling I'll eventually be seeing some familiar Spanish butterflies? 😊

Thanks David

It's always interesting to see how people's passion for butterflies is sparked or re-sparked. And yes, sunny central Spain and it's wonderful butterflies will certainly feature, but not until many other destinations are featured first

Best wishes

Paul

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 13-Sep-19 10:09 PM GMT

selbypaul wrote:

..It's always interesting to see how people's passion for butterflies is sparked or re-sparked. And yes, sunny central Spain and it's wonderful butterflies will certainly feature, but not until many other destinations are featured first.

Bring it on, Paul. This is going to be an education. 😊

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by Charles Nicol, 13-Sep-19 10:48 PM GMT

i am also enjoying your butterfly journey Paul 😊

looking forward to future instalments

Charles

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 14-Sep-19 03:04 PM GMT

Charles Nicol wrote:

i am also enjoying your butterfly journey Paul 😊

looking forward to future instalments

Charles

Thanks Charles. I'm aiming to post stuff at least once a week over the autumn and winter, whilst UK butterfly activity is quiet

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 22-Sep-19 10:42 AM GMT

I guess my interest in UK butterflies was always going to lead to a wider interest in all butterflies, why wouldn't it? As a child I had been abroad a few times, to holiday destinations like Mallorca and Majorca, but actually, most of our family holidays were in the UK.

After I got my first job in 2004, I finally had enough money to begin taking my own holidays abroad. But actually, the priority was saving money for a house deposit! That and my quest to see all of the UK's butterflies meant most of my holidays were still spent in the UK.

I did visit Poland in June 2004 with a friend. It was mainly a sightseeing trip, but we did spend two days in the Tatra Mountains on the border of Slovakia. Knowing what I know now, I wish I had concentrated on any butterflies that might have been flying, as the Tatra Mountains seem to be a good butterfly destination!

In September 2008, another friend and I took a trip to Florence in Italy. Again, it was mainly sightseeing, but we did spend a day in Tuscany. In one of the vineyards I saw an unusual Blue butterfly and took the photo below, not knowing what it was. It turned out to be a Long Tailed Blue (*Lampides boeticus*). And whilst it isn't a particularly good photo, it is an important one. Because it was my first non-UK tick!



Long Tailed Blue

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 22-Sep-19 11:03 AM GMT

Incredibly, my next trip to Europe wasn't for another six years, in September 2014 to Cyprus. By this time, my hunt to see all the UK's butterflies had ended two years earlier. And indeed, much of the following two years had been focused on significant building work at my house, and my job. Not much time for anything else.

A group of us went for a friend's wedding, staying in the Paphos area. I didn't take my macro camera, nor anything for spotting wildlife in general. Again, with the benefit of hindsight, I wish I had, given the number of endemics and specialities on Cyprus!

Despite not having much free time whilst there, I did manage to get two spare hours one day. I didn't even know what I was looking for, such was my lack of knowledge of European butterfly species. I didn't even have a copy of Tolman and Lewington (2009) – the Collins Butterfly Guide.

So, when I saw a colony of very active, small blue butterflies, I had no idea what they were, other than being very different to anything I'd seen before. After a bit of research effort when back at home, I worked out that they had been African Grass Blue (*Zizeeria knysna*).

I also took some terrible photos on my phone camera of three species near the hotel I was staying at.

One was this Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*). I'd seen the *britannicus* form in the UK, but not the European *gorganus* form before. So I was chuffed to see it flying most of the day from my sunbed!



Swallowtail

Again, when back home, I deduced what the other two were. Eastern Bath White (*Pontia edusa*) and Mallow Skipper (*Carcharodus alceae*).



Eastern Bath White



Mallow Skipper

So, excitingly, four new species without even trying.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 22-Sep-19 11:16 AM GMT

Hindsight seems to be a theme so far in many of most posts above. And so it proved to be again, in January 2016, when my partner and I went on a sun holiday to Tenerife. Or should that be stupidity rather than hindsight?

I went there thinking that because it was January, no butterflies would be flying. Why I didn't think that the year-round warm sunny climate wouldn't lead to some butterfly species flying year round too, I don't know. But I didn't take my macro camera again, so no photos!

I was however delighted to see a Monarch (*danaus plexippus*), which until I saw it, didn't even know it had established itself anywhere in Europe. I knew of occasional sightings in the southern UK, but assumed these were all windblown from the USA.

I also saw a Brimstone, which at the time I assumed was normal UK Brimstone. But actually turns out to be Canary Brimstone (*gonepteryx cleobule*)

Another species I unknowingly saw was Canary Speckled Wood (*parage xhipioides*), assuming it was just normal Speckled Wood.

Finally, in the rocky former larva flows underneath Mount Teide, I definitely saw butterflies flying in the distance over the rocks. Hindsight and research now suggests they were probably Tenerife Grayling (*hipparchia wyssii*), but I didn't get a good enough or close enough view, let alone a photo, so I'm not counting it sadly. One for another day in the future hopefully!

So, another three new species, despite not expecting to see any at all.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 22-Sep-19 11:27 AM GMT

2016 would actually turn out to be the year my passion for European butterflies properly began.

Having been promoted a year earlier at work, I now had more disposable income. My partner and I had always wanted to visit the ancient and unspoiled wild woods of Bialowieza in Poland. And doing my research on the internet, I discovered that a company called Naturetrek did an organised wildlife holiday there over the early May bank holiday weekend. (<https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tours/polands-primeval-forests>)

So we booked on the trip. And it was great, particularly for the bird watching and to see the native European Bison in the wild. But also the incredible

atmosphere in the "Strict Reserve" which is unlike any forest I've ever been to. There were some spring butterflies, but all were species seen in the UK.

It was however, whilst booking the Poland Naturetrek holiday, that I noticed that they also did organised butterfly spotting holidays across Europe. One in particular stood out to me, Butterflies of the Dolomites (<https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tours/butterflies-of-the-dolomites>).

I'd always wanted to visit the Dolomites, having seen photos that my Nana took when she visited 20 years earlier. And with an extra week of annual leave compared to my partner, I thought I'd give it a go. I booked the holiday as a test, to see if I'd enjoy group holidays, with people I didn't know. And also to see if I'd enjoy a full 8 days focused solidly on butterflies. I'm so very glad I did....

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 23-Sep-19 06:56 PM GMT

That's a good read, Paul. Your early evolution was similar to mine – an initially slow transition giving way to a passion that will never go away.

You first dip your toe in the water, and soon afterwards you're in at the deep end. Once you can swim confidently, it never leaves you. 😊

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by Charles Nicol, 26-Sep-19 09:50 AM GMT

Am enjoying the unfolding story Paul !

I hope to go on a Naturetrek holiday in the future.

Charles



Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Sep-19 05:34 PM GMT

David M wrote:

That's a good read, Paul. Your early evolution was similar to mine – an initially slow transition giving way to a passion that will never go away.

You first dip your toe in the water, and soon afterwards you're in at the deep end. Once you can swim confidently, it never leaves you. 😊

Indeed, at this moment in my life, it feels like it really is a passion that will never go away. I keep thinking, if only I was retired, there are so many places to visit, and so much I want to do try and conserve some of the special habitats under threat.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Sep-19 05:37 PM GMT

Charles Nicol wrote:

Am enjoying the unfolding story Paul !

I hope to go on a Naturetrek holiday in the future.

Charles



I can vouch for both Naturetrek and Greenwings holidays so far. In 2020 I'll hopefully be testing out both Greentours and Wild Echo for myself too. I've had good reviews from others. Maybe see you on one of the holidays soon Charles!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 27-Sep-19 01:26 PM GMT

selbypaul wrote:

Indeed, at this moment in my life, it feels like it really is a passion that will never go away. I keep thinking, if only I was retired, there are so many places to visit, and so much I want to do try and conserve some of the special habitats under threat.

With every passing year things get more urgent with regard to conservation, Paul. It's good to know there are people out there who can make a difference in, say, 15 – 20 years time.

Most of the folks with a passion for butterflies are older than I am, and I do sometimes worry about whether there are sufficient numbers to take their place.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 05-Oct-19 09:29 PM GMT

David M wrote:

With every passing year things get more urgent with regard to conservation, Paul. It's good to know there are people out there who can make a difference in, say, 15 – 20 years time.

Most of the folks with a passion for butterflies are older than I am, and I do sometimes worry about whether there are sufficient numbers to take their place.

I sometimes wonder that too David. Here's hoping that there are enough of us around in 20 to 30 years time to make that difference!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 05-Oct-19 09:40 PM GMT

The eight day Naturetrek Butterflies and Moths of the Italian Dolomites holiday began on Thursday 14th July 2016. Flying out from London Gatwick at lunchtime, and arriving in Venice Marco Polo just after 3pm. Our tour guides for the holiday were Alan Miller (from the UK), and Luca Sattin (from Venice). Both would turn out to be excellent and patient guides. I was one of nine guests, all of us with a varied interest in nature of different sorts, not just butterflies, but plants, birds and other insects too.

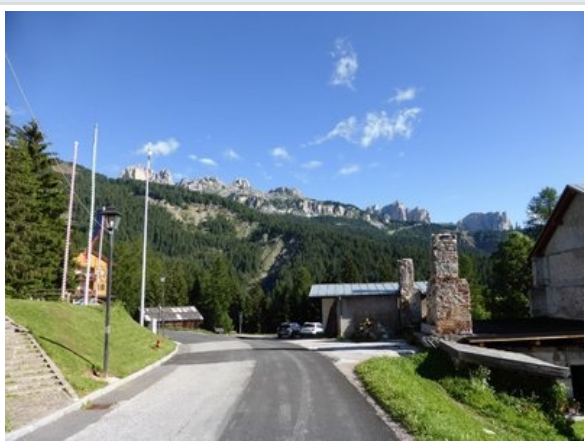
A two hour drive from Venice to the mountains, saw us arrive in our base location for the week, the wonderful Hotel Gran Mugon, in the small hamlet of Tamion, just above the town of Vigo di Fassa.

The scenery on the drive was excellent, and I did even see two butterflies in the late afternoon warmth along the side of the road. A Brimstone and a Painted Lady.

I include photos of the hotel and its surroundings in the village of Tamion.



Hotel Gran Mugon



Tamion

A simply wonderful location, there are even Glow Worms, 50 metres down the lane from the hotel. Excellent food too. Plus a free spa in the hotel for guests, including an outdoor jacuzzi with views straight out across the valley to the mountains on the other side. A perfect way to relax at the end of the day, before dinner.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 05-Oct-19 10:04 PM GMT

Day 2 was the first proper day of the holiday. Interestingly, it was actually the worst day of weather all week, as the weather got progressively hotter and

sunnier as the week went on.

But the "worst" wasn't that bad. It started off clear, clouded over at lunchtime, with a cooler wind, but became sunny again in the late afternoon.

It was a bit of an acclimatisation day really, giving us an idea of the type of species we might see regularly during the week. We started the morning with a short walk straight from the hotel, along a dappled forest track, to a large grass clearing in the pine woods. All at around 1500 metres above sea level.

The afternoon was spent across the Fassa valley, the other side of the town of Vigo di Fassa, in the Val di Monzoni and Val San Nicolo.

We then had a final stop in a meadow very close to the hotel, where we saw a few new species.

Over the course of the day, the group as a whole saw 20 species, of which I saw 19. Of the 19 I did see, six were new species for me, namely:

Titania's Fritillary (*boloria titania*)

Arran Brown (*erebia ligea*)

Woodland Ringlet (*erebia medusa* form *hippomedusa*)

Large Wall Brown (*lasioommata maera*)

Warrens Grizzled Skipper (*pyrgus warrensis*)

Olive Skipper (*pyrgus serratulae*)



Titania's Fritillary (*boloria titania*)



Arran Brown (*erebia ligea*)



Woodland Ringlet (*erebia medusa form hippomedusa*)



Large Wall Brown (*lasiommata maera*)



Warrens Grizzled Skipper (*pyrgus warrensis*)



Olive Skipper (pyrgus serratulae)

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 06-Oct-19 02:40 PM GMT

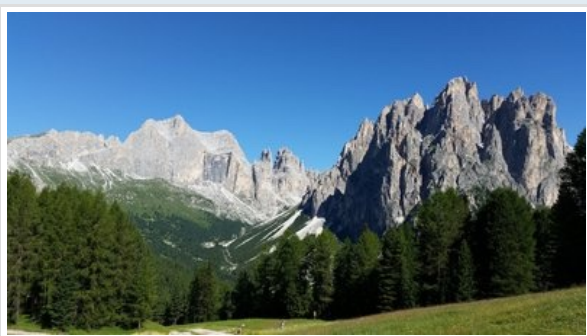
The weather on Day 3 was stunning. Literally cloudless all day, with crystal clear views. We caught the cable car from Vigo di Fassa up to Rosengarten, and then walked the generally flat 2.5 mile walk from there to Gardeccia, where we had lunch, before walking the same path back to Rosengarten, and the cable car back down. So we spent pretty much all day at a height of roughly 1950 to 2000 metres

The scenery was literally stunning, and it was hard not to take loads of photos just of the views. Lots of wildlife was seen, not just butterflies. I was impressed to see my first ever Nutcracker, as well as an Alpine Chamois high up on the mountain tops.

There was quite a bit of butterfly interest just around the Rosengarten cable car station, and we spent about two hours in total during the day just hunting in this area.



View from Rosengarten 1



View from Rosengarten 2

The walk from there to Gardeccia is mainly through pine woods, broken every now and again with a ski slope. These ski slopes were well worth exploring as they were full of wild flowers, and therefore butterflies.

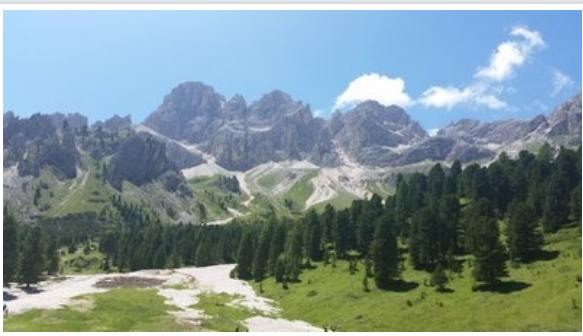


Halfway along the path from Rosengarten to Gardeccia

Gardeccia itself is very very pretty, a very open grassy area beneath the high mountains, and it was here we saw all the erebia for the day.



View from Gardeccia 1



View from Gardeccia 2

18 butterfly species were seen in total, I saw 17 of them, and 8 were new species for me:

Mountain Green Veined White (*pieris bryoniae*)

Geranium Argus (*eumedonia eumedon*)

Alpine Blue (*albulina orbitulus*)

Mazerine Blue (*cyaniris semiargus*)

Shepherds Fritillary (*boloria pales*)

Blind Ringlet (*erebia pharte*)

Common Brassy Ringlet (*erebia cassioides*)

Alpine Heath (*coenonympha gardetta*)



Mountain Green Veined White (pieris bryoniae)



Geranium Argus (eumedonia eumedon)



Alpine Blue (albulina orbitulus)



Mazerine Blue (cyaniris semiargus)



Shepherd's Fritillary (boloria pales)



Common Brassy Ringlet (erebia cassioides)



Alpine Heath (coenonympha gardetta)

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 06-Oct-19 03:06 PM GMT

Day 4 was our main lower altitude day. We set off westwards in the morning on the main road to Bolzano, stopping first by the river, near a wood mill, close to a hamlet called Halser at 700 metres altitude. This proved hugely productive, with lots of buddleia attracting lots of nectaring butterflies, and we spent a good two hours there.



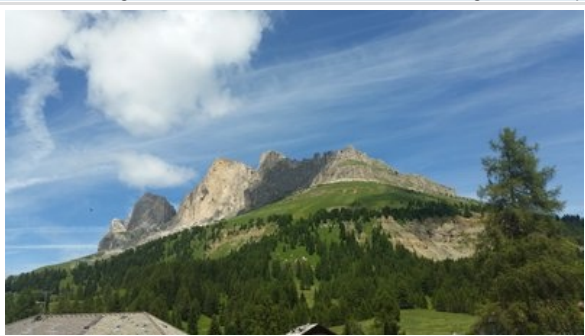
View over the river near the woodmill, near Halser

We then drove back eastwards a few miles, to a meadow near the river at 1000 metres altitude, close to the town of Welschnofen Nova Levante, where we had lunch. There weren't so many butterflies here, though we did see some.



View of meadow near to the town of Welschnofen Nova Levante

We then continued eastwards, stopping in the early afternoon at the Costalunga Pass (or Karerpass), which is 1745 metres in altitude. We spent about an hour looking round a number of meadows with thick grass and alpine wildflowers, before having some refreshments in the café there.



View 1 from Costalunga Pass



View 2 from Costalunga Pass

The morning was cloudless and hot at such low altitudes, and the afternoon was close to cloudless and also hot, even at the higher altitude.

Given the range of altitudes and locations over the day, a total of 49 butterfly species were seen, 40 by me. Of the 40, seven were new species for me:

Scarce Swallowtail (*iphiclides podalirius*)

Black Veined White (*aporia crataegi*)

Sooty Copper (*lycaena tityrus*, form *subalpinus*)

Provençal Short Tailed Blue (*cupido alcetas*)

Amanda's Blue (*polyommatus amandas*)

Meleager's Blue (*polyommatus daphnis*)

Marbled Fritillary (*brenthis daphne*)



Scarce Swallowtail (*iphiclides podalirius*)



Sooty Copper (*lycaena tityrus*, form *subalpinus*)



Provençal Short Tailed Blue (cupido alcetas)



Meleager's Blue (polyommatus daphnis)



Marbled Fritillary (brenthis daphne)

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 06-Oct-19 03:23 PM GMT

The fifth day of the holiday was spent mainly in Panneveggio Natural Park (in Val Velengio), between 1400 and 1500 metres altitude. We did however make a stop for an hour in the morning near Predazzo at a place where Apollo (*parnassius apollo*) is known to breed, and indeed we saw one. This latter site is at 1020 metres altitude.

Val Velengio is very pretty, and it was here where we saw our only Marmot's of the week, although we did hear them elsewhere.



View 1 in Val Velengio



View 2 in Val Velengio

The morning was cloudless, but at around 2pm, it clouded over, albeit it stayed hot all day.

The group saw 35 species across the day, of which I saw 31. Four of the 31 were new species for me, which were:

Apollo (*parnassius apollo*)

Mountain Fritillary (*boloria napaea*)

Large Ringlet (*erebia euryale*, form *ocellaris*)

Pearly Heath (*coenonympha arcania*)



Apollo (*parnassius apollo*)



Mountain Fritillary (*boloria napaea*)



Large Ringlet (*erebia euryale*, form *ocellaris*)



Pearly Heath (*coenonympha arcania*)

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by Charles Nicol, 06-Oct-19 10:44 PM GMT

Very enjoyable account... the scenery is magnificent !

I am not sure what a Nutcracker is ? 😊

favorite butterfly pic = Titania's Fritillary

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 07-Oct-19 08:43 AM GMT

Thanks Charles

A Nutcracker is a bird in the corvid family. Here is the not too brilliant picture I took of one from quite a distance



Nutcracker

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 10-Oct-19 08:52 PM GMT

A particularly lovely part of Europe, Paul, and one I've yet to visit.

Some nice species too, especially Woodland Ringlet and Warrens Grizzled Skipper, the latter of which remains one of my main targets. 🇪🇺

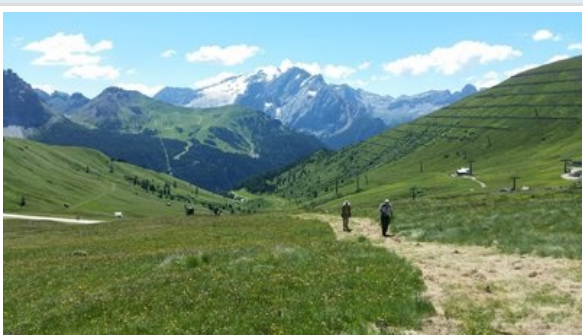
Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 19-Oct-19 10:13 AM GMT

Day 6 was probably my favourite day of the whole week, spent at the highest point on the Sella Pass. The highest point on the road, where we parked is at 2200 metres, but we did reach 2450 at the highest point.



Sella Pass Views 1



Sella Pass Views 2



Sella Pass Views 3

It was Luca and I who were the only ones who went that extra 250 metres, as it involved a bit of scrambling up steep scree to see if we could see Sooty Ringlet (*erebia pluto*) and Silky Ringlet (*erebia gorge*). It was a big effort, as we had only 45 minutes to scramble up and down, and it also involved some running up and down the scree chasing the fast moving Ringlets!

The sky was near cloudless for most of the day, with not a breath of wind all day, and the views were stunning. It was here where we took our group photo for the week.



Group Photo for the week

The group saw 22 butterfly species over the course of the day, of which I saw all but one. Five of the sightings were new species for me, which were:

Cranberry Blue (*agriades optilete*)

Lesser Mountain Ringlet (*erebia melampus*)

Sooty Ringlet (*erebia pluto*)

Silky Ringlet (*erebia gorge*)

Alpine Grizzled Skipper (*pyrgus andromedae*)



Cranberry Blue



Sooty Ringlet



Silky Ringlet



Alpine Grizzled Skipper

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 19-Oct-19 10:37 AM GMT

The last proper day of the holiday, Day 7, was a scorcher. The hottest day of the week by far, near cloudless, and muggy with it. So hot indeed that, at 3pm most of the group had lost interest in chasing butterflies around the flower filled meadows and were seeking shade under the trees.

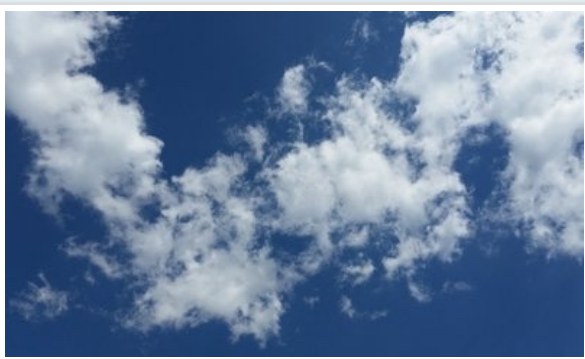
We spent the whole day at Miralago, at about 1900 metres, in the Val de Bay along the San Pellegrino Pass.



Miralago



Flower meadow at Miralago



Blue skies and Scorchio!

The morning was most fruitful, seeing seven *erebia* species in total, including two new ones. It was hard work trying to separate the seven species in flight!

30 species were seen by the group over the course of the day, 20 by me, and of the 20, three were new species for me:

Mountain Clouded Yellow (*colias phicomone*)

Yellow Spotted Ringlet (*erebia manto*, form *pyrrhula*)

Almond Eyed Ringlet (*erebia alberganus*)



Mountain Clouded Yellow



Yellow Spotted Ringlet



Almond Eyed Ringlet

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 19-Oct-19 10:48 AM GMT

Day 8, the return journey from the Dolomites to Venice Marco Polo Airport, and then the flight back to Gatwick Airport. Luckily, the flight wasn't until 3.30pm, and so we had time to stop off for 90 minutes by the river in the Agordo Gorge (Altitude roughly 425 metres above sea level). Specifically, it was a wide braided river section we stopped at, just south of Agordo itself. The low altitude and the fact we were much further south, allowed us to see a number of species we'd not seen at any point else in the holiday. The weather was cloudy all day, but still hot and muggy.

18 species were seen by the group in total, 13 by me. And of the 13, two were new species for me:

Southern Small White (*pieris manni*)

Large Chequered Skipper (*heteropterus morpheus*)



Southern Small White



Large Chequered Skipper

It was sad saying goodbye to everyone at the end of 8 brilliant days. I'd say it was probably my favourite ever holiday, up to that point. The weather had been very good to us. Alan, the main tour leader, told me that our week had been the best week of weather he'd had of the ten times he had led the trip.

Both he and Luca, the local guide were so patient with us all, including me. I went into the trip knowing how to identify only UK species, knowing if I saw something that wasn't a UK species, but not a clue what it might actually be, indeed not even having the ability to narrow it down. Such was my lack of knowledge of identification tips or geographic range limitations.

Over the course of the week I had also got to know the other 8 guests pretty well, and they were all good company and good humoured.

In total, over the course of the eight days, the whole group saw 78 species, of which I saw 74, missing out on seeing Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*), Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*), Swallowtail (*Papilio machaon*), and Large Grizzled Skipper (*Pyrgus alveus*). Only the latter one would have been a new species for me, had I seen it. It would have to wait until future trips.

I saw 35 new species in total though, and most importantly, it sparked a renewed interest in butterflies and butterfly watching. As soon as I got home, I began looking at what other butterfly holidays Naturetrek had on offer!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 22-Oct-19 07:46 PM GMT

Some beautiful scenery and highly desirable butterfly species in that reportage, Paul. There are a handful in amongst them that I have not yet seen and yearn for, e.g. Yellow Spotted Ringlet & Large Chequered Skipper.

No wonder that trip gave you a real taste for European butterflies.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Oct-19 11:14 AM GMT

David M wrote:

Some beautiful scenery and highly desirable butterfly species in that reportage, Paul. There are a handful in amongst them that I have not yet seen and yearn for, e.g. Yellow Spotted Ringlet & Large Chequered Skipper.

No wonder that trip gave you a real taste for European butterflies.

It really was superb David, still up there in my top 3 holidays ever.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 27-Oct-19 10:36 AM GMT

I actually booked two Naturetrek holidays in 2017, the Butterflies of Croatia being the first one. (<https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tours/butterflies-of-croatia>)

The holiday began with an early 8.15am flight from Heathrow airport to Zagreb airport in Croatia, landing at 11.35am local time. It took about an hour get through the airport and load our bags onto the coach.

Our tour leader was naturalist Andy Harding, ably supported by local guide Gerard Gorman. Including me, there were fourteen guests in total on the holiday.

It was a two and half hour drive to our first of three locations for the holiday, the Hotel Plitvicka Sedra, in a village called Irinovac. We stopped en-route in an area of scrub, near Gornje Taboriste, for about an hour.

The weather was hot and sunny, and many butterflies were flying, often rapidly! 24 species were seen by the group in total, actually only 8 by myself. This would turn out to be a bit of a theme for the week, with many of the guests snapping photos of unknown butterflies, only identifying them as something different that night, when reviewing their photos.

Of the 8 butterflies I saw, only one was a new species for me, which was:

Sloe Hairstreak (*satyrium acaciae*)



Sloe Hairstreak

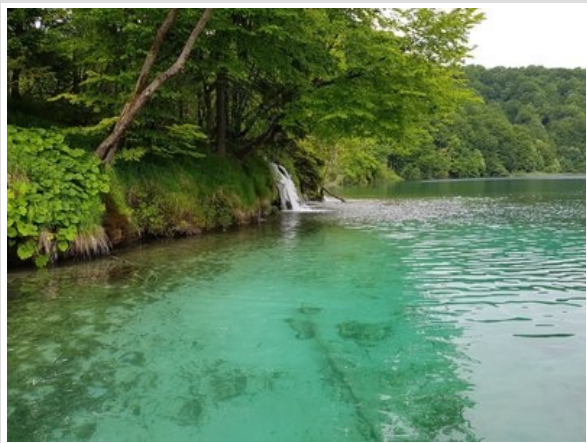
We continued the journey to the hotel, arriving at about 4pm. This allowed us a decent 2 hours to unpack and freshen up, ahead of dinner at the hotel. With such a large group of 14 guests, two guides, and our bus driver Tibor, it was a challenge to try and remember everyone's names!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 27-Oct-19 02:09 PM GMT

Our tour guide Andy had warned us that the first day was going to be mainly about picturesque views, with the real butterflying beginning the next day. The reason being that Day 1 was mainly about visiting the incredibly stunning, and UNESCO World Heritage site, Plitvicka Lakes.

It is the turquoise colour of the water, as you'll see in the photos, that is so unusual and beautiful. Whilst limited in terms of butterflies, it was still well worth the visit. And there was other wildlife to see, including birds, flowers, and dragonflies.



Plitvicka 1



Plitvicka 2



Plitvicka 3



Plitvicka 4



Plitvicka 5

The day was mainly overcast and warm. The sun did come out for brief spells, and when it did, it was very hot.

We returned to the hotel for a late packed lunch at around 2pm. Following this, we spent the afternoon in the meadows behind the hotel. These were incredibly productive, with 43 species seen, 27 by me. Of the 27, seven were new species for me. These were:

Large Copper (*lycaena dispar*)

Short Tailed Blue (*cupido argiades*)

Reverdin's Blue (*plebejus argyrognomon*)

Queen of Spain Fritillary (*issoria lathonia*)

Weavers Fritillary (*bolonia dia*)

Nickerl's Fritillary (*melitaea aurelia*)

Marbled Skipper (*carcharodus lavatherae*)



Large Copper



Short Tailed Blue



Reverdin's Blue



Queen of Spain Fritillary



Weavers Fritillary



Nickerl's Fritillary



Marbled Skipper

So actually a really productive day, despite the overcast weather, and more than half of the day not spent butterflying.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 27-Oct-19 04:30 PM GMT

Day 3 was our first transfer day, travelling from the Plitvicka area to the Adriatic coast, specifically the town of Starigrad. Had we been doing the journey in one burst, it would have taken around two hours. But we stopped at five different locations on the way, for various lengths of time, meaning we only arrived in Starigrad at about 4pm.

The first main stop was at a large "polje" (large flat plain in karstic landscapes), called Bjelopolje. This was a productive location, despite it being

overcast.



Bjelopolje

The second main stop was our lunch stop, looking over the town of Gracac, as the main road reaches its highest point, crossing the Velebit mountain range. This was also highly productive, particularly as the sun came out.



The hills near Gracac

Our third main stop was a viewpoint halfway from lunch to the coast. The species on the coast side of the mountains were different, so whilst less of them, it was also a worthwhile stop.

Over the course of the day, 45 species were seen, 26 by me. Of the 26, seven were new species, which were:

- Blue Spot Hairstreak (*satyrium spin*)
- Amanda's Blue (*polyommatus amandus*)
- Turquoise Blue (*polyommatus dorylas*)
- Niobe Fritillary (*argynnis niobe*)
- Assman's Fritillary (*melitaea britomartis*)
- Balkan Marbled White (*melanargia larissa*)
- Chestnut Heath (*coenonympha glycerion*)



Blue Spot Hairstreak



Amanda's Blue (in foreground)



Turquoise Blue



Niobe Fritillary



Assman's Fritillary



Balkan Marbled White



Chestnut Heath

The Hotel Rajna in Starigrad is lovely. The back of it looked up to the peaks of the Velebit mountains, whilst the front of the hotel looked over a small bit of farmland and olive groves, to the Adriatic Sea. My hotel room had a balcony looking out to the Adriatic, and included Nightingales singing in the trees/scrub. Idyllic.



View from the Hotel Rajna

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 27-Oct-19 05:09 PM GMT

Day 4 was our first of two full days exploring the Adriatic facing slopes of the hills around Starigrad, otherwise known as Paklenica National Park. We spent the morning just north of Starigrad, near a place called Veliki Vaganac. After lunch, we then moved slightly more inland, and higher up, where an isolated Lime Tree was in full bloom and absolutely buzzing with bees and butterflies.



Starigrad from the hills above it



Looking the other way from the same hill



More views of the Adriatic in the afternoon



Looking back at the hills behind Starigrad from the shoreline

The weather was boiling hot, with not a cloud in the sky all day.

47 butterfly species were seen overall, 32 by me. Of the 32, 11 were completely new species for me. They were:

- Mountain Small White (*pieris ergane*)
- Balkan Green Veined White (*pieris balkana*)
- Ilex Hairstreak (*satyrium ilicis*)
- Idas Blue (*plebejus idas*)
- Southern White Admiral (*limenitis reducta*)
- Southern Comma (*polygonum egea*)
- Lesser Spotted Fritillary (*melitaea trivia*)
- Eastern Rock Grayling (*hipparchia syriacha*)
- Great Sooty Satyr (*satyrus ferrula*)
- Great Banded Grayling (*brintesia circe*)
- Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper (*pyrgus armoricanus*)



Ilex Hairstreak



Idas Blue



Southern White Admiral



Lesser Spotted Fritillary



Eastern Rock Grayling

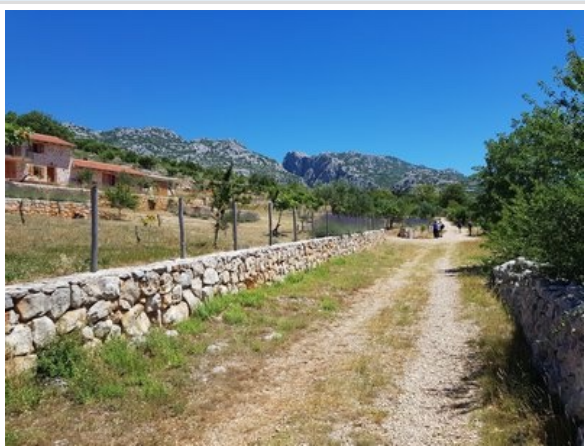
Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 27-Oct-19 05:22 PM GMT

Day 5 was the second of the two days around Starigrad. This time we were slightly lower down, walking down the tracks that ran parallel with the sea, through farmland partway up the slopes of the hills behind the town.



View from the tracks behind Starigrad 1



View from the tracks behind Starigrad 2

In the late afternoon, we went slightly higher up, into the Mala Paklenika gorge.



Mala Paklenika gorge

Again the weather was cloudless, boiling hot, and there wasn't even a breeze. So by the late afternoon we were all flagging.

36 species were seen by the group, 24 by me. Of the 24, three were new species for me, namely:

Berger's Clouded Yellow (*colias alfacariensis*)

Little Tiger Blue (*tarucus balkanicus*)

Spotted Fritillary (*melitaea didyma*)



Little Tiger Blue



Spotted Fritillary

We enjoyed the meal and refreshments at the hotel that night more than normal, given how hot it had been that day.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 29-Oct-19 10:25 PM GMT

Paul, this is such **torture** to look at images of blue skies, hot sunshine & near perfect butterfly habitat in the throes of late autumn in the UK!! 😞

You made a good choice in terms of location – Croatia looks serene and beautiful, especially that turquoise lake, which I could dive into right now!

Again, some species that I have not yet encountered: Balkan Marbled White, Large Copper, Assman's Fritillary....

Looking forward to your next instalment.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 30-Oct-19 07:11 PM GMT

David M wrote:

Paul, this is such **torture** to look at images of blue skies, hot sunshine & near perfect butterfly habitat in the throes of late autumn in the UK!! 😞

You made a good choice in terms of location – Croatia looks serene and beautiful, especially that turquoise lake, which I could dive into right now!

Again, some species that I have not yet encountered: Balkan Marbled White, Large Copper, Assman's Fritillary....

Looking forward to your next instalment.

Hi David

I'm very sorry to be torturing you! 😊

Seriously though, you need to get yourself to the Balkans, and Croatia more specifically. You'd love it!

Best Wishes
Paul

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by Charles Nicol, 31-Oct-19 12:25 AM GMT

thanks for the helpful Nutcracker picture 😊

i loved the photos of the dazzling blue lake....

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 02-Nov-19 11:05 AM GMT

Day 6 was a day of sunny spells most of the day, overcast at lunchtime, but warm throughout. It was another day of travel moving from our second base in Starigrad, to our third and final base at the Jure Guesthouse in Krasno.

Over the course of the day we stopped three times. Firstly at the very highest point the road reached in the Velebit Mountains. Secondly, for lunch, near Baske. And thirdly, in the late afternoon a scrubby meadow area somewhere between the town of Gospic and our hotel in Krasno.



First Stop, at the high point in the Velebit Mountains



Lunch Stop, near Baske



Afternoon stop, near Gospic

46 species were seen by the group over the three sites visited, 26 by me. Of the 26, five were new species for me, namely:
Eastern Baton Blue (*pseudophilotes vicrama*)
False Heath Fritillary (*melitaea diamina*)
Bright Eyed Ringlet (*erebia oeme*)
Safflower Skipper (*pyrgus carthami*)
Eastern Large Heath (*coenonympha rhodopenensis*)



Eastern Baton Blue



False Heath Fritillary



Bright Eyed Ringlet



Safflower Skipper



Eastern Large Heath

Krasno is a tiny village/hamlet in the North Velebit mountains, with wonderful meadows and wooded hills surrounding it, as the views from my

bedroom window show.



View from my bedroom window in Krasno

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 02-Nov-19 11:27 AM GMT

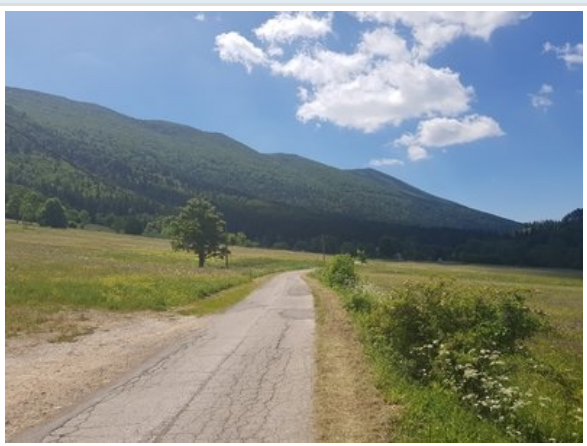
Day 7 was our final full day, and was quite a busy day, spent in various meadows and woodland tracks in the hills and meadows around Krasno.

The first main stop was a very productive series of meadows near the village of Oltare. We then moved into the woods nearby for lunch.



Meadows near the village of Oltare

Finally, we spent most of the afternoon in the lower meadows just outside of Krasno itself. This final meadow being a more colourful natural meadow than I've seen anywhere else in the world to date. The photos below just doesn't do the scene justice sadly.



Final Meadow, near Krasno 1



Final Meadow, near Krasno 2



Final Meadow, near Krasno 3

The weather was slightly cooler and windier than the rest of the week, but it remained sunny most of the day, and it didn't stop the butterflies from being seen.

A grand total of 44 species was seen by the group that day, 36 by me. Of which two were new species for me. These were:

Southern Festoon (*zerynthia polyxena*)

Woodland Grayling (*hipparchia fagi*)



Southern Festoon

At the end of this final full day, we took the below group photo outside of the hotel.



Group photo outside our final hotel

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 02-Nov-19 11:30 AM GMT

Our flights back to the UK were at 12.45pm local time, meaning an early start to ensure we arrived at Zagreb airport the obligatory two hours early. It meant there was sadly no time to stop anywhere for any last butterfly spotting. That said, we did have a comfort break in a motorway service station, and two lucky guests spotted a Map (*araschnia levana*), which I missed out on!

In total, over the eight days, a grand total of 105 butterfly species were seen. I saw 82 of these, highlighting the point I made in an earlier post about other guests taking photos and only identifying different butterflies in the evenings, when reviewing photos.

Of the 23 species I missed, as I write this in late 2019, I've seen all but two of them either before or after. These two are Eastern Pale Clouded Yellow (*colias erate*), Common Glider (*neptis sappho*). Both remain on my "To See" list.

Of the 82 I did see, 36 were brand new species for me, reflecting the fact that this was still only my second "proper" European butterfly trip, and in a completely different part of Europe to anywhere I'd been before.

It was very sad to be saying goodbye to all the other guests at the end of the holiday. We had all gelled really well, partly because of the fact we were all on the same bus all holiday. Croatia is a wonderful country, good chunks of it are still relatively unspoiled, and I definitely intend to return one day.

Andy and Gerrard were also excellent guides. The area was new to Andy, so whilst he knew how to identify all the species, he was as excited as some of the guests at seeing some of the species, particularly the Little Tiger Blue, which was new for him. Gerrard was also excellent, his sense of humour being pretty legendary amongst Naturetrek holidaymakers.

Thankfully though, despite my sadness to leave Croatia, I only had four weeks to wait until my next European trip.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 02-Nov-19 11:53 AM GMT

My second butterfly holiday of 2017 was originally meant to be the Naturetrek Butterflies of the Swiss Alps trip. Sadly, with 8 weeks to go, the Switzerland trip had to be cancelled due to only two people having signed up. There was a limited number of places left on other Naturetrek butterfly holidays, with such short notice. Of the limited choice, I decided upon the Butterflies and Moths of the Spanish Pyrenees.

<https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tours/butterflies-and-moths-of-the-spanish-pyrenees>

I was disappointed not to be visiting Switzerland, but the Spanish trip did sound interesting. As you'll see from what follows, the Spanish Pyrenees turned out to be spectacular! In a way, in hindsight, I was almost glad the Swiss holiday had been cancelled.

Day 1 of the Butterflies and Moths of the Spanish Pyrenees was Wednesday 5th July 2017, and began with a 1.30pm flight from Stansted airport to Zaragoza in Spain, landing at 4.30pm local time.

Our tour leaders for the week were Chris Gibson and Peter Rich. Chris is an all round naturalist, and has years of experience guiding this trip. Peter is also a naturalist, and is the co-owner (with his wife) of the hotel we were staying at.

The airport in Zaragoza is pretty small and quiet, so we were quickly into the minibuses, and on our way to our location for the week. It was actually a two hour drive, so we stopped to stretch our legs in the foothills of the "pre-Pyrenees" underneath the cliffs of Los Mallos de Riglos.



The cliffs of Los Mallos de Riglos

Despite being relatively late, given it was mid-summer, and still very warm and sunny, some butterflies were flying, and indeed six species were seen, five by me, including three new species for me. Those new species were:

Southern Brown Argus (*aricia cramera*)

Southern Gatekeeper (*pyronia cecilia*)

Spanish Gatekeeper (*pyronia bathseba*)



Southern Gatekeeper



Spanish Gatekeeper

These of course were just tempters for what was to come later in the holiday. We continued the drive to our home for the week, a town called Berdun which is built on an outlying foothill, just under the main Pyrenees. Our hotel, Casa Sarasa, was right on the edge of the town, at the very foot of the hill. And what a beautiful hotel it was too, as the pictures below show.



View from my balcony at Casa Sarasa



Looking back at Casa Sarasa (with the town of Berdun behind it)

There were nine other guests on the holiday with me, so ten in total. Two of the ten, Neil and Jan, were also on my previous holiday in Croatia, only four weeks before, so it was good to have some familiar faces.

After a fantastic home cooked meal from Mel (Peter's wife), and plentiful local wine, we all went to bed excited about what the next seven days might hold.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 04-Nov-19 01:37 PM GMT

Looking forward to this one, Paul. Spain is a very interesting country for butterflies (as we both know). 😊

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 15-Nov-19 08:37 PM GMT

Day 2 of the holiday was billed by Chris as an acclimatising day, in the farmland and scrub just around the town of Berdun. The idea was to begin to build up our identification knowledge and skills of some of the commoner butterflies in the area.

It was very hot and muggy all day, and mostly overcast, apart from some sunny spells between around lunchtime.

The morning was spent on a circular walk from the hotel, to Vira Real.



During a brief sunny spell in the morning

The afternoon was spent in various spots around the Rio Aragon.



At the Rio Aragon in the afternoon



Near the River Aragon, late in the afternoon

There were still lots of species about though, 34 in total for the group. Of the 34, I saw 25, of which six were new species for me. These were:

- Spanish Swallowtail (*iphiclides feisthamelii*)
- Spanish Purple Hairstreak (*jaeosopsis roboris*)
- Catalonian (Forster's) Furry Blue (*polyommatus fulgens*)
- Spanish Chalkhill Blue (*lysandra albicans*)
- Knapweed Fritillary (*melitaea phoebe*)
- Tufted Marbled Skipper (*carcharodus flocciferus*)



Spanish Swallowtail



Spanish Purple Hairstreak



Catalonian (Forster's) Furry Blue



Spanish Chalkhill Blue



Knapweed Fritillary

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 15-Nov-19 09:24 PM GMT

Day 3 dawned with clear blue skies, and it remained sunny all day. We spent all of it in various spots in the Roncal valley.

We first stopped briefly by a grove of Strawberry trees, in the lower valley, the hope being to see some Two Tailed Pasha (*charaxes jasius*). Sadly no luck. So the first proper stop was at a meadow near Isaba, which proved highly fruitful.

The minibuses then climbed the winding road all the way to the top of the pass, and just crossed the French border, at 1600 metres altitude, where we stopped for about an hour, spotting various erebia species.



Top of the Pass, looking out to France

We dropped down slightly, back on the Spanish side of the border, stopping at La Contienda for lunch and a short walk.



Scenery at the lunch stop 1



Scenery at the lunch stop 2

Finally, after lunch, we spent about 90 minutes lower down the valley at a place called Balagna.

It was an excellent day, and the group as a whole saw 60 species in total, of which I saw 46. Six of the 46 were new species for me, namely:

Green Underside Blue (*glaucopsyche alexis*)

Escher's Blue (*polyommatus escheri*)

De Prunner's Ringlet (*erebia triaria*)

Pyrenean Brassy Ringlet (*erebia rondoui*)

Piedmont Ringlet (*erebia meolans*)

Lefebvres Ringlet (*erebia lefebvrei*)



Pyrenean Brassy Ringlet



Piedmont Ringlet

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 15-Nov-19 09:41 PM GMT

Day 4 was sadly the worst day of weather, on what was potentially going to be our highest stops of the week, at just over 1800 metres altitude. We set off from overcast but dry Berdun, straight into heavy rain. Our first stop, on the slopes above Foz de Jaca, was aborted after just 10 minutes, as the rain was heavy and showed no sign of stopping.

So we moved on to Portalet, right on the Spain/France border. It was very atmospheric here, with the clouds slowly swirling in only a very light breeze around the peaks of the mountains surrounding Portalet.



Swirling clouds at Portalet

The rain was only intermittent here, but it was cool. We stopped for a coffee, and did admire the wildflowers, particularly the stunning dark blue Iris'.



Iris at Portalet

With hope that the rain might be clearing, we drove back down to La Serra (roughly 1450 metres), for lunch. Pretty much as we arrived the sun broke out. As soon as it did, it became hot, and the butterflies came out. So we spent a good three hours in this spot.



La Serra View 1



La Serra View 2

On the way back to Berdun, we stopped by a river near Atares. It had become overcast, and it soon began raining again, so we headed back to the hotel early.

Despite the poor weather, we still managed to see 54 species as a group, 36 by me. Of the 36, two were new species for me. These were:

Chapman's Blue (*polyommatus thersites*)

Lesser Purple Emperor (*apatura ilia*)

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 17-Nov-19 03:35 PM GMT

Day 5 was a complete contrast to the previous day. It was scorching hot, with only very few clouds in the sky all day, and we stayed at low to medium altitudes. We spent the first part of the morning at a sculpture park near Berdun, full of old coppiced Holm Oaks and other scrub, amongst the meadows.



Sculpture Park

We then drove into the Fago valley, stopping four times, including one stop at the top of the gorge, for lunch.



Lunch stop at the top of the Fago Valley

We then spent the afternoon in the Anso valley, stopping twice, once with a short walk to a "wild swimming" location, and then at the very narrow Binies Gorge.



"Wild swimming" location in the Anso Valley



The very narrow Binies Gorge

This was another high species total day, seeing 69 species, a very high number. Of the 69, I saw 52, ten of them new species for me. These were:

Bath White (*pontia daphidice*)

Pale Clouded Yellow (*colias hyale*)

False Ilex Hairstreak (*satyricum esculi*)

Lang's Short Tailed Blue (*leptotes pirithous*)

Ripart's Anomalous Blue (*polyommatus ripartii*)

Rock Grayling (*hipparchia alcyone*)

Striped Grayling (*hipparchia fidia*)

Black Satyr (*satyrus actaea*)
Dusky Meadow Brown (*hypone lycaon*)
Dusky Heath (*coenonympha dorus*)



Bath White



False Ilex Hairstreak



Ripart's Anomalous Blue



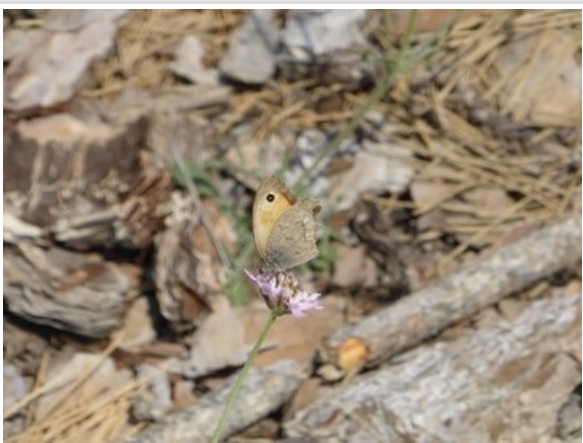
Rock Grayling



Striped Grayling



Black Satyr



Dusky Meadow Brown



Dusky Heath

After such a hot and enjoyable day, we were all ready for refreshments that evening. After dinner, with clear skies, the stars were showing brightly. One of the guests had brought a stargazing telescope, so we all decamped into the garden and were treated to views of Jupiter, Saturn, and their moons.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 17-Nov-19 03:58 PM GMT

Day 6 was a cooler day, and mostly overcast, but thankfully with no rain.

We spent all of it in the Hecho valley. Our first stop was walking up the very narrow gorge, known as the Boca del Infierno. At some times in the year, this location is known for its Wallcreeper's, a much sought after bird, but there were none today. It was cool enough to mean that very few butterflies were out.



Boca del Infierno

So we moved on, stopping briefly at a meadow near Selva de Oza, again with not much around.

So we moved even further up the valley, to where the road turned into a footpath. Here, apart from the butterflies which had started to appear, we also saw a Lammergeier (Bearded Vulture), which was one of the main target bird species for the week.



Top of the Hecho Valley 1

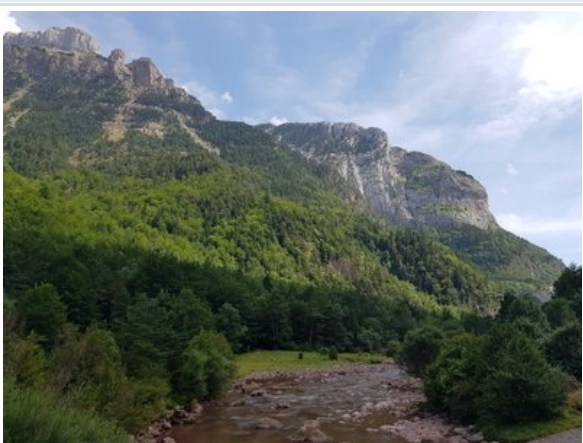


Top of the Hecho Valley 2

After lunch, we returned to the meadow near Selva de Oza, where the weather had improved, with some sunny spells. A very obliging Purple Emperor (*apatura iris*) kept us entertained for 20 minutes by the minibuses.



Meadow near Selva de Oza 1



Meadow near Selva de Oza 2

The total species count for the group today was 49, which again is very large considering the conditions were not brilliant. Of the 49, I saw 36, one being a new species for me. This was:

Alcon Blue (*phengaris alcon* form *rebeli*)



Alcon Blue form rebeli – photo 1



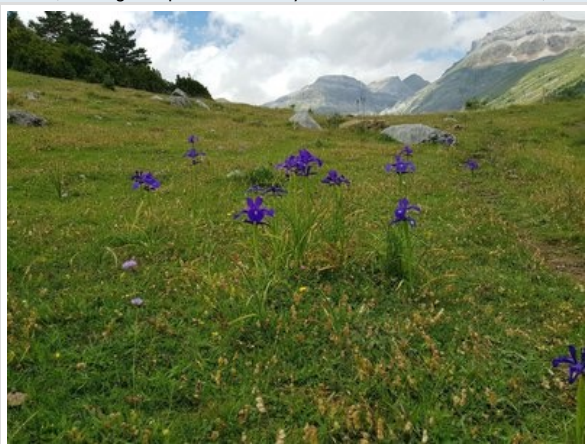
Alcon Blue form rebeli – photo 2

Note this is sometimes named as a separate species, the Mountain Alcon Blue, but the latest thinking, as I write this in late 2019, is that it remains just a form of Alcon Blue.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 17-Nov-19 04:14 PM GMT

Day 7 was spent in the Aisa valley. It was warm with sunny spells all day. We stopped three times in the valley. First was in a meadow just outside the village of Aisa. Second was halfway up the valley, by the river. Finally, the third stop was right at the head of the valley, where the road stops, and becomes a footpath. It is at this final stop, and after a short walk, that our main guide Chris calls the most beautiful view in the world. It is certainly up there. (This highest point of the day was at 1540 metres altitude).



Head of the Aisa Valley 1



Head if the Aisa Valley 2



Head if the Aisa Valley 3

The group saw 73 species today, the highest total of the holiday, an incredible amount in just one day. Of the 73, I saw 55. One of these was a brand new species for me, namely:

Meadow Fritillary (*melitaea parthenoides*)

Sadly I didn't manage a photo of it.

I also saw the Spanish version of Chestnut Heath (*coenonympha glycerion* form *iphiodes*). It is very different to the normal version, which I'd seen in Croatia four weeks earlier. Perhaps one day it will be separated out as a species, in which case I've banked it!



Chestnut Heath form *iphiodes*

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 17-Nov-19 04:29 PM GMT

Thankfully our return flight to the UK from Zaragoza airport wasn't until 5pm local time, which meant we had a proper Day 8 of the holiday, and allowed us time for two butterfly watching stops. Before we left, we took this group photo outside of the hotel.



Group photo

The first was at the dam of the Pena Reservoir. This was an interesting stop for the views in particular, if not the butterflies, as there were few.



Pena Reservoir 1



Pena Reservoir 2

The second was near Aguero, where we had lunch.



Near Aguero

This spot was more interesting, and we spent a good time looking at the various highly active Blue species. Panoptes Blue (*pseudophilotes panoptes*) and Provencal Chalkhill Blue (*lysandra hispana*) were both seen by others, and I photographed lots of different individual butterflies. But I could not confirm any of them as being either. So I dipped out on those two sadly.

In total, on this final day, the group saw 31 species, 18 by me. And having missed out on the two Blue's above, none of the 18 were new species for me.

We left Peter at Zaragoza airport, for him to drive back home to the Casa Sarasa hotel. Peter and his wife Mel had been superb hosts, and Peter an excellent guide also. I firmly intend to return to stay with them again, perhaps at a different time of year, to see different species.

The rest of us arrived back in the UK at 6.30pm, and we all said our sad goodbyes. For a holiday that had been selected at the last minute, as a replacement for Switzerland, this had turned out to be a superb holiday. Our main guide Chris had also been brilliant.

In total, over the eight days, the species list for the group was an incredible 112 species, 24% of all European butterfly species, reflecting the huge diversity of the habitat we visited over the course of the week.

Of the 112 species, I saw 103 of them, of which 29 were brand new species for me.

Of the nine species I missed out on during the week, I've thankfully seen all nine either before or since.

Back in the UK, I began researching my 2018 butterfly trips.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 19-Nov-19 06:43 PM GMT

Fabulous reportage, Paul. The scenery in that part of the world is quite breathtaking, and quite a few of the butterflies too, for example Forster's Furry Blue, Lefebvre's Ringlet & Ripart's Anomalous Blue.

The shots you posted from the Aisa Valley are especially appealing. This is a part of Europe I'd very much like to visit.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by Padfield, 19-Nov-19 07:55 PM GMT

Hi Paul. I've been popping into this thread from time to time but for some reason most of the pictures fail to show on my computer. They do show if I click on the link but not in the thread, even when I repeatedly reload the page. It may just be my computer. The ones I have clicked on have been excellent shots of fantastic butterflies (though you do have a turquoise blue masquerading as Chapman's ... 😊) and other creatures. When I get time I'll systematically work through all the links! In the meantime, accept my apologies for not having commented sooner.

Guy

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by essexbuzzard, 20-Nov-19 10:48 PM GMT

Sounds like a great holiday. I've done the French side a couple of times, which was also excellent. But the Spanish side is on my (rather long) wish list, and your report confirms this.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 22-Nov-19 07:57 AM GMT

David M wrote:

Fabulous reportage, Paul. The scenery in that part of the world is quite breathtaking, and quite a few of the butterflies too, for example Forster's Furry Blue, Lefebvre's Ringlet & Ripart's Anomalous Blue.

The shots you posted from the Aisa Valley are especially appealing. This is a part of Europe I'd very much like to visit.

Thanks David

It really is a fantastic part of the world. I'd not heard before of it being a good place to visit, either in butterfly terms, or in normal holiday terms. But it really is superb in every way. I do intend to go back sometime, possibly in Spring, to see a different range of butterfly species
Paul

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 22-Nov-19 08:00 AM GMT

Padfield wrote:

Hi Paul. I've been popping into this thread from time to time but for some reason most of the pictures fail to show on my computer. They do show if I click on the link but not in the thread, even when I repeatedly reload the page. It may just be my computer. The ones I have clicked on have been excellent shots of fantastic butterflies (though you do have a turquoise blue masquerading as Chapman's ... 😊) and other creatures. When I get time I'll systematically work through all the links! In the meantime, accept my apologies for not having commented sooner.

Guy

Thanks Guy

I have the same problem with the photos not loading fully, some do some don't. But I've found that for about a year on this whole website, not just my own posts.

And I feared I'd get some of the photo ID's wrong, so cheers for being eagle eyed. I'll look to edit.
Paul

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 22-Nov-19 08:02 AM GMT

essexbuzzard wrote:

Sounds like a great holiday. I've done the French side a couple of times, which was also excellent. But the Spanish side is on my (rather long) wish list, and your report confirms this.

It really is, I highly recommend it. Like you though, I have a very long list of European destinations to visit in the future. I'll post about this once I'm up to the present in this thread. But before that point, I've got four further expeditions to write about....!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by essexbuzzard, 22-Nov-19 09:33 PM GMT

Can't wait, Paul...!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 23-Nov-19 03:30 PM GMT

Before my main two 2018 butterfly holidays however, I had a week in Madeira for some winter sun, specifically the second week of 2018.

Whilst most of the holiday was spent relaxing, I did see a Canary Red Admiral (*vanessa vulcania*) by the hotel swimming pool, plus a Madeiran Speckled Wood (*pararge xiphia*) elsewhere. So two new species without even trying!

The disadvantage of not trying, of course, was that I was not prepared. I therefore only had my phone camera, which doesn't do macro shots or long zoom shots. So only a very blurred photo of the Canary Red Admiral sadly.



Canary Red Admiral

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 23-Nov-19 03:35 PM GMT

Butterfly holiday number one of 2018 was the Naturetrek Butterflies of Southern Greece trip, beginning on the 16th June.
<https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tours/butterflies-of-southern-greece>

It was a two base holiday, the first half of the week based in Kalavrita in the Peloponese mountains. The second half the week based across the Gulf of Corinth in Delphi, near Mount Parnassos.

Day 1 of the holiday began with a very early 6.55am flight from Heathrow airport to Athens airport, landing just after 12.30pm local time. The weather in Greece was unusually cool, and thunderstorms were building as we left the terminal to find the minibus. Including me, there were seven guests on this holiday, plus our one tour leader, Philip Thompson.

We began the roughly two hour drive westwards, stopping halfway at the town of Isthmia, to stretch our legs and take in the views of the engineering marvel that is the Corinth Canal. We saw two butterfly species, but nothing special. The thunderstorms seemed to be focused on Athens, so we drove out of the bad weather thankfully.



Corinth Canal

We continued the journey, arriving in the lovely town of Kalavrita at about 5pm. After such an early start, and long day, we were very glad to sit down and enjoy the Greek food and wine in a local restaurant, and then head to bed, ready for the excitements of the week ahead.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 23-Nov-19 03:58 PM GMT

The weather forecast for Day 2 was not good, with cloud forecast all day, and thunderstorms from lunchtime. However we set off early, from Kalavrita, up the road to Mount Chelmos.

Our first stop, at 9.30am for an hour was a lower track, where the tour leader Philip helped to familiarise us with some of the butterflies we would be seeing all week. Amazingly, despite this being the fourth guided butterfly holiday, this was the first time I discovered the quick ID technique for Common Blue (ie the additional cell spot close to the body on the forewing underside). Had I known or learned this previously, I'd have much reduced my time spent trying to get photos of every Blue butterfly!

The weather was warm with sunny spells at this first stop, so we progressed higher to the Mount Chelmos Ski Centre. By this time, it was overcast, but still warm, and the butterflies were still flying. We spent a further hour here, and we racked up a very good number of additional butterflies.

We then made an optimistic move to a known Odd Spot Blue (*turanana taygetica*) location, but the clouds were at ground level, and rain was in the air, so after a fruitless 20 minutes, we set off back to the lowlands below Kalavrita.



View looking south, from the foothills of Mount Chelmos



Looking back to Mount Chelmos, just before the rain arrived

We had our lunch, and in a brief break in the rain did a short river walk, which had to be abandoned as a heavy thunderstorm and torrential rain rolled in. We then drove 20 minutes into a different valley, which had missed the rain, and had a successful 45 minutes, seeing a number of new species, before the rain then reached that valley.

We made one final attempt at a short walk elsewhere, but by then the rain had really set in, so we had an early 3pm finish.

Despite the mixed weather, it was still a pretty decent day for the group. We saw 28 species, 25 seen by me, and of the 25, four were brand new species for me, namely:

Eastern Wood White (*leptidea duponcheli*)

Zephyr Blue (*kretania sephirus*)

Hermit (*chazara briseis*)

Oriental Marbled Skipper (*carcharodus orientalis*)



Zephyr Blue



Hermit

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 26-Nov-19 06:18 AM GMT

Strange to see such grassy slopes in Greece, Paul, although I believe there's a decent amount of rain in that part of the country over the course of the year.

I'm looking forward to finding out what else you saw – there are quite a few endemics in those mountains!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Nov-19 05:40 PM GMT

David M wrote:

Strange to see such grassy slopes in Greece, Paul, although I believe there's a decent amount of rain in that part of the country over the course of the year.

I'm looking forward to finding out what else you saw – there are quite a few endemics in those mountains!

Absolutely! Day 3 was arguably the best day in Greece, I'll leave you waiting with anticipation.

In terms of the greenery, I am told that up until late June and early July there is enough rain. Its later in August and September that things get parched, albeit there are thunderstorms.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by Roger Gibbons, 26-Nov-19 06:22 PM GMT

Hi Paul,

The white spot on the inside of the antennal club says *sinapis* to me, whereas *duponcheli* is brown at this point. Maybe worth another look?

Roger

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 27-Nov-19 07:05 PM GMT

Roger Gibbons wrote:

Hi Paul,

The white spot on the inside of the antennal club says *sinapis* to me, whereas *duponcheli* is brown at this point. Maybe worth another look?

Roger

You are correct Roger, my mistake!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 02-Dec-19 10:58 PM GMT

selbypaul wrote:

...Absolutely! Day 3 was arguably the best day in Greece, I'll leave you waiting with anticipation.

You sure know how to build the suspense, Paul! Put me out of my misery please. 😊

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 03-Dec-19 07:07 AM GMT

David M wrote:

selbypaul wrote:

...Absolutely! Day 3 was arguably the best day in Greece, I'll leave you waiting with anticipation.

You sure know how to build the suspense, Paul! Put me out of my misery please. 😊

It's not intentional David, trust me! I've had to focus my free time this last week on my day job! Aiming to spend some time on this in the next two weeks!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 15-Dec-19 05:00 PM GMT

Thankfully, Day 3 was a much better day weather wise. Despite more forecast thunderstorms, they never actually happened, and we had sunny spells for most of the day.

We spent the morning focused on walking up and down two gullies in the north eastern foothills of Mount Chelmos, then a return to the known Odd Spot Blue location from the day before, just after lunch.

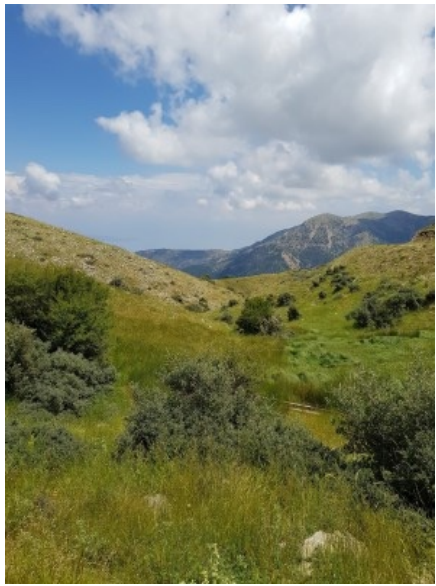
It was a very successful morning, seeing lots of different species, but the most prized being two different individual Chelmos Blue (*polyommatus iphigenia*), and a single Odd Spot Blue (*turanana taygetica*). Given how rare these species are in Europe, and how many are trapped and killed by collectors each year, we were very lucky indeed. One wonders whether they'll both be extinct in Europe in the not too distant future.



View of Mount Chelmos from the first gully in the morning



Our first butterflying gully in the morning



Our second butterfly gully at lunchtime



View of Mount Chelmos from our stop just after lunch

The rest of the afternoon was spent at various scrubby meadows on the road back from the Mount Chelmos ski centre to Kalavrita. These areas had historically been pretty successful places for butterflying. But the grazing of livestock is in retreat here, as it is in many parts of Greece. As a result, the scrub growth had shaded out much of the previously flower rich meadow, and we saw very little butterfly life.

Over the course of the day, the group saw 29 species, of which I saw 26. Of the 26 I saw, five were new species for me, which were:

Clouded Apollo (*parnassius mnemosyne*)

Greek Clouded Yellow (*colias aurorina*)

Lesser Fiery Copper (*lycaena thersamon*)

Odd Spot Blue (*turanana taygetica*)

Chelmos Blue (*polyommatus iphigenia*)



Clouded Apollo



Greek Clouded Yellow



Lesser Fiery Copper



Odd Spot Blue



Chelmos Blue

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 15-Dec-19 05:23 PM GMT

Day 4 was varied day spent at six different locations around Kalavrita. There were sunny spells all day, and in the late afternoon, it became quite hot.

The first two stops in the morning were Aghia Monestary, and a school just before it. Both had scrubby garden meadows full of different butterfly species.

We then did a short river walk, in a known lola's Blue location, where we were successful in seeing this target species.

Lunch was eaten in very quiet (near abandoned) village called Souvarado, under a wonderful old Oriental Plane tree.



Oriental Plane tree in Souvarado

After lunch we walked along an open hillside track from this village, which proved quite successful.



View from the hillside track near Souvardo

Our final stop for the day was along another hillside track, lower down, which had a different cast of butterflies again.

In total the group saw 41 species, of which I saw 37. Five of these were new species for me, namely:

Grecian Copper (*lycaena ottomana*)

Iola's Blue (*iolana iolas*)

Delattin's Grayling (*hipparchia volgensis*)

Lattice Brown (*kirinia roxelana*)

Persian Skipper (*spialia phlomidis*)



Grecian Copper



Iola's Blue



Lattice Brown



Persian Skipper

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by essexbuzzard, 16-Dec-19 11:02 PM GMT

I've done this trip myself, Paul, and I'm glad you have done it too.

I'm surprised how lush and green it looks, when we were there, same time of year, it was already very parched and brown.

We saw vast numbers of Large Tortoiseshell and Zephyr Blues, but we failed to find Chelmos Blues, so congratulations for that, I'm delighted for you—a moment to treasure!

I was also surprised how many British species we saw, in a climate so very different to ours!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 19-Dec-19 07:51 PM GMT

[quote=essexbuzzard post_id=149840 time=1576537360 user_id=11426] I've done this trip myself, Paul, and I'm glad you have done it too.

I'm surprised how lush and green it looks, when we were there, same time of year, it was already very parched and brown.

We saw vast numbers of Large Tortoiseshell and Zephyr Blues, but we failed to find Chelmos Blues, so congratulations for that, I'm delighted for you—a moment to treasure!

I was also surprised how many British species we saw, in a climate so very different to ours!

Definitely a special day to see both Chelmos Blue and Odd Spot Blue, in the space of an hour! And I agree, I was surprised by the greenery of Greece!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 22-Dec-19 10:43 AM GMT

Hi there

I had a private message from DCPDAVID (Dave), which I've tried to reply to, but it is showing as only being in my Outbox, not having sent. Not sure if this is because DCPDAVID hasn't logged on again, or his inbox is full and can't receive messages, or another reason. But just flagging this here, in case DCPDAVID is wondering why I've not replied.

Best Wishes

Paul

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by DCPDAVID, 22-Dec-19 05:51 PM GMT

Dear Paul,

I have seen your message could you reply to suedaveplowman@btinternet.com

It may be a problem with my inbox.

Anyway thanks for letting me know I'm sure we will get there.

I can also help you with places to go also.

Dave.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Dec-19 07:15 AM GMT

Day 5 was transfer day between our two bases for the week. But we still had time in the morning for a quick walk along a farm track on the edge of Kalavrita, to a nearby scrubby meadow.



Farm track on the edge of Kalavrita

We then set off on the drive, from Kalavrita, to the Gulf of Corinth, across the big bridge in Rio, and then eastwards along the coast road to Delphi.



The bridge near Rio across the Gulf of Corinth

We stopped for a late lunch and a short walk in Galaxidi, and after arriving in Delphi, we did a very short walk around the edge of the town.



The harbor in Galaxidi

The weather all day was mostly sunny, and very warm.

Over the course of the day, the group saw 29 species, of which I saw 24. Only one was a new species for me, Freyer's Grayling (*hipparchia fatua*)



Freyer's Grayling

Our evening meal was in a restaurant across the road from our hotel, with an outside balcony overhanging a steep cliff, looking out over one of the largest olive groves in Europe, and out towards the sea. Literally stunning.



View from the restaurant in Delphi

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Dec-19 07:31 AM GMT

Day 6 was the best day for the group in terms of number of species seen. This was despite the weather in the morning being cool and overcast, to the point where there were virtually no butterflies seen until 11am!

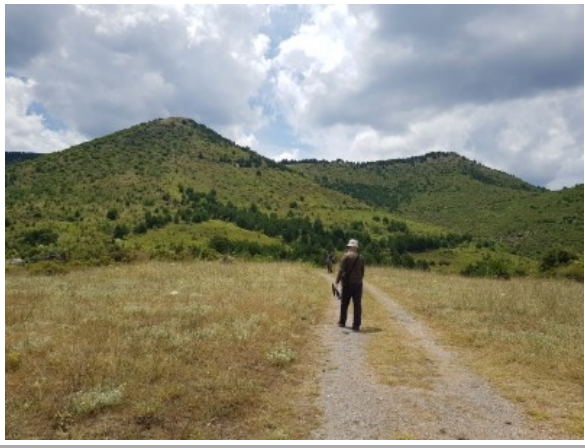
The whole day was spent at various spots on Mount Parnassos. Firstly at a usually successful bramble patch near ski lodges. This proved unsuccessful due to the cold conditions.

Then we stopped at a large damp meadow in the pine forest. The initial 30 minutes were again cool, brightened by a great view of a Black Woodpecker. But as soon as the sun came out, things warmed up butterfly wise, and we saw many species.



Large damp meadow in the morning

We had lunch at a picnic site around halfway up the mountain, followed by a short walk in some rocky scrub.



Rocky track just after lunch

Our final stop was much higher up at a ski station near the summit, with the aim of seeing Blue Argus, which we were successful at.

A total of 50 species were seen by the group, 43 by me. Of the 43, two were new species for me:

Blue Argus (*aricia anteros*)

Hungarian Skipper (*spialia orbifer*)



Blue Argus



Hungarian Skipper

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Dec-19 07:46 AM GMT

Day 7 was the final proper day. The morning was spent around the ruins of Delphi, the primary focus being the spectacular views and the ruins themselves. Whilst some on the tour thought the visit was a "waste" of a morning that could have been spent butterflying, I disagreed, with the history and views of the ruins being one of the highlights of the holiday.



Ruins of Delphi 1



Ruins of Delphi 2

We then made a late afternoon stop at a place nearby where Grass Jewel had been seen in the past, no luck sadly.

We revisited the bramble patch from the day before, where the much warmer conditions had brought out huge numbers of individuals of many species. We had a decent "fly by" by a Cardinal, and good views of a White Letter Hairstreak, despite there being no sign of any elm trees anywhere nearby.

Lunch and the early afternoon were spent in a meadow halfway up Mount Parnassos. Our final stop was at a ski centre just below the summit. Here we had our best views of Clouded Apollo all holiday.

Other than a 20 minute rain shower in the mid afternoon, it was very hot and sunny all day.

The group saw a total of 48 species on the day, 39 by me. Of the 39, two were new species for me:

Cardinal (*argynnis pandora*)

Oriental Meadow Brown (*hyponephele lupina*)



Cardinal



Oriental Meadow Brown

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Dec-19 07:48 AM GMT

Our final day sadly didn't leave any time for butterflying. The flight was at 2.30pm, and given the long drive from Delphi to Athens, other than a brief comfort break, it was mostly spent on the road.

Thunderclouds were towering above the airport, so I was very impressed at how the pilots skilfully steered the plane through the small gaps in the clouds and avoided any turbulence!

And so another Naturetrek holiday was over. Over the course of the week, the whole group saw a grand total of 86 species, which wasn't bad considering some of the mixed weather we experienced. I missed out on just four of the 86 species, three of which I have seen either before or since. So the only one I was gutted to miss out on was Kreuper's Small White (*pietris krueperi*), which I still need to see. Of the 82 species I did see, 19 were new species for me, so another excellent week.

The other thing I'd say about this week was that it felt like the first holiday where I felt I was now a "semi expert" at butterfly identification in Europe. In my previous holidays in the Italian Dolomites, Croatia and the Spanish Pyrenees, I was very much reliant on the guides and other guests. However, having spent quite a bit of winter 2017/2018 researching and honing my identification skills, I was well prepared for Greece, and by the end of the week, many of the other guests were seeking my advice on some of their photos, particularly the ever tricky skippers!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Dec-19 10:26 AM GMT

My second butterflying holiday of 2018 was the Naturetrek Butterflies of the Swiss Alps trip. <https://www.naturetrek.co.uk/tours/butterflies-of-the-swiss-alps>

If you read earlier posts in this diary, I had been booked on it for 2017, but it was cancelled due to not enough people. So I had booked it again for 2018. I was pretty confident that it would run this time though, as five of the other guests with me on the Spanish Pyrenees trip had also said they would book it, given how well we got on, and how good the holiday sounded.

And so, on 1st July 2018, we all caught the 9.25am flight from Heathrow to Zurich. Incredibly there were 16 guests on the holiday, by far the biggest group I'd been with. And only one Tour Leader, an all round expert naturalist called Jon Stokes who works for the Tree Council.

I have to say, not many tour leaders could have coped with so many guests all on their own, but Jon did admirably.

The peak difficulty for Jon as a guide was ensuring we all safely disembarked and embarked on four different trains in the all-rail transport trip from Zurich airport to the town of Wengen. That is easier said than done with heavy suitcases. But with a little helping each other out, we all did so safely. And as expected, the Swiss trains all ran like clockwork!

The weather in Switzerland that first day was clear blue skies and scorching hot. The scenery outside the train windows was stunning. And we all arrived into our hotel for the week, the Hotel Berghaus, at about 4pm local time.



Lake Thunersee from the train



View from the train up the valley, near Lauterbrunnen



View from the train, just outside of Wengen

After a quick freshen up, Jon took us for a quick walk from the hotel to a nearby meadow, which took around 90 minutes, before dinner outside the hotel in the evening warmth, lapping up the incredible scenery, and getting to know the large group.



View from the hotel veranda at dinner

The food, location, and friendliness of the hotel staff were all superb.

In total the group saw an amazing 37 species of butterfly in just 90 minutes. Of the 37, I personally saw 27. And of the 27, two were brand new species for me, specifically:

Purple Edged Copper (*Lycaena hippothoe*)

Red Underwing Skipper (*Spialia sertorius*)



Purple Edged Copper

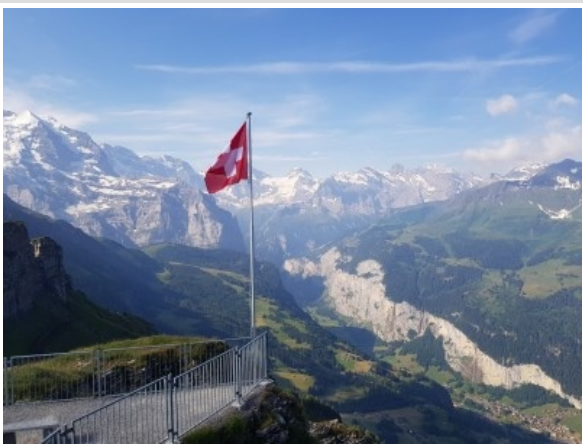


Red Underwing Skipper

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Dec-19 10:38 AM GMT

The first proper day of the holiday dawned with clear blue skies, and so we took the cable car near our hotel up to the top of Mannlichen, where the views were everything I expected Switzerland to be, and more.



View from the top of Mannlichen, looking back down to Wengen



View from the top of Mannlichen, looking over to Grindelwald

After about 90 minutes of butterflying at this peak, we then spent the rest of the day slowly walking the relatively flat path to Kleine Schiedegg, stopping for lunch about halfway, and whenever there was an interesting butterfly.



View of the Eiger from the path between Mannlichen and Kleine Schiedegg

During the course of the day it began to cloud over, and we were very lucky that it only just began to rain 10 minutes before we arrived at Kleine Schiedegg railway station. It was then an easy train journey back to Wengen, and a short walk from Wengen station to the hotel.

In total, the group saw 29 species, of which I saw only 18. But of the 18, there was one new species for me, which was Glandon Blue (*agriades glandon*)



Glandon Blue

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Dec-19 02:10 PM GMT

Day 3 began with the threat of more rain, so we headed lower, taking the train to Wilderswill, and walking in the churchyard and woods behind it.

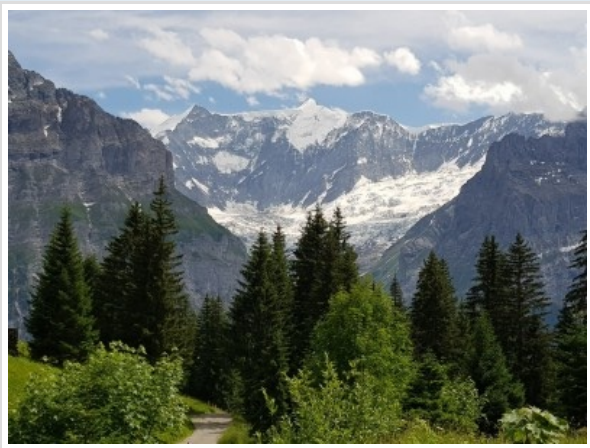
The rain never happened though, so we then took the train to Grindelwald, and then the cable car up to Bort, where we had lunch. We then spent a good two and a half hours in the very productive meadows around the Bort cable car station. We had the specific target of seeing the Sudeten Ringlet, which we saw, but there was lots else to see.



View 1 from just above the Bort cable car station



The main meadow in the afternoon



View 2 from just above the Bort cable car station

Finally, we headed back down the cable car to Grindelwald, then the train from there to Allmend, and then the three mile walk from there back to Wengen.

In total, the group saw 42 species, of which I saw 35. And of the 35, there were three new species for me, namely:

Osiris Blue (*cupido osiris*)

Sudetan Ringlet (*erebia sudetica*)

Carline Skipper (*pyrgus carlinae*)



Osiris Blue



Sudetan Ringlet



Carline Skipper

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 24-Dec-19 08:17 PM GMT

I just love those images from your Greek trip, Paul. Lush, verdant fields with many species that don't occur in western Europe and a bit of ancient history thrown in too! I must take the plunge real soon and become familiar with some of these eastern European specialities.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 24-Dec-19 10:10 PM GMT

David M wrote:

I just love those images from your Greek trip, Paul. Lush, verdant fields with many species that don't occur in western Europe and a bit of ancient history thrown in too! I must take the plunge real soon and become familiar with some of these eastern European specialities.

I have a Greek trip from 2019 still to report on here David. You really do need to visit. It is a stunning country in every way

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Dec-19 03:40 PM GMT

Day 4 was hot with sunny spells all day. We travelled to a beautiful little village called Gimmelwald, via Lauterbrunnen, using a combination of train, bus and cable car. From Gimmelwald, we walked down "butterfly valley" famous for its Apollo's amongst other species. We spent the whole morning here, plus lunch, before walking back to the cable car station, and then back down it.

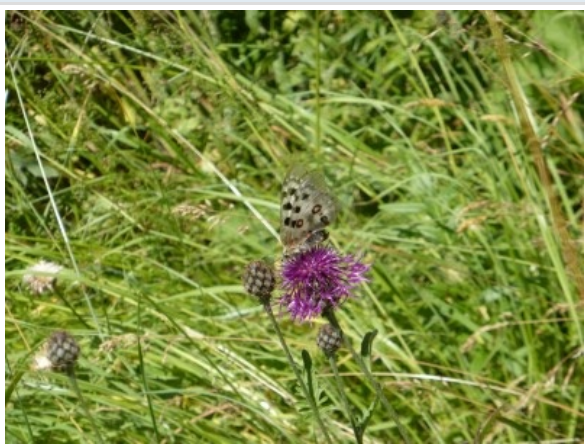


View from Wengen train station



View looking up "Butterfly Valley" from the edge of Gimmelwald

It really was full of butterflies of various species, the Apollo's being as numerous as suggested, and the False Heath Fritillaries also being very obliging too.

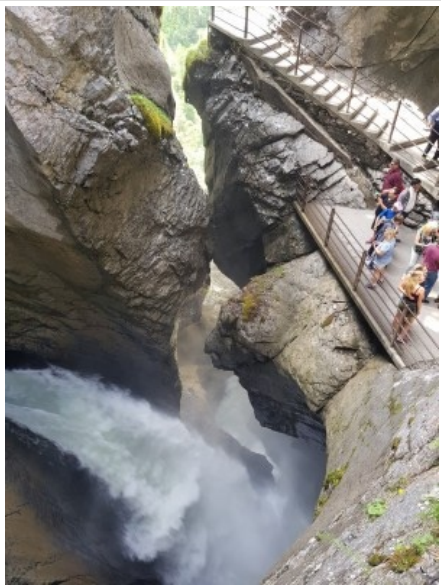


Apollo



Obliging False Heath Fritillary

We then caught the bus to the incredible Trummelbach Falls, a set of very powerful waterfalls hidden inside the mountain, and fed by glacier meltwater.



Trummelbach Falls

Following an hour here, we then walked back to Lauterbrunnen, and caught the train back to Wengen.

In total, the group saw 45 species, of which I saw 33. Of the 33, there was one new species for me, which was a single Hungarian Glider (*neptis rivularis*). Sadly no photo however, as it was just a "fly by."

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Dec-19 03:46 PM GMT

Day 5 was a cool day, with the odd dry spell, but mainly drizzle and showers all day.

Our first stop was the "First" cable car station, reached using two Cable Car rides, via Mannlichen and Grindelwald. We managed a short walk before the rain set in, and we had an early lunch.



A short dry spell before the rain set in, taken on the top of Mannlichen

With the weather outlook not getting any better, we took the scenic long route back to the hotel, taking cable car and train back via Grindelwald and Kleine Schiedegg.

Given the poor weather pretty much all day, the group for the day was just 13 species, of which I saw only 10. Even so, one of these was a new species for me, a Dusky Grizzled Skipper (*pyrgus cacaliae*)



Dusky Grizzled Skipper

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

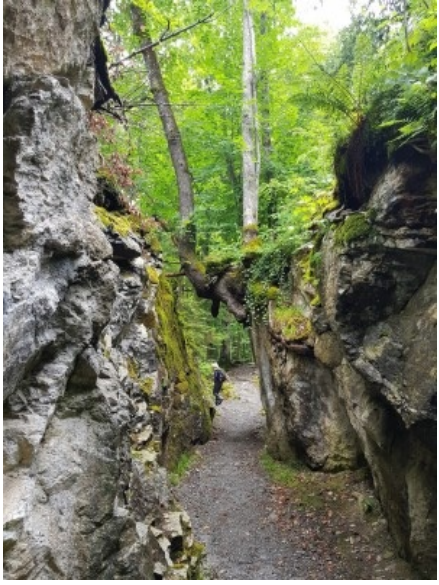
by selbypaul, 26-Dec-19 03:54 PM GMT

Sadly, Day 6 had even worse weather, with rain pretty much the whole day. So we focused on doing a scenic walk and boat trip, as the scenery was still stunning, despite it being grey. We caught the train to Interlaken Ost, and then caught a boat across Lake Brienersee to Iseltwald.

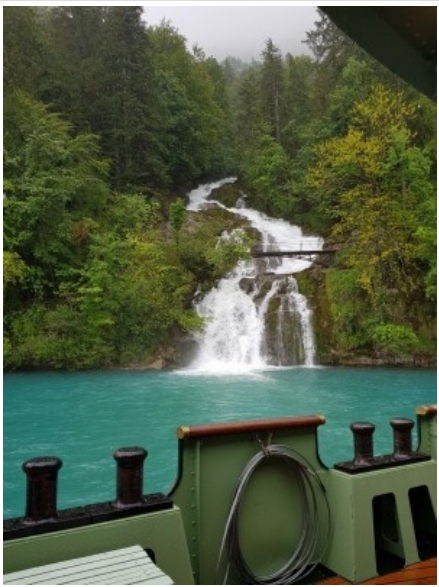


Looking back to Iseltwald on the edge of Lake Brienersee

This took us to late morning, and we then walked along the lake shore from here to the Giessbach Ferry stop, where we caught the boat to Brienz. Finally we caught three trains back to Wengen.



Interesting tree growth on the path on the southern side of Lake Brienersee



Giessbach Falls from the ferry

Lots of modes of transport, and lots of nice scenery, just a shame about the weather.

In total, the group saw 15 species, of which I saw only 2, none of which were new species for me.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Dec-19 04:09 PM GMT

After two days of being constrained by the weather, it was to great pleasure that the sun was out pretty much all of Day 7. There was a cool wind at times, but that didn't seem to hamper the butterflies.

Our first stop was at Kleine Schiedegg itself, via train, where we did a short walk. We then caught the train to Grindelwald, and then a bus to the top of Grosse Schiedegg by mid-morning. We then slowly walked back down the winding road to Grindelwald, spending most of the rest of the day to walk halfway down, such was the number of butterflies.



View from Grosse Schiedegg, looking back to Grindelwald



View from Grosse Schiedegg, looking towards Schattenhalb



Looking up to the Wetterhorn

Catching the bus the rest of the way back to Grindelwald, then the train to Allmend, we then walked the rest of the distance back to Wengen.

In total, the group saw 57 species, of which I saw 47. Of the 47, there was one new species for me, which was the Violet Copper (*lycaena helle*).



Violet Copper

It was the Violet Copper that was the most exciting find, one I found for myself, and which our guide Jon and others were sceptical about me having seen, even after seeing my photo.

But as you can see, it definitely was. And when I got home and researched it, I found that the species hadn't been seen anywhere near that part of Switzerland for over 20 years, so I reported it to the local recorder, who was very grateful.

Jon Stokes (our guide) was also kind enough to email me in July 2019, a year later, to say his group had found a whole colony of Violet Copper in the same location, so it wasn't a one off. For such a rapidly declining European species, this was indeed an excellent find, one I am very proud of.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Dec-19 04:18 PM GMT

Our flights back to Heathrow weren't until 7pm local time. So despite the four trains needed to get back to Zurich, we still had a half day. The weather was the best since the first day, with clear blue skies and hot too. We spent the whole morning near the hotel, at the meadow we had visited on the first afternoon.



Final view from the hotel balcony

Again there was lots to keep us interested, with the total for this final day being 39 species, of which I saw 31. And even on this last day, there was one new species for me, specifically Damon Blue (*polyommatus damon*)



Damon Blue

The grand total for the group for the whole week was 94 species, of which I saw 81 species. And despite this now being my fifth full week looking for butterfly species in Europe, I was still able to see 10 new species.

Of the 13 species I missed out on during the week, I have seen seven either before or since, elsewhere. But that means there were six species seen by

others which I very much regret dipping out on! These were Peak White, Moorland Clouded Yellow, Mnestre's Ringlet, Swiss Brassy Ringlet, Dewy Ringlet and Alpine Grayling.



Group photo

Both for what I missed, but most importantly, for what I saw too, I will return to this part of Switzerland. It is an incredible country. Beautiful, clean, efficient, full of alpine meadows, friendly people, good food and stunning scenery.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Dec-19 04:38 PM GMT

My butterflying year for 2019 was a busy one, and it began in the second week of January, in Lanzarote. As a new Canary Isle for me, and with a pretty different climate to Tenerife, I was hoping to see some different butterflies. And that I did. In fact the first butterfly I saw was a brand new species for me, a Greenish Black Tip (*euchloe charlonia*). Sadly only a blurred photo however, taken with my phone camera.



Greenish Black Tip

I'd seen an African Grass Blue (*zizeeria knysna*) before, in Cyprus in 2014, but I was still happy to see one again, this time properly, knowing what I was looking for.



African Grass Blue (or should that be African Glass Blue?)

I had also hoped to see Southern/Austat's Blue (*polyommatus celina*) and Geranium Bronze (*cacyreus marshalli*), but despite a few efforts during the week, I had no luck.

Perhaps the most significant sightings of the holiday however, were the literally hundreds of Painted Lady butterflies, literally everywhere. Obviously very early to predict an "invasion year" across Europe, but it felt to me that it was likely to be, and indeed it did turn out to be.



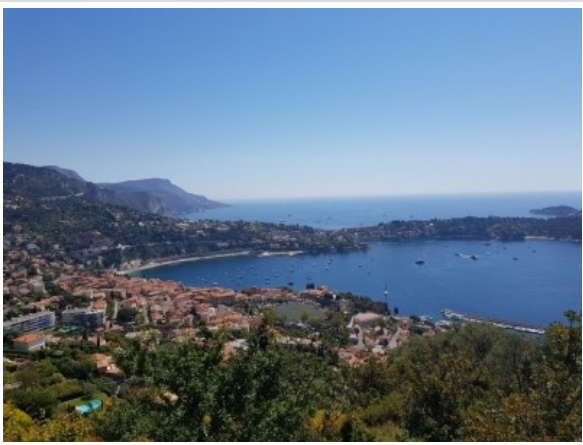
Arrecife, Lanzarote

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 26-Dec-19 04:46 PM GMT

My next trip to Europe in 2019 was also not a butterflying holiday, instead a long weekend trip to Nice and Monaco with my brother.

But this still allowed half a day walking up one of the hills on the eastern edge of Nice, looking over the city, where I hoped to see at least some butterflies.



View looking east from the hills above Nice

I was therefore very pleased to see, but not photograph, a Two Tailed Pascha (*charaxes jasius*). Another new species for me, without even really trying.



Me, having just seen a Two Tailed Pascha

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by Padfield, 26-Dec-19 05:15 PM GMT

Hi Paul- I'm especially glad you enjoyed your trip to Switzerland when you eventually got there! I know well the meadows where *sudetica* flies and have

happy memories of that species, though the region is a bit outside my usual stamping-grounds.

Guy

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 27-Dec-19 05:19 PM GMT

[quote=Padfield post_id=149981 time=1577380549 user_id=665] Hi Paul- I'm especially glad you enjoyed your trip to Switzerland when you eventually got there! I know well the meadows where *sudetica* flies and have happy memories of that species, though the region is a bit outside my usual stamping-grounds.

Guy

Thanks Guy

I can absolutely see why you chose to live there, prior to moving back to the UK. It really is such a stunning country. I'm planning a visit to a different part of Switzerland (using the Sion/Visp area as a base) in 2021.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 05:01 PM GMT

My first proper butterflying holiday of 2019 was to Greece. All my previous holidays had been with Naturetrek, but I thought I'd try Greenwings' Butterflies and Birds of North Greece. (<https://greenwings.co/product/butterflies-birds-of-north-greece/>)

Day 1 was 8th June, and involved an early morning flight from Gatwick to Thessaloniki, arriving at midday local time. Our two guides were Julian Dowding and Jon Dunn, both excellent guides. Including me, there were 12 guests.

It was actually a pretty short 90 minute drive to our hotel, the Hotel Villa Belles, on the slopes of Mount Belles, looking out over the expanse of Lake Kerkini.



View from the Hotel Villa Belles, looking over Lake Kerkini



View of the Hotel from the road, looking up to the mountains behind

So after a spot of late lunch, we then set out for a short afternoon of butterfly spotting, visiting four local sites, all pretty close together, in or near the village of Porroia. The weather was hot and sunny.

Notable sightings included Little Tiger Blue, Cardinal, Southern Comma, Southern White Admiral, amongst others. The most impressive sights however were the thousands of Nettle Tree Butterfly, sometimes in clouds.

In total, the group saw 29 species, of which I saw 20. And of the 20, there were two new species for me, namely:

Nettle Tree Butterfly (*libythea celtis*)

Large Tortoiseshell (*nymphalis polychloros*)



Nettle Tree Butterfly



Large Tortoiseshell

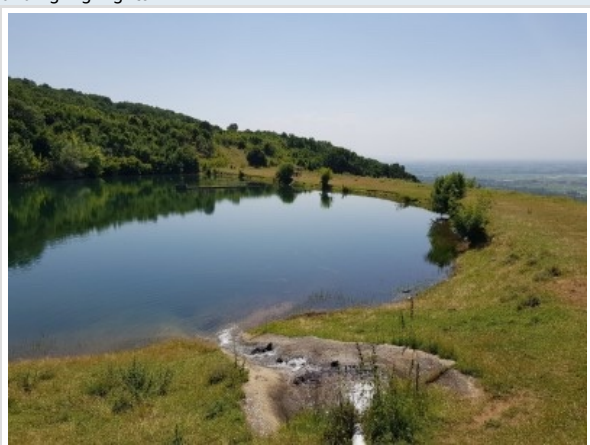
Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 05:16 PM GMT

Day 2 was primarily, though not exclusively, a birdwatching day, spent mostly at various sites around the edge of Lake Kerkini itself. The weather was excellent, hot, sunny, and very little wind.

Stop 1 was at Mandraki harbour, and it was great to see so many new bird species I had never seen before, including Squacco Heron, Purple Heron, Little Bittern, Pygmy Cormorant, White Pelican and Dalmatian Pelican.

We then headed uphill in the hills above Mandraki, by a small reservoir. I spotted a Black Stork circling, and a Woodchat Shrike, which were the main birding highlights.



Small Reservoir above Mandraki View 1



Small Reservoir above Mandraki View 2



View of Lake Kerkini from the hills above Mandraki

There were again clouds of Nettle Tree butterflies, all breeding frantically and laying eggs on the profusion of Nettle Trees. Here we stopped for lunch and had some excellent views of a Large Tortoiseshell, which landed on one of the other guests hats!



Large Tortoiseshell on hat

After lunch, we moved to the other side of Lake Kerkini, where we visited a known spot for Iola's Blue. We were successful, and I saw much better views of this large butterfly than I'd seen the year before.



Iola's Blue

Our final stop for the day was further along Lake Kerkini, near a little chapel. It was arguably a stop too far, as the heat was quite sapping!

In total, the group saw 40 species, of which I saw 31. A very good day, but no new species for me.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 05:28 PM GMT

Day 3 started cloudless and hot again. We first spent an hour on the road just outside the hotel, which was pretty productive, and I achieved my best ever photos of Lesser Fiery Copper, such a beautiful butterfly. There were also a good number of White Letter Hairstreak too, not surprising given the large number of Field Elms (*Ulmus minor*) in the field boundaries.



Lesser Fiery Copper

The rest of the morning was spent looking for birds in river channels near the dam that holds back Lake Kerkini. The highlight was a pair of Penduline Tits building a nest.



Water Channels by Lake Kerkini



Sunflowers in the fields near Lake Kerkini

By lunch it had clouded over, and was very muggy. Our first afternoon stop was at a quarry just to the south of the lake. The hope was to see a Mediterranean Skipper (*gegenes nostradamus*), which had been seen there before, but we were out of luck.

There was then a torrential downpour, which we missed as we were driving to our final stop for the day, Vironia quarry. Another excellent view of a Large Tortoiseshell and around twenty Lattice Brown mud pudding underneath a White Mulberry tree was the highlight.



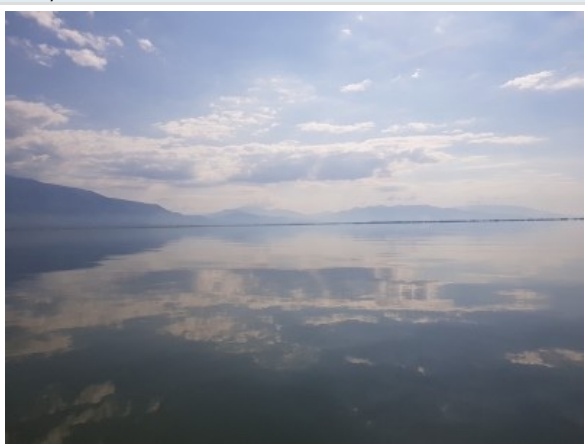
Vironia quarry

In total, the group saw 35 species, of which I saw 31. Sadly, again no new species for me today, but it had still been a great day of wildlife watching.

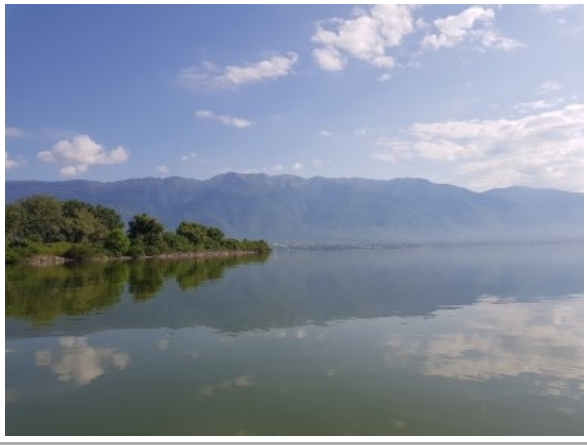
Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 05:38 PM GMT

Day 4 was a day of two halves. The morning was spent on a boat on Lake Kerkini, getting close to the breeding birds on the lake. We were so lucky with the weather. Near cloudless skies, not a breath of wind, the lake was like a mirror at times. The close views of the birds was also a highlight of the holiday as whole.



Lake Kerkini by boat 1



Lake Kerkini by boat 2



Lake Kerkini by boat 3

The afternoon was then spent at a secret site in search of a very butterfly, the Tessellated Skipper. It was a new location for both Julian and Jon (our guides) and we were not at all sure we were looking in the right place, given the habitat was near woodland scrub on a steep slope. After about an hour of searching, all of us spread out across the hillside, a shout went up, and all of us ran up or down hill as quickly as possible to where the shout had come from. A Tessellated Skipper! Definitely the butterfly highlight of the holiday for many of us.



Tessellated Skipper

We then headed back to the hotel, again most of us needing a cold shower given the very high temperatures.

In total, the group saw 36 species, of which I saw 31. And of the 31, the Tessellated Skipper (*muschampia tessellum*) was a new species for me.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 07:44 PM GMT

Day 5 was the first day of the holiday that was fully focused on butterflies. The first stop was near Promachonas, at a woodland glade which marks the Greece/Bulgaria border. The aim was to see Common Glider, but this was sadly not seen. But the site proved to be an excellent one for other reasons. A Masked Shrike was seen feeding its young in a nest. Plus we saw the Map butterfly, a species I had dipped out on seeing on various of my other butterfly holidays.



The meadow near Promachonas

Most interesting however was a still unidentified Clouded Yellow species. (See my next post as I'm looking still looking for identification help with this one).

The rest of the day was then mostly near Achladochori, in various meadows, all full of lots of different butterfly species.



The hills around Achladochori

In total, the group saw 63 species, of which I saw 55. And of the 55, there were four or five new species for me, namely:

Eastern Festoon (*zerynthia cerisy*)

Anomalous Blue (*polyommatus admetus*)

Map (*araschnia levana*)

Eastern Knapweed Fritillary (*melitaea ornata*)

Balkan Grayling (*hipparchia senthes*)



Eastern Festoon



Anomalous Blue



Map



Eastern Knapweed Fritillary



Balkan Grayling

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 08:06 PM GMT

The Clouded Yellow mystery

Jon (the guide) and I were the only ones to see it. From a distance it caught our eye as being very orange on its top side in flight. We did get a few photos of it, some better than others. Confusing things was another two Clouded Yellow species individuals, which the original had brief aerial fights with. Jon and I therefore took photos of three different individuals. Possibly the same species or possibly not?



My photo of Individual 1



My photo of Individual 1 (on plant) and Individual 2 (in flight)



Jon Dunn photo of different individual, Individual 3

Having seen Greek Clouded Yellow (*colias aurorina*) the year before, my first identification guess was this species again, given the orange upperside in flight. However the underside photos taken by both Jon and I do not look anything like Greek Clouded Yellow (*colias aurorina*).

Back in the hotel that evening, based on my study of the identification guides, my next guess on visuals alone, was Balkan Clouded Yellow (*colias caucasica*). But our altitude was only 150 metres above sea level, whereas the guides suggest it flies above a minimum of 1200 metres.

I ruled out Danube Clouded Yellow (*colias myrmidone*) simply because it is such a rare butterfly, never seen in this area before. But the orange was orange enough, and this is a border area that is minimally explored by butterfly experts.

My best guess is that it was probably just an unusually orange "Common" Clouded Yellow (*colias crocea*). It just didn't feel like it, as we saw many of these throughout the holiday, and this felt different.

Jon has promised to revisit this location again next year (when this Greenwings holiday is re-run), with the express aim of trying to see the species again, and trying to confirm its ID.

So what are your thoughts? Was it: `{list}`

- Greek Clouded Yellow (*colias aurorina*); or `{list}``[list]`Balkan Clouded Yellow (*colias caucasica*); or `{list}``[list]`Clouded Yellow (*colias crocea*); or `{list}``[list]`Danube Clouded Yellow (*colias myrmidone*)`[list]`

All thoughts would be very much appreciated!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 08:32 PM GMT

Day 6 was the longest drive, to an area called Lailias in the Vrontous mountains. The ski slope here was highly productive, and we spent three hours in total over the course of the day, in two spells.



The Lailias ski slope, looking up it, in the morning



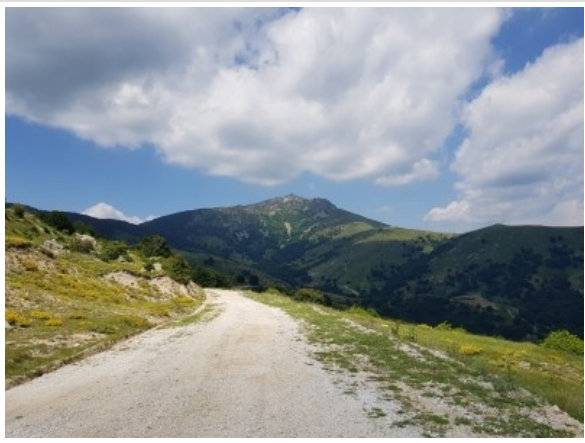
The Lailias ski slope, looking down it, in the afternoon

The woodland tracks around this main location were also great for butterflies, the highlight being two sightings of Camberwell Beauty (*nymphalis antiopa*). This butterfly holds a special place in my heart, having seen one in the Lake District in 1995, that I believe sparked my interest in butterflies.



Camberwell Beauty (blurry as taken from a distance)

Our final stop was slightly lower down, in more open hillside. We had been seeing masses of Painted Ladies all week, but this afternoon saw a peak for the week. I had seen the UK invasion in Hampshire in May 2009, but what I saw in Greece this week, particularly on this day, was perhaps doubly spectacular. I wonder whether I'll see such an incredible spectacle of Painted Lady migration again in my lifetime? I hope so.



Lower down track in the afternoon

In total, the group saw 62 species, of which I saw 48. And of the 48, there were two new species for me, namely:
Northern Wall Brown (*lasioommata petropolitana*)
Eros Blue (*polyommatus eros* form *eroides*) – False Eros Blue not currently being counted as a separate species



Northern Wall Brown



Eros Blue (form eroides)

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 08:37 PM GMT

Day 7 was also spent mostly in the Vrontous mountains again, albeit this time we were lower down and further west.

The morning was spent walking the length of two different tracks, one out in the open, and one in the shade. This allowed quite a large diversity of species.

After lunch, we headed to back closer to the hotel, and into the wooded mountain roads that make up the border between Greece and Bulgaria. There were different species here, including our first Clouded Apollo of the week, a mating pair.

By 3pm, the temperature in the hills reached an incredible 38 degrees centigrade, as a large thunderstorm approached. This was the hottest it reached all week, and some of the guests started to feel unwell, so we got back into the air conditioned minibuses and drove back to the hotel, arriving just in time to escape a 10 minute battering of marble sized hailstones!

In total, the group saw 60 species across the day, of which I saw 50. And of the 50, there was one new species for me, the Purple Shot Copper (lycaena alciphron).



Purple Shot Copper

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 28-Dec-19 08:49 PM GMT

Our flight back to the UK was at midday, so Day 8 allowed no time for butterflying sadly.

I took this photo from the hotel entrance, just as we left for the airport. The Greece of this holiday was very different from the coastal Greece most people see. So wild, and so beautiful, and so full of wildlife. As I write this in December 2019, I know I'll definitely be back, albeit briefly, in summer 2020.



Final morning looking out from the hotel entrance

In total, over the course of the week, the whole group saw 95 species, of which I saw 87. Of the 87, eleven were new species for me.

Of the 8 species I missed out on seeing, I have seen five either before or since, leaving three that I regret not seeing, specifically Yellow Banded Skipper (*pyrgus sidae*), Balkan Copper (*lycaena candens*) and Kreuper's Small White (*pieris krueperi*). My aim is to see all three of these in 2020.

One of the notable features of this holiday is that I had spent a good chunk of time preparing for it, honing my ID skills in the weeks before, more so even than in 2018. This helped me to help the guides Julian and Jon in helping some of the other guests with identifying photos they had taken, taking some of the burden off them.



Julian and I, pleased after just having identified the first Idas Blue of the holiday



The group photo

Overall I was not disappointed with my first Greenwings holiday. Equally as good as all my previous Naturetrek holidays, and it wouldn't be long until my second!

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 29-Dec-19 07:29 PM GMT

It was only six weeks after my trip to North Greece that I was on my second Greenwings butterfly holiday of the year. This time it was to the Montes Universales area of central Spain, between Valencia and Madrid.

<https://greenwings.co/our-holidays/butterfly-holidays/butterflies-montes-universales/>

The area is pretty much unknown to most UK people, but it is acquiring a strong reputation amongst European butterfly enthusiasts due to its long list of endemic and near endemic species.

So on the morning of 27th July 2019, I flew out to Valencia airport, and met up with the group and two guides. One of the guides was the excellent Jon Dunn, who had been my guide just six weeks earlier in Greece. The other guide was the equally excellent David Moore, who has written separately about this trip on here, and is one of the most regular contributors on this UK Butterflies Forum. Joining us were 10 other guests.

It was a two hour drive from Valencia to Albarracin where we were based for the week. The weather was mostly broken sunshine. We stopped just outside Albarracin at a place called Xavier's Rambla, a mostly dried out stream, and spent about an hour familiarising ourselves with the local butterflies.

The heat of the afternoon meant that less butterflies were flying, and in total, the group saw 12 species, all of which I saw. Of the four, 12 were new species for me, namely:

Cinquefoil Skipper (*pyrgus cirsii*)

Azure Chalkhill Blue (*lysandra caelestissima*)

Oberthur's Anomalous Blue (*polyommatus fabressei*)

Iberian Marbled White (*melanargia lachesis*)



Cinquefoil Skipper



Azure Chalkhill Blue



Oberthur's Anomalous Blue



Iberian Marbled White

Albarracin was as pretty as David described it when we arrived at the airport, even in the grey skies.



View 1 from my hotel room window



View 2 from my hotel room window

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 29-Dec-19 07:50 PM GMT

We were up early on Day 2, and back at Xavier's Rambla for 9.30am. The place was alive with butterflies, many more than the previous afternoon. We spent just under three hours there, walking up the dry riverbed, trying to identify the various Grayling's and Skipper's.



Xavier's Rambla



Our guide (Jon Dunn) gets up and close to a Southern Hermit in Xavier's Rambla

Just before lunchtime, we moved on to a scrubby area near Pozondon. We had lunch here, and spent around two hours in total.



Near Pozondon

Our final stop for the day was back near Albarracin, this time by the river. Here we stopped to watch clouds of hundreds of Blue's and Skipper's mud puddling.

The day had been sunny and hot, and it was good to get back to the hotel for a shower and a cold drink.

In total, the group saw 57 species, of which I saw 45. And of the 45, there were 5 new species for me, specifically:

Southern Marbled Skipper (*carcharodus baeticus*)

Sage Skipper (*muschampia proto*)

Rosy Grizzled Skipper (*pyrgus onopordi*)

Tree Grayling (*hipparchia statilinus*)

Southern Hermit (*chazara prieuri*)



Sage Skipper



Rosy Grizzled Skipper



Tree Grayling



Southern Hermit

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 29-Dec-19 08:15 PM GMT

The first stop on Day 3 was just up the valley from the village of Noguera. It was a relatively steep sided narrow valley with a stream running through it, and it proved to be an excellent location for butterflies.



Near Noguera 1



Near Noguera 2

On arrival, the first thing we saw were large numbers of Silver Washed and High Brown Fritillaries nectaring on some of the flowers close to the road. It was by far the greatest concentration of these two species that I'd ever seen.

We spent the whole morning in this valley, the highlights for nearly all of us being Iberian Sooty Copper and Mother of Pearl Blue.

After lunch we made two stops in the Sierra Alta area, near the town of Bronchales. The first stop was the peak of Sierra Alta itself, at around 1850 metres above sea level, the highest we reached all week. The second stop was nearby, but lower down.



View from the top of Sierra Alta

In total, the group saw 56 species over the course of the day, of which I saw 49. And of the 49, there were three new species for me, namely:

Iberian Sooty Copper (*Lycaena bleusei*)

Southern Mountain Argus (*aricia montensis*)

Mother of Pearl Blue (*polyommatus nivescens*)



Iberian Sooty Copper



Southern Mountain Argus

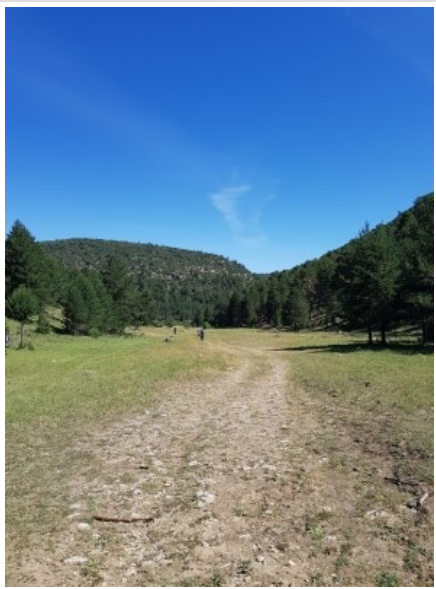


Mother of Pearl Blue

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 29-Dec-19 08:58 PM GMT

The morning of Day 4 was spent in meadows near the village of Moscardon. It was a particularly interesting set of meadows, and so we spent three hours there, including lunch. It was highly productive, and amongst other things, we saw our first False Grayling's of the week.



The meadow near Moscardon

The biggest spectacle however was the sheer number of Great Banded Grayling's. I've seen perhaps ten or so over the course of a morning at various places elsewhere in Europe. But here you could see 20 or so in the space of a ten second scan of the area around you. There must have been 500+ in the meadow complex overall.

This site also produced the biggest mystery of the holiday, this mystery Chalkhill Blue species.



*Either the hybrid *lysandra x coeruleascens* or Provence Chalkhill Blue*

At the time, David and I both identified it as a Provence Chalkhill Blue (*lysandra hispana*). But after the holiday, after doing extensive research, David believes it to be a hybrid between Azure Chalkhill Blue (*lysandra caelestissima*) and Spanish Chalkhill Blue (*lysandra albicans*), known as *lysandra x coeruleascens* in the guides. We may know more next August when David returns with the 2020 Greenwings holiday.

After lunch, we moved on to some meadows near the village of El Vallecillo. We spent the whole afternoon here, it was again highly productive.



The meadow near El Vallecillo

In total, across both of the two sites, the group saw 70 species, of which I saw 57. And of the 57, there were five confirmed new species for me, those being:

- Panoptes Blue (*pseudophilotes panoptes*)
- Lesser Marbled Fritillary (*brenthis ino*)
- Twin Spot Fritillary (*brenthis hecate*)
- Esper's Marbled White (*melanargia russiae*)
- False Grayling (*arethusana arethusana*)



Panoptes Blue



Lesser Marbled Fritillary



Twin Spot Fritillary



Esper's Marbled White



False Grayling

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 30-Dec-19 07:15 AM GMT

Day 5 saw us travel the longest distance away from Albarracin all week. The first site visited was one where Sandy Grizzled Skipper had been known to fly, near the village of Huelamo. Sadly, we had no luck, despite an hour of trying, and a number of other Skipper's trying to confuse us!



Scrubby area near the village of Huelamo

The second site was a wooded area near some road junctions, where I spotted a large Skipper which at the time was a mystery, but which has subsequently been identified as a Cinquefoil Skipper (the commonest Skipper of the holiday).

We moved on to a site near Tragacete, where we first had lunch, and then spent a good two hours walking the tracks and meadows. Amongst many other butterflies, including Apollo, we saw our first Zapater's Ringlet, the main target species of the holiday.



Our lunch stop near Tragacete

Finally we visited Puerto de el Portillo, our second highest peak of the holiday, which was known to have Spanish Argus. After some early misidentifications, we were successful, with a good number seen, in and around its larval host plant.



Puerto de el Portillo

In total, the group saw 61 species over the day, of which I saw 43. And of the 43, there were two new species for me, specifically the aforementioned:
Spanish Argus (*aricia morronensis*)
Zapater's Ringlet (*erebia zapateri*)



Spanish Argus



Zapater's Ringlet

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 30-Dec-19 07:19 AM GMT

Day 6 was the final full day of the week. We returned to the meadows near to the village of El Vallecillo, which we had first visited on the afternoon of Day 4.

We spent the full morning here, with the main target again being Zapater's Ringlet, for better photos. The group as a whole saw four or five, but they were highly active in the heat, and this was my best photo.



Zapater's Ringlet

In the afternoon, we visited Ojo de Cabriel, where we saw the first Spanish Purple Hairstreak of the week, amongst other species.

In total, the group saw 79 species in just one day. This is an incredible amount, and by far the largest number in one day of any of the group holidays I've been on so far. Of the 79, I saw 55, none of which were new.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 30-Dec-19 07:26 AM GMT

Day 7 was the day we had to fly home to the UK. But the flight was in the early evening, so even with a two hour drive, we had a full morning for butterflying.

A slightly later start enabled me to climb the hills above Albarracin and take these photos.



Albarracin from above, View 1



Albarracin from above, View 2

The morning was spent back at Xavier's Rambla, where we began the holiday. The three hours there sadly didn't turn up anything definitively new, though David did spot a large mystery skipper.



Final view of Xavier's Rambla

In total, the group saw 38 species on the day, of which I saw 37, none of which were new to me.

The grand total for the whole holiday was 103 species, of which I saw 95. 19 of the 95 were new species for me, a very high amount given my six previous dedicated butterfly spotting holiday's, including the previous one to the Spanish Pyrenees. This is testament to the area being so good for endemics and near endemics.

Of the 8 species I missed out on, I have 7 either before or since elsewhere, so I only really dipped out on Provençal Fritillary (*melitaea deione*).

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 30-Dec-19 07:35 AM GMT

Whilst my dedicated butterfly spotting holidays for the year were over, I still had an eight day trip to Italy planned in the second week of September 2019, with three separate locations. The first location was two days in Venice.



View from the Rialto Bridge, Venice



Ponte della Paglia, Venice

I wasn't expecting to see much, butterfly wise, but had wondered if I might see Geranium Bronze (*cacyreus marshalli*) given the amount of Pelargonium plants there are in window boxes.

I wasn't disappointed, with this one landing on me whilst I had lunch in one of the squares!



Finally, a Geranium Bronze

I know it is an introduced species to Europe, from South Africa, and indeed many see it as a pest. But having dipped out on seeing it on at least five previous attempts to see it, I was very pleased.

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 30-Dec-19 07:53 AM GMT

The second Italy location was my most anticipated. It was a return to the Dolomites, to the same hotel as I had visited on my 2016 Naturetrek tour.

At a different time of year though, two months later, and cooler, so I was not expecting many butterflies at all. I was mainly there for the scenery and views, which in themselves did not disappoint.

Day 1 of the four I spent in the Dolomites was really just a half day, having only arrived at the hotel at 2pm. On the way, I stopped at Lago di Carezza to take in the views, but it was pretty chilly so only a Brown Argus was seen.



Lago di Carezza

After arriving at the hotel I walked from the village of Tamion slightly down the valley. Not much was around, but the Autumn Crocuses were beautiful, and I did see a Queen of Spain Fritillary.



View from the village of Tamion



Autumn Crocuses



Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by David M, 30-Dec-19 09:51 PM GMT

Wow, you don't mess about when you get started, Paul. I struggled to keep up there! 😊

The last Greece report was extremely interesting...I must dive in there very soon; that habitat looks glorious.

Of course, I am more than familiar with the Montes Universales trip, and certainly the lycaenid you posted looks neither like a Spanish Chalkhill Blue **nor** an Azure. At some point I'll get round to visiting this region earlier in the year which may give a clue to the identity of these 'halfway house' Blues.

By the way, I think your 'Southern Marbled Skipper' is actually a Mallow Skipper. I remember catching a single specimen of *baeticus* at the site near Pozondon and releasing it in front of the group. Unfortunately (and entirely due to my fault) I released it in a sheltered little area which contained many other butterflies. Dogfights ensued and the skipper that actually came back to the area immediately in front of us was *alceae*, which is what you've got there (and what I got as I was standing behind you all when the insect settled on a grass blade).

Re: European Butterflies – A personal diary

by selbypaul, 31-Dec-19 05:30 PM GMT

David M wrote:

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Thanks David. You definitely need to visit Greece, it really is superb. And thanks for the correction on the Mallow Skipper. I remember that now! I'll make this and two other corrections to the diary I need to make when I'm finished. Just four more posts to go!