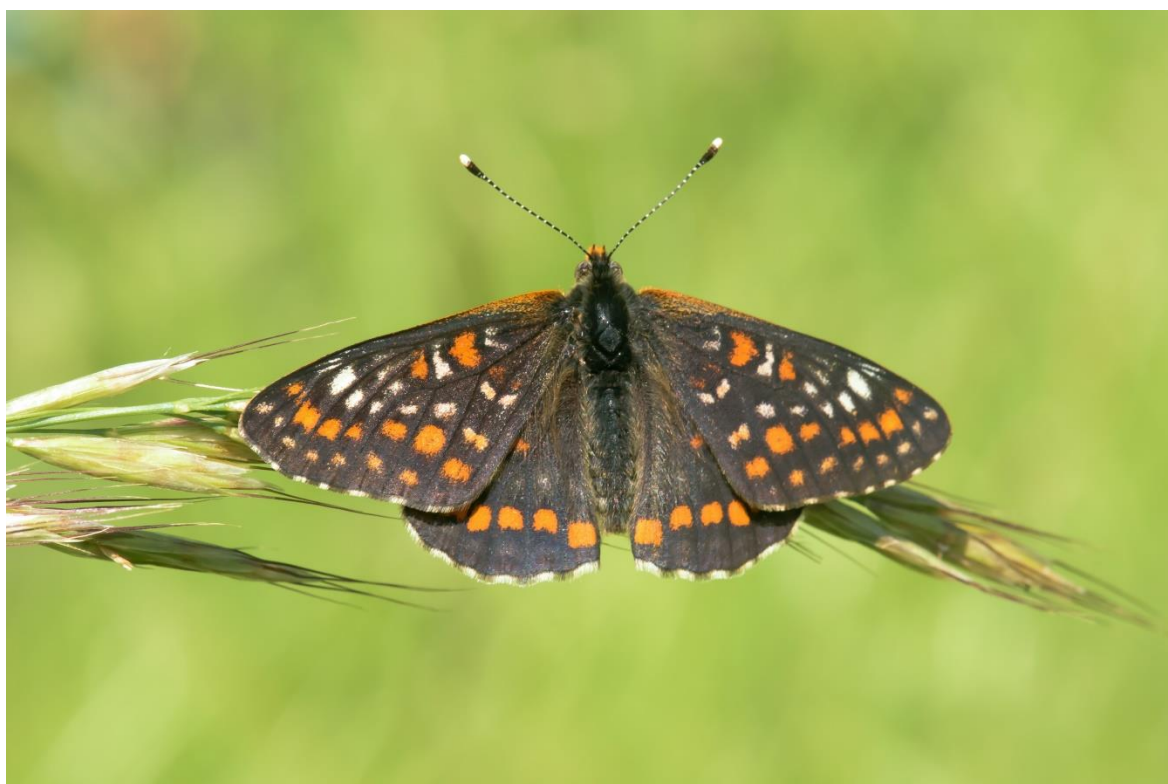


Butterflies of the Piedmont Alps, Italy

Holiday Report 15 – 22 June 2019

led by
David Moore, Simon Spencer and Martin Warren



Scarce Fritillary (Ian Collins)

Greenwings Wildlife Holidays

Tel: 01473 254658

Web: www.greenwings.co.uk

Email: enquiries@greenwings.co.uk

Introduction

This butterfly holiday was based in the Bassa Valle Stura and the Valle Gesso, with Demonte and Entracque being the host towns. Both these areas form part of the Parco Delle Alpi Marittime, close to the French border and the Mercantour National Park. It was the first time Greenwings had operated a tour to this region, and the principle reason for doing so was to study the relict populations of Scarce Fritillary, *Euphydryas maturna*, which were only discovered in the early part of the century.

Marin Warren, Simon Spencer and David Moore were the three guides for this trip with the guests joining them being Ian & Sue, Harry F, Harry C, Bill, Malcolm, Roger, Alfie, Sam and Diane & John.

What follows is a daily diary for the week, followed by species lists. The itinerary was as follows:

Day 1, Saturday 15 June: Arrival at Nice airport, transfer to Demonte via Col de la Lombarde

Day 2, Sunday 16 June: Road to Vanet and east of Ruera di Ronvel

Day 3, Monday 17 June: Val d'Arma, and around Moiola and Valloriate

Day 4, Tuesday 18 June: Transit day – repeat visit to Val d'Arma and on to Entracque

Day 5, Wednesday 19 June: Vallone del Gesso, outskirts of Entracque,

Day 6, Thursday 20 June: San Bernardo, quarries/meadows at San Lorenzo and Roaschia

Day 7, Friday 21 June: Ponte Porcera, Vallone di Brignola, Roaschia and Ponte della Rovina

Day 8, Saturday 22 June: Return to UK via Col de la Lombarde



Montane grassland in Val d'Arma (Martin Warren)

Day 1: Saturday 15 June

Guests had all arrived at Nice airport by early afternoon, with the exception of Diana & John who had travelled independently to Demonte in their camping van. After about an hour and a half's driving, a stop was made about 1,250m up the road leading to Col de la Lombarde, although weather conditions were far from ideal meaning few butterflies were seen. Indeed, a heavy rain shower put an abrupt end to the search and the group headed for the col itself which, at 2,350m, was rather inclement with temperatures only just into double figures. Little more than a leg-stretch later it was time to descend the col on the Italian side, with heavy rain accompanying the group for much of the journey. This developed into a fierce hail storm between Vinadio and Aisone, before things cleared up just in time for arrival at the hotel in Demonte. The rest of the trip was fortunately blessed with good weather, so we were lucky to have escaped this on a transit day.

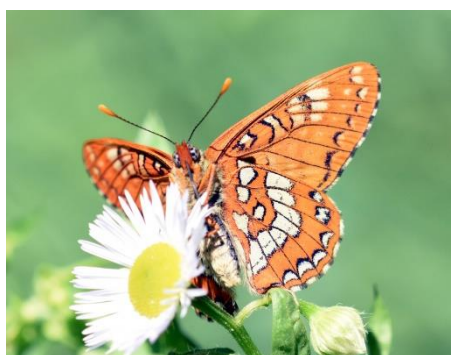


Hay-meadow near Entracque (Martin Warren)

Day 2: Sunday 16 June

Thankfully, the storms had cleared overnight and it was a far more agreeable sky that greeted the group on this first morning. The first stop was not far away, just a couple of miles to the north west of Demonte.

There were several south facing meadows to explore, and the group got off to a good start when a couple of Large Blues appeared in the first meadow that we entered. Soon after, there were further delights discovered, with Baton Blue, Nickerl's Fritillary, Green Underside Blue and Swallowtail recorded. Later in the morning, the group moved down the road to a damp lay-by which Simon had reported as a good puddling site for the target species, Scarce Fritillary. However, the first specimen observed was actually nectaring on umbellifers high up the slope just above this lay-by. But it wasn't long before a few Scarce Fritillaries were taking fluids from the damp spot Simon had identified, with another taking a considerable liking to one of the guests' rucksacks further down the road. Diana was fortunate to have another using her hat as a perching post, and the entire group wasted no time photographing this comical phenomenon! We found considerable variation in their colour, a few having no white spots on the upperside (like Asian Fritillary) while others had conspicuous white markings.



Scarce Fritillary (Roger Clooney)



Green Underside Blue (Ian Collins)



Diana sporting a fritillary

In the meantime, several other species of butterfly were dropping by to take minerals from the damp roadside, with Marbled Skipper and a beautiful, fresh Silver Washed Fritillary being the most notable. In addition, whilst lunch was being taken a Camberwell Beauty was seen flying around the trees beside the road, whilst a gorgeous Turquoise Blue came to ground to take in some fluids.

In the afternoon, the group moved eastwards into the valley near the Ruera di Ronvel. Here, further Scarce Fritillaries were seen, both taking fluids on the damp track and defending territories in the nearby grassy meadows. Almond Eyed Ringlets and many Clouded Apollos were on the wing here, with some of the other species recorded being Red Underwing, Olive & Large Grizzled Skipper, Wood White, Duke of Burgundy, Escher's Blue, Weaver's Fritillary and Large Wall Brown. By the end of the day, 54 butterfly species had been definitively identified, with a handful more requiring confirmation.



Turquoise Blue (Ian Collins)



Large Wall (Ian Collins)



Clouded Apollo (Sam Ellis)

Day 3: Monday 17 June

The first stop this morning was along the Via Val d'Arma. There were inviting flower-filled grassy meadows that were clearly to be cut later in the year for hay. Again, Scarce Fritillaries were present, along with quite a few others from this family – Niobe, Dark Green, High Brown, Queen of Spain & Marbled, whilst the week's first Dingy Skipper was recorded, albeit rather worn.

After an hour or so, the group decided to move to higher altitude, and 30 minutes later were at about 1,600m. Unfortunately, the weather was quickly closing in, although there was still time to see Mazarine Blue, Olive Skipper & Mountain Clouded Yellow. The decision was made to drop down in altitude but the cloud was almost as fast as the vehicles, meaning that only short stops were possible, although there was sufficient time to pick up a few more Scarce Fritillaries! So, with the clear skies towards the east, the decision was made to visit sites further east in the afternoon.



Clouded Yellows courting (Roger Clooney)



Mountain Clouded Yellow (Ian Collins)

These sites were part-forested meadows along infrequently used minor roads, and were home to a striking array of species. Some meadows were clearly wetter than others and had abundant Bistort. Some were clearly cut for hay while others showed signs of light grazing. In one meadow we found Scarce Copper, the only place where it was seen during the week, and other newcomers for the trip were Tufted Marbled Skipper, Safflower Skipper, Mountain Argus, Lesser Spotted & Meadow Fritillary. Several stunning Purple-shot Coppers were stars of the show. The decision to move away from the Scarce Fritillary concentrations and higher elevation paid off, as the weather held throughout the afternoon and the group enjoyed walking amongst wild flower meadows in bright conditions. The checklist in the evening showed that after a mere two days in the area, over 70 species of butterfly had been seen.



Purple-shot Copper (Ian Collins)



Lesser Spotted Fritillary (Ian Collins)



Safflower Skipper (Ian Collins)

Day 4: Tuesday 18 June

After yesterday's cloud interrupted the excursion along Via Val d'Arma, this morning's sunshine heralded a return visit as business there was deemed to be unfinished. The group stopped at the same location as on the previous day, but this time the sunny skies meant that far more butterflies were seen. Mountain Clouded Yellow was seen and photographed by the group, as was an immaculate Swallowtail. In addition, the week's only Osiris Blue was identified, and other desirables such as Mazarine Blue and Purple-Edged Copper were observed. Several Duke of Burgundy were seen in this open Alpine grassland at 1700m - very different from the scrubby lowland sites we are used to in Britain.



Turquoise Blue (Harry Faull)



Purple-edged Copper (Martin Warren)



Reverdin's Blue (Ian Collins)

Lunch was taken at a roadside meadow a couple of hundred metres further down in altitude, and the group were treated to a small number of Apollos flying through the flower-laden fields, though very few settled for any length of time. In the early afternoon, the group departed for the second leg of the trip in the nearby Valle Gesso, with the journey taking less than an hour. The first stop was made at the base of the imposing dam just south of the town of Entracque, and within seconds a mint-fresh male Purple Shot Copper was observed, with a Spotted Fritillary also nectaring on the opposite side of the road.

At the end of the road, the track gave way to a series of large, grassy fields, where many different species of butterfly were to be found, including Large Wall Brown, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Small & Essex Skipper and Knapweed Fritillary. There were also Provençal Short Tailed Blues flying in the long grass at the roadside verges as well as blues such as Turquoise, Reverdin's, Adonis and Baton.

This had been an enjoyable and productive day, with eight new species recorded, bringing the total for the trip so far to 79.



Apollo (Ian Collins)

Day 5: Wednesday 19 June

A beautiful morning heralded a visit to altitude, past Terme di Valdieri and into the Vallone del Gesso. It was cool upon arrival, and at first not too many butterflies were seen. A few Olive and Southern Grizzled Skippers were about, and Northern Wall Browns were spotted flying around the rocks. As time went by things livened up, both on the butterfly AND the marmot front! Several Mountain Green Veined Whites were seen, including a pristine female. Mountain Dappled White was also recorded along with Geranium Argus. Perhaps the most welcome sighting, however, came in the form of the week's only Piedmont Ringlet, eponymously named after the region where it is said to be quite common!

Lunch was taken at the car park, before the group descended back down into the lower valley where things had really started to pick up. A series of damp meadows saw large numbers of Apollos, whilst Sam recorded the first Titania's Fritillary of the week (thankfully, at least one more was found so the rest of the group could see this stunning butterfly). Large Blue, Mallow Skipper and Tufted Marbled Skipper were positively identified, whilst both Baton Blue and Chequered Blue put in a welcome appearance. Perhaps most satisfying though were the sheer number of butterflies seen in this idyllic location, with flowery meadows untouched by pesticides.



Mountain Green-veined White (Ian Collins)



Titania's Fritillary (Martin Warren)



Sloe Hairstreak (Ian Collins)

On the way back, we decided to stop at a hairpin bend 2km out of town to investigate an enticing-looking track seen during their reconnaissance period. This turned into quite an experience for everybody as the small meadow about 100m down the track was filled with huge numbers of butterflies of over two dozen different species! Several late instar Large Tortoiseshell larvae were found on an elm tree whilst an airborne Southern White Admiral kept everyone entertained. A fresh Safflower Skipper was located, along with both Spotted and Lesser Spotted Fritillary. After a week where Hairstreaks had seemingly gone into hiding, suddenly a couple appeared in this meadow. Most were identified as Sloe Hairstreak. Across the road where the track began, the grassy slope provided a handful of Reverdin's Blues. It was a fitting end to what was perhaps the best day of the trip in terms of both butterfly numbers and range of scenery. A further ten new species had been added to the tally leaving the total on 89 with two days to go.



Large Tortoiseshell larva (Roger Clooney)



Chequered Blue (Harry Faull)

Day 6, Thursday 20th June

The first stop today was a series of flowery meadows beyond San Bernardo after the point where the road gives way to a track. Parking was a little tricky, but the group were soon exploring the fields that harboured many species of butterflies which were just beginning to stir. However, it was on the track itself where the main excitement was to be had. A damp area attracted several beautiful Marbled Skippers along with some of the *Pyrgus* genus, as well as a few Fritillaries, Wood Whites and other Pierids.



Chequered Blue (Harry Faull)



Meleager's Blue (Harry Faull)



Large Wall Brown (Ian Collins)

Further up the track though, a Poplar Admiral was seen briefly before it flew off. Everyone soon gathered in the area and we all had fabulous views as it sat for long periods on the bridge, seemingly taking salts from the mortar. On the way back to the main road, a quick stop was made above the quarry at San Lorenzo. The copious valerian growing here makes it one of the likelier spots to find the rare Southern Swallowtail. Sadly, this species was not seen but the group were treated to a Camberwell Beauty nectaring on this valerian, along with Swallowtails, large Fritillaries and the ubiquitous Painted Ladies.

The afternoon stop was opposite another quarry (albeit much larger) just outside the village of Roaschia. These quarry sites are reputedly the best to get a chance to see Southern Swallowtail, but in spite of a good roadside search, none were recorded. However, some of the group managed to find their way into a grassy meadow at the base of the quarry, and were treated to a feast of species, including the only Ringlets of the week and both male and female Purple Shot Coppers. Within this meadow it was suddenly discovered that Alcon Blues were present. Only two were seen, and at first it was thought that they were Large Blues. In addition, a scarce Foulquier's Grizzled Skipper was caught so that all the group could see it. On the way back to Entracque, another stop was made at the grassy meadow on the hairpin bend. This time, White Admiral was recorded, along with more Reverdin's Blues and several High Brown Fritillaries of the *cleodoxa* form. With one full day to go, the total number of species seen was now 96.



Black-veined Whites mating and High Brown Fritillary *cleodoxa* form (Harry Faull)



Butterflies on mud - Northern Brown Argus, Adonis, Mazarine and Osiris Blues (Harry Faull)

Day 7, Friday 21 June

The first stop on this final morning was Ponte Porcera, just beyond the tiny village of Trinita. This was an interesting site, with a river running by and many grassy meadows sheltered by the steep mountains on either side. Although it was quite early, there were plenty of butterflies on the wing, including a new species when Sam found a False Heath Fritillary in one of the nearby fields. There was also a mating pair of Purple Edged Coppers to be seen here, along with a Camberwell Beauty. These were all trumped though by a persistent Poplar Admiral, which spent some considerable time landing on the gravel path in the car park area and, to everyone's delight, the stone bridge across the river, giving the group quite a spectacle.



Poplar Admiral (Harry Faull)



Poplar Admiral under (Ian Collins)

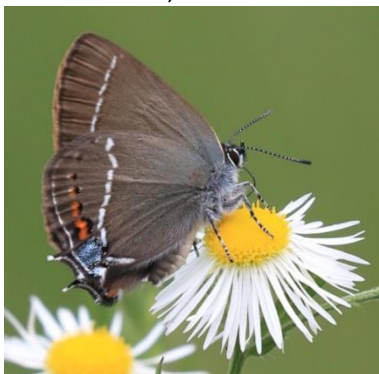


Weaver's Fritillary (Ian Collins)

At around 11.30am, it was time to revisit the quarry meadow where the Alcon Blues had been seen the previous day. This was to prove a judicious choice, as overnight there had been an emergence of fresh specimens, with around a dozen being recorded. To further enhance proceedings, a huge Great Banded Grayling flew by and landed on a tree trunk; the only one of this species seen during the holiday. With much still to do, the group moved on after lunch to meadows along a minor road in the Vallone di Brignola, with White Admiral being a notable find, particularly as it was seen in the company of Southern White Admiral, which is not a common occurrence in this part of Europe.

There was time for one last stop at the quarry in San Lorenzo for what was to prove a vain pursuit of the coveted Southern Swallowtail. However, during a walk down the steep road Blue Spot Hairstreak was finally spotted, much to the relief of the guides who had been wondering why it hadn't been on the wing. In addition, a male Meleager's Blue was also seen, proving that interesting returns can be gained in the most unlikely of places!

To round things off, a last stop was made just beyond the dam at Entracque, at Ponte della Rovina. This gave the group one last opportunity to take in the butterfly riches to be found in the grassy meadows of this lovely region of Alpine Italy. Satisfyingly, the four new species added during the day brought the final total to a nice, round 100.



Blue-spot Hairstreak (Harry Faull)



Alcon Blue (Sam Ellis)



Meadow Fritillary (Harry Faull)

Acknowledgements

Greenwings and the guides would like to thank all the guests on this trip for their convivial company throughout the week. We would also like to thank the photographers for use of the superb pictures in this report. There were some knowledgeable and experienced individuals amongst the group and this undoubtedly led to a higher species return than would normally be the case. We would also like to thank the staff at the Piedmont National Park for arranging permission for us to catch and identify butterflies in the Park, especially Marta de Biaggi and Fabiano Sartirana.

Given that this was the first time Greenwings had run a tour in this area, things went remarkably smoothly, with the distance from Nice airport to the bases being offset by the short travelling time between sites once in situ. Furthermore, both family-run hotels provided excellent service and were situated in attractive locations very close to good butterfly habitat.

The only minor disappointment was the absence of one of the target species, Southern Swallowtail, however compensation was provided by the better than anticipated numbers of the other main target, Scarce Fritillary, as well as the appearance in reasonable numbers of Alcon Blue on the last full day.

At this time of year, high altitude sites are relatively bereft of butterflies, but within the 1,000m – 1,500m range, things are getting moving by midsummer's day, and this trip was notable for its unspoiled and, at this time of year, generally uncut flower meadows within this altitude range, which provide a spectacle for the butterfly enthusiast and certainly one that is difficult to match elsewhere in such a restricted radius.



Butterfly list: Greenwings trip to Piedmont Alps, Italy – June 2019

English name	Scientific name	No sites observed
Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>	17
Mallow Skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>	1
Marbled Skipper	<i>Carcharodus lavatherae</i>	6
Tufted Skipper	<i>Carcharodus flocciferus</i>	4
Red-underwing Skipper	<i>Spialia sertorius</i>	9
Safflower Skipper	<i>Pyrgus carthami</i>	3
Southern Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>	5
Olive Skipper	<i>Pyrgus serratulae</i>	1
Carline Skipper	<i>Pyrgus carlinae</i>	1
Cinquefoil Skipper	<i>Pyrgus cirsii</i>	1
Large Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus alveus</i>	7
Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>	7
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	3
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>	12
Clouded Apollo	<i>Parnassius mnemosyne</i>	7
Apollo	<i>Parnassius apollo</i>	6
Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>	7
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	14
Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis complex</i>	17
Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	15
Mountain Dappled White	<i>Euchloe simplonia</i>	1
Black-veined white	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>	12
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	14
Southern Small White	<i>Pieris mannii</i>	3
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	9
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>	18
Mountain Green-veined White	<i>Pieris bryoniae</i>	9
Mountain Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias phicomone</i>	2
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	12
Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>	6
Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	10
Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>	13
Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	7
Large Copper	<i>Lycaena dispar</i>	1
Scarce Copper	<i>Lycaena virgaureae</i>	1
Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>	7
Purple-shot Copper	<i>Lycaena alciphron</i>	5
Purple-edged Copper	<i>Lycaena hippothoe</i>	6
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	10
Blue-spot Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium spini</i>	1
Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium ilicis</i>	1
Sloe Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium acaciae</i>	1
Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	9
Osiris Blue	<i>Cupido osiris</i>	1
Provençal Short-tailed Blue	<i>Cupido alcetas</i>	5
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	8

Baton Blue	<i>Pseudophilotes baton</i>	8
Chequered Blue	<i>Scolitantides orion</i>	4
Green-underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>	15
Large Blue	<i>Phengaris arion</i>	5
Mountain Alcon Blue	<i>Phengaris alcon rebeli</i>	2
Silver-studded Blue	<i>Plebejus argus</i>	6
Reverdin's Blue	<i>Plebejus argyrognomon</i>	6
Geranium Argus	<i>Aricia eumedon</i>	2
Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>	2
Northern Brown Argus	<i>Aricia artaxerxes</i>	4
Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>	10
Escher's Blue	<i>Polyommatus escheri</i>	4
Turquoise Blue	<i>Polyommatus dorylas</i>	9
Amanda's Blue	<i>Polyommatus amandus</i>	3
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	14
Meleager's Blue	<i>Polyommatus daphnis</i>	1
Adonis Blue	<i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>	13
Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>	2
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Argynnis aglaja</i>	14
High Brown Fritillary	<i>Argynnis adippe</i>	13
Niobe Fritillary	<i>Argynnis niobe</i>	4
Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>	9
Marbled Fritillary	<i>Brenthis daphne</i>	9
Twin-spot Fritillary	<i>Brenthis hecate</i>	1
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>	13
Titania's Fritillary	<i>Boloria titania</i>	1
Weaver's Fritillary	<i>Boloria dia</i>	8
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	10
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	13
Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>	1
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	13
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	15
Camberwell Beauty	<i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>	5
Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>	1
Scarce Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas maturna</i>	4
Glanville Fritillary	<i>Melitaea cinxia</i>	7
Knapweed Fritillary	<i>Melitaea phoebe</i>	4
Lesser Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea trivia</i>	3
Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea didyma</i>	4
False Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea diamina</i>	1
Meadow Fritillary	<i>Melitaea parthenoides</i>	2
Nickerl's Fritillary	<i>Melitaea aurelia</i>	3
(Southern) Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea nevadensis</i>	18
Poplar Admiral	<i>Limenitis populi</i>	2
White Admiral	<i>Limenitis camilla</i>	2
Southern White Admiral	<i>Limenitis reducta</i>	4
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	8
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	7
Northern Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata petropolitana</i>	3
Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>	16

Pearly Heath	<i>Coenonympha arcania</i>	15
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	14
Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	2
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	6
Almond-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia alberganus</i>	10
Piedmont Ringlet	<i>Erebia meolans</i>	2
Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>	12

Day-active Moth list: Greenwings trip to Piedmont Alps, Italy – June 2019

Common Heath	<i>Ematurga atomaria</i>
Speckled Yellow	<i>Pseudopanthera macularia</i>
Burnet Companion	<i>Euclidia glyphica</i>
Latticed Heath	<i>Chiasmia clathrata</i>
Mother Shipton	<i>Callistege mi</i>
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gamma</i>
Transparent Burnet?	<i>Zygaena purpuralis?</i>
Cistus Forester	<i>Adscita geryon</i>
Cream Spot Tiger	<i>Arctia villica</i>
Dew Moth	<i>Setina irrorella</i>
Clouded Buff	<i>Diacrisia sannio</i>
Chalk Carpet	<i>Scotopteryx bipunctaria</i>
Black-veined Moth	<i>Siona lineata</i>
Small Argent and Sable	<i>Epirrhoe tristata</i>
Chimney Sweeper	<i>Odezia atrata</i>
Narrow Rose-banded Wave	<i>Rhodostrophia calabra</i>
Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth	<i>Hemaris tityus</i>
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>
Willowherb Hawk-moth	<i>Proserpinus proserpina</i>
Mint Moth	<i>Pyrausta aurata</i>
Small Magpie	<i>Anania hortulata</i>
White-spotted Sable	<i>Anania funebris</i>
Nine-spotted Moth	<i>Amata phegea</i>
Oak Eggar larva	<i>Lasiocampa quercus</i>
Lackey moth larva	<i>Malacosoma neustria</i>