

Butterflies of Greece

Holiday Report 24 June - 1 July 2017

Led by Sotiris Alexiou



Amanda's Blue © Clive B

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Day 1, Saturday 24th June.

John and Chris were already in Athens, enjoying the capital of Greece, with all the museums and antiquities. So when the rest of the group (Clive, Tony & Dave) arrived at the airport early in the evening, they were already waiting for us. The meeting point was set correctly, so with no delay we were very soon on our way. The trip from the airport to our destination, the beautiful town of Delphi, was about 2 hours drive, mostly on the highway. After checking in to our hotel, we went straight to our local tavern! With a nice view down to the sea and the sun about to set, we enjoyed nice local delicacies and chatted about our plans and hopes for the week ahead.

Day 2, Sunday 25th June.

Delphi is situated on the southern foothills of famous Mountain Parnassos. Our hotel is a small family hotel, run by a family of Greek naturalists, Diamantis and Vaso. The breakfast contains only local Greek ingredients, e.g. fresh eggs, yogurt, homemade marmalade, fruits, etc.

Stop 1. After breakfast, we drove up the mountain, until we found a nice looking clearing by the road. The meadow we explored there was covered with bushes and mulleins. Common Blue and Queen of Spain Fritillary were among the first butterflies we saw. Spotted Fritillary was there as well as Turquoise Blue *Polyommatus dorylas*, Silver-studded Blue *Plebejus argus* and Wood White. Clive photographed a nice Krueper's White. Greek Clouded Yellow *Colias aurorina* and Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni* were also flying.

Stop 2. We then took the road that climbs up to the ski resort. The road goes as high as around 2000m high, so we could get a nice idea of what species were flying in this altitude at that time of year. A few Clouded Apollo *Parnassius mnemosyne* were basking in the sun and a couple of Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros* were already flying around us. The commonest blue butterfly was Balkan Zephyr Blue *Polyommatus pylaon*. A worn individual of Mazarine Blue *Polyommatus semiargus* *parnassia* was seen on a flower stem, as well as Common Blue. This year's spring was cold and late, and that had made an impact on the numbers of butterflies flying.



Stop 3. We decided to descend into lower elevations and spent time there. A large meadow that during winter becomes a temporary lake was visited. Wild Gladiolus, *Gladiolus illyricus*, was in full flower. In the surrounding fir forest, we could see Broad-Leaved Helleborine, *Epipactis helleborine*, Bird's-Nest Orchid, *Neottia nidus-avis* and White Helleborine, *Cephalanthera damasonium*. Dark clouds had appeared in the sky and some thunder could be heard not far away. Some drops of rain soon appeared. So we couldn't wander too far away from the car. Butterflies had settled down waiting for the sun to reappear. Among the first interesting observations made was an Olive Skipper *Pyrgus serratulae* resting on a fern leaf. This

Skipper was probably the commonest Skipper around, as we saw several other individuals as the day went on. Heath Fritillary *Melitaea athalia* was not uncommon and neither was Large Tortoiseshell.

Not long after the rain stopped, the sky cleared as fast as it had darkened, and immediately butterflies came out swarming! Green-veined White *Pieris napi* and Mountain Small White *Pieris ergane* were flying through. All kinds of Skippers, Large Skipper *Ochlodes sylvanus*, Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*, Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris* were flying. Queen of Spain, Heath Fritillary, Small Copper, Olive Skipper as well as Adonis Blue were common.

Day 3, Monday 26th June.

Stop 1. The sun was shining brightly this morning. After breakfast we took the van for the second day on Parnassos Mountain. We took the road that climbs the mountain towards the ski resort. After about 20 minutes, we stopped at Livadi, the biggest mountain plateau of the mountain. Flying around the scattered bushes, were mostly Skippers, like Large Skipper, *Ochlodes sylvanus*, Lulworth Skipper, *Thymelicus acteon*, Essex and Small Skipper, (*Thymelicus lineola* and *Th. Sylvestris*). Great Banded Grayling, *Brintesia circe* was also flying.

Stop 2. Not very satisfied with the number of flying butterflies, we didn't stay long. Not far away, we stopped to visit a couple of smaller meadows by the road. This stop proved much more productive. The place was covered with many different species of Clover, Medick, Melilots and Vetches, so things were much better! Silver-studded Blue and Adonis Blue, *Polyommatus bellargus*, were very common. Grecian Copper, *Lycaena ottomana*, Southern White Admiral, *Limenitis reducta*, Cleopatra, *Gonepteryx cleopatra*, Silver-washed Fritillary, *Argynnis paphia*, Comma, *Polygonia c-album*, Marbled and Balkan Marbled White, *Melanargia galathea* and *M. larissa* were all seen. The flowers of a Danewort bush by the road provided a lot of nectar for the butterflies... and us with nice photographs! Rather common were Sloe and Ilex Hairstreaks, *Satyrrium acaciae* and *S. ilicis*.

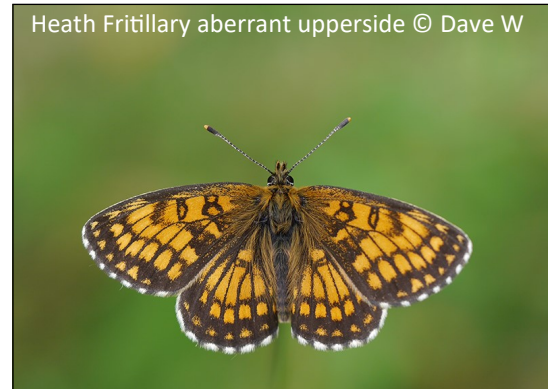


Stop 3. After spending a pleasant couple of hours there we decided to move on. We ventured well inside the heart of the mountain, to a magical place! A dirt road passing through large meadows, one after the other, covered with flowers!

We had lunch under the fir trees while strong thunder could be heard closing in on us. Heavy

clouds were also hiding the sky, pretty much as the previous day.

Among our first observations was a small population of aberrant Heath Fritillary, *Melitaea athalia*! Clive was the first to spot one individual and then another one. We struggled a bit to give a correct identification, but the upper side of the wings gave it away! Tony even managed to hold (without damaging) one butterfly for a few minutes, so we could inspect and photograph the underside. Parnassos Mountain holds the most southern populations of the species and this observation is really interesting. For that reason a paper will be prepared for proper publication.



Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper, *Pyrgus armoricanus*, was there also! It took Dave and Sotiris quite a lot of time to get a good view of the underside of the wings to confirm the identification! But then rain came down strongly. We took cover inside the van for a few minutes and got out when the rain stopped. But the sun was still hidden and no butterflies were on the wing. It was unfortunate that we lost about an hour in this beautiful place, but this is nature. Anyway, we managed to spot a few more butterflies as the clouds disappeared finally. Freshly emerged Amanda's Blue, *Polyommatus amanda* and Turquoise Blue, *Polyommatus dorylas* were flying, as well as Olive Skipper and Sage Skipper, *Muschampsia proto*.

Now, with the sun shining over our heads, this locality revealed its full potential. But it was already early evening, and a surprise was set up. Diamantis, the husband of the owner of the hotel, a true mountaineer and nature photographer, came to meet us. He led us to a big plateau, at the heart of the mountain, where his father had built a small mountain shelter. There, surrounded by an orchard with all kind of trees, we tasted heaven, in the 'middle of nowhere', in absolute silence. We started with Diamanti's own *tsikoudia*, traditional Greek strong drink. And then homemade Greek salad, *psomotiti* - a local soft cheese, fresh french fries and a barbecue with local lamb, accompanied with his own wine! It can't get any better than that! We all agreed it was by far the best dinner we had on this trip. And then, accompanied with the last light of the day, satisfied, we drove to our hotel... What a day that was!

Day 4, Tuesday 27th June.

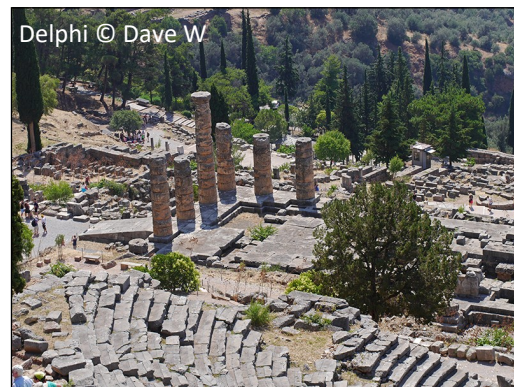
After having breakfast we visited the archaeological site of Delphi, situated in between vertical rocks and with a spectacular view down to the valley of Amfissa and the sea. The heat was expected to be substantial today and wanting to avoid the sea of tourists, we visited the place as early as possible. We admired the temple of Apollo and managed to walk up to the Stadium.

It is a nice place for birdwatching also! Rock Nuthatch is everywhere, singing loudly, as well as Blue Rock Thrush. A large Short-toed Eagle was also flying high above us. As for butterflies, the day started with the tiny Grass Jewel, *Chilades trochilus*, inside the ruins and close to the temple of Apollo, a very rare and significant find! Then, a Mallow Skipper, *Carcharodus alceae*, on the flower of its food plant and a Great Sooty Satyr, *Satyrus ferula*, was spotted nectaring on a flower. As we moved upwards, towards the Stadium, we observed on a wall a huge pregnant cricket, *Saga hellenica*, consuming another cricket, a pure *Decticus albifrons*.

After having some well deserved refreshments in the yard of the Museum we visited the Museum itself, without spending too much time inside though. It was almost midday when we visited a known population of Grass Jewel, not very far from the archaeological site. We managed to spot 2-3 individuals of this tiny butterfly, the smallest in Europe!



Grass Jewel © Dave W



Delphi © Dave W

A nice big lunch was waiting for us. Under the thick shade of Oriental Plane, inside modern Delphi, we enjoyed a good selection of nice local dishes.

And then we checked out of our hotel. It was time to leave this part of Greece and head southwards, over the huge modern bridge of Rio-Antirio, to the Peloponnese. We reached Chelmos Mountain and the beautiful town of Kalavrita, at afternoon. A light dinner had been served for us, at this nice hotel, hanging over the plain of Kalavrita.

Day 5, Wednesday 28th June.

Stop 1. Our first stop on Chelmos Mountain was the known population of Odd-spot Blue, *Turanana taygetica* on the mountain. This locality is troubled over the years by humans and by widening of the road. Greenwings' year-after-year presence there, along with other more official acts towards the Greek State, will help the population to survive. Very promising is the activation towards that goal of BC, along with Greenwings, Greek naturalists and lepidopterists. Every year we monitor and count the population of this very rare in Europe, remnant species.



© John Wride
© John Wride

Odd-spot Blue © John W

We spent several hours in this location, first photographing and counting the Odd-spot Blue and then gradually walking down a slope and through a gully. Inside

the gully, there was running water from melting snow and mud, where butterflies gathered to zip humidity. Chelmos Zephyr Blue, *Polyommatus brethertonii*, was there, as well as Silver-studded Blue, Dinky Skipper, *Erynnis tages* etc.

Stop 2. We drove southwards, to lower altitude, and reached the village of Zarouchla. The extensive



Oriental Meadow Brown © Dave W

forest around that village was our goal. Eventually we reached a big clearing with flowering plants. A female Oriental Meadow Brown, *Hyponephele lupina*, was seen by Dave and Sotiris as well as Meadow Brown. Among others, more Chelmos Zephyr Blue, Holly Blue, *Celastrina argiolus*, Meleager's Blue, *Polyommatus daphnis*, Black-veined White, *Aporia crataegi*, Comma, Nettle Tree Butterfly, Speckled Wood, Grecian Copper and several species of Skippers.

Some refreshments in Zarouchla village were then enjoyed before we moved on!

Stop 3. A small meadow by the road, not far from our hotel holds a nice population of Pontic Blue, *Neolysandra coelestina*. The individuals this year were rather worn and few in number, probably due to strange early spring conditions. Other butterflies were also flying in that locality, like Grecian Copper.

Dinner at our hotel, under the Mediterranean stars, was our next stop...

Day 6, Thursday 29th June.

The weather was expected to be hot today. After breakfast, Tony, John and Chris took the famous Odontotos rack railway, which connects Kalavrita with the sea, through bridges and tunnels of the fabulous Vouraikos Gorge. The rest of us took the van down to Diakofto, the end of the line. Of course, not straight away! We stopped at a very promising place, which we decided to visit again a few hours later, with the whole group.

Stop 1. We rejoined the others at Diakofto, and after a quick drink, we moved to a Two-Tailed Pasha locality at the end of the gorge. It was a beautiful and fairly shady location, next to Vouraikos River. It was not long after, that we managed to see the Two-Tailed Pasha. One individual came around us, out of the canopy of Plane Tree and landed on a mashed banana we had put on a leaf. This bait provides a good chance of seeing what we want... A nice surprise was a Pygmy Skipper, obligingly sitting for as long as we wanted, on a grass stem! Southern White Admiral was also flying as well as a Freyer's Grayling, *Hiparchia fatua*, almost unnoticed on the side of a tree.



Two-tailed Pasha © John W

It was time to go. The sun was getting higher...We needed some sea breeze...Lunch by the sea, under the shade of a Tamarisk tree with plenty of fruits, cold drinks...and a swim for those who

chose to!

Stop 2. But enough with the heat of the lowlands! We took the road leading up to the mountains again, towards Kalavrita. About half way, a nice opening by the road led us to a river, shaded by Plane Trees. The opening was not large, but was packed with butterflies! Ripart's Anomalous Blue was sipping humidity from a muddy puddle. A Spotted Fritillary, *Melitaea didyma*, Hungarian Skipper, *Spialia orbifer*, Balkan Marbled White, Sloe Hairstreak, Queen of Spain Fritillary and Comma. Niobe Fritillary, *Argynnis niobe*, is uncommon on this mountain and at its southern distribution limits but a nice individual was flying. On the *Rubus* shrubs, Skippers were observed, mainly Large Skipper. A number of Lattice Brown, *Kirinia roxelana*, were also seen flying in and around the canopy of the trees. Several Grayling were flying also, mainly Woodland Grayling/ Eastern Rock Grayling, *Hipparchia fagi/Hipparchia syriaca*, Balkan Grayling (indistinguishable in the field), *Hipparchia senthes* and Great Banded Grayling, *Brintesia circe*.

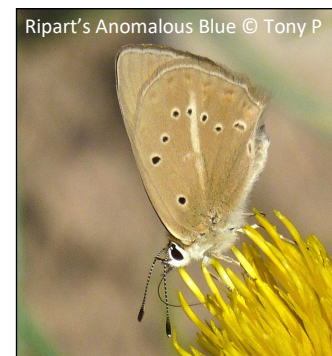
Stop 3. It was time to check the place that those who didn't take the railway got a glimpse of earlier this morning, a muddy and wet area next to the main road, surrounded by typical dry, Mediterranean habitat. A lot of butterflies were here. Southern Knapweed Fritillary, *Melitaea telona* and Hermit, *Chazara briseis* were seen only here. Ripart's Anomalous Blue and Anomalous Blue were very common, flying together and commonly next to each other. Grecian Anomalous Blue, *Polyommatus aroaniensis* was also present, but not as common. So this area provide a leisurely study the different Anomalous Blue species! The dwarf plants of Felty Germander, *Teucrium polium*, were ideal for our observations. Dingy Skipper was also here.



Hermit © Dave W



Grecian Anomalous Blue © Tony P



Ripart's Anomalous Blue © Tony P

Day 7, Friday 30th June.

Stop 1. This would be the hottest day of our trip. So, we moved straight to the mountain top! The road above Kalavrita leads to a high plateau, at 1800 m, where the ski resort is. From there a dirt road lead us to the high peaks of the mountain, well above 2000m. We stopped and enjoyed the view all around us. High mountains everywhere, with plateaus of fertile land in between, and to the north, the sea. Not many butterflies were flying up here, and most of them were just flying away, without resting. With the exception of few very fresh Turquoise Blue, lying low into the vegetation.

Stop 2. A stop at Tsivlos Lake, a nice mountain lake, was not a good idea! It was so hot in there that we very soon left. A much better place was expecting us, just four kilometers after the lake. Potamia village, a semi-abandoned lost in time kind of place, which comes to life during summer only, mostly August. Plenty of shade, a lot of gardens, orchards and lots of running water!

We went straight to the main square, next to an old stony church and under some huge Plane Trees.

A small tavern was waiting for us, open, with the tables outside. Sotiris had made the arrangements the previous day. We were the only customers in this paradise. Balkan Graylings alighted on the trunks of every tree. A spring, a few feet away, was the perfect place for John to lie down and photograph butterflies, mostly Ripart's Anomalous Blue. An old bell was hanging from a branch, next to the spring. When the bell rang, we immediately knew that John had stood up! Luckily, not much damage was done to John's head...or the bell!

After having our first drinks and feeling again alive and refreshed from the heat, we started to wander. A Holly Blue, a Hungarian Skipper and a Meleager's Blue were by a pond. Only a few feet away, behind the church, a cherry orchard was the habitat of around a dozen different species of butterflies! Balkan Grayling, Comma, Nettle Tree Butterfly, Purple Hairstreak, Lattice Brown, etc.

We returned to the square for our lunch, lamb in the oven with potatoes and Greek salad - amazing taste! It was early in the afternoon, when we decided to walk down the main road of this settlement. It took us around two hours to walk half a kilometer and then back to the square with so many things to see on the way. We saw everything during that walk...Ilex Hairstreak, Grecian Copper, Meleager's Blue, Grayling of all kinds.... All the cherry trees were covered with butterflies, but also, along the road, on the flowering plants. Around a puddle in the middle of the road, several blue butterflies were gathered, among others Escher's Blue, Ripart's Anomalous and Anomalous Blue. John (as always!), lay down photographing. When he got up, a Balkan Grayling landed on his arm. A Southern Comma also landed on Chris's hat!

It was already evening when we returned to the square and our tavern for homemade cherry sweet and coffee. That's when a Camberwell Beauty flew inside the square, under the trees and landed on a trunk. The mashed banana we had put nearby must have played a role, since it soon landed on it, along with Graylings and Lattice Brown!

It was already night time, and our last night at Chelmos when we arrived at the hotel. On the way we had one last chance to admire the gorgeous sun setting over the Aroanians!

Day 8, Saturday 1st July.

Within a couple of hours we were at Athens. We stopped at the Corinth Canal, for a drink and to observe the Lesser Kestrels inside their nests, just under the bridge. Some of us had to be dropped off at Athens airport at around noon. We said our goodbyes, and the rest continued to the nearby mountain, Imittos. There, at a lowland locality, we enjoyed for a while a big population of Freyer's Grayling. We soon left for the sea again not far away. Ice-cream, beer and relaxed conversation, was our last experience in beautiful Greece!!



Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery

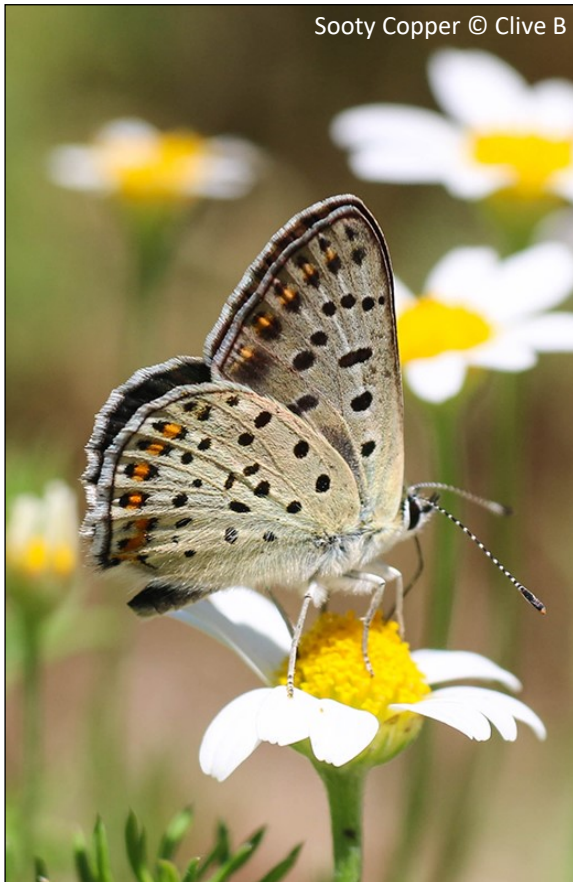


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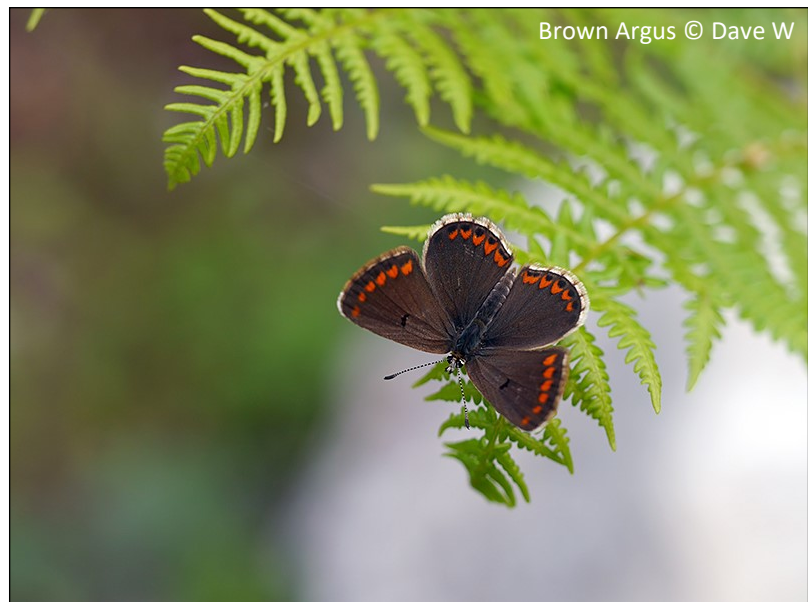


Photo Gallery



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Greek Clouded Yellow © Dave W



Ancient Delphi © Dave W

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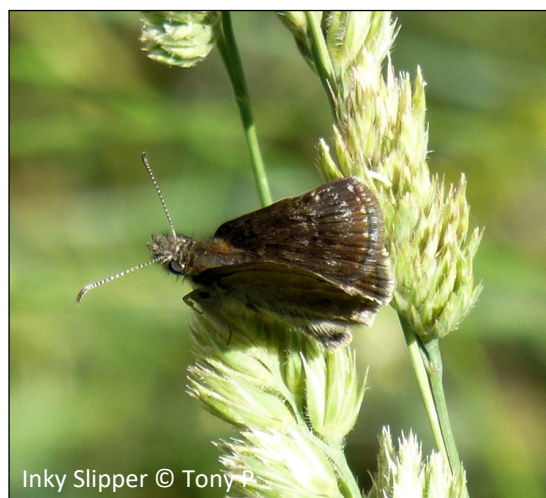


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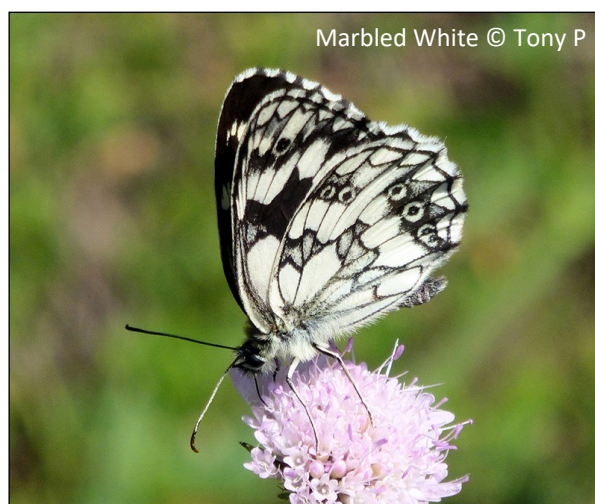


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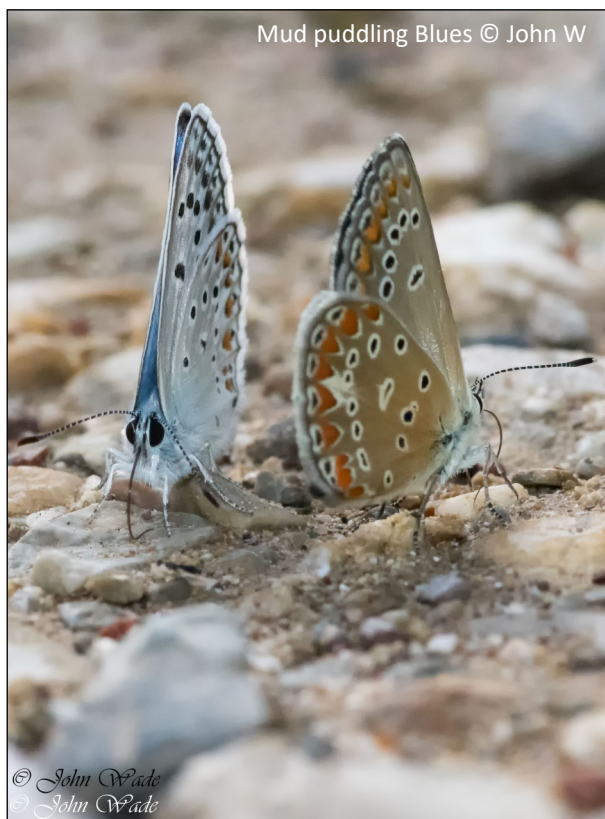


Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery

Grayling © John W



© John Wade



© John Wade
© John Wade

Essex Skipper © John W

Photo Gallery



Photo Gallery



Butterfly checklist for species seen during the week

PAPILIONIDAE

1. Swallowtail *Papilio machaon*
2. Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides podalirius*
3. Clouded Apollo *Parnasius mnemosyne*

PIERIDAE

4. Black-veined White *Aporia crataegi*
5. Large White *Pieris brassicae*
6. Small White *Pieris rapae*
7. Mountain Small White *Pieris ergane*
8. Krueper's Small White *Pieris krueperi*
9. Green-veined White *Pieris napi*
10. Eastern Bath White *Pontia edusa*
11. Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*
12. Greek Clouded Yellow *Colias aurorina*
13. Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*
14. Cleopatra *Gonepteryx Cleopatra*
15. Wood White *Leptidea sinapis*

LYCAENIDAE

16. Purple Hairstreak *Neozephyrus quercus*
17. Sloe Hairstreak *Satyrium acacia*
18. Ilex Hairstreak *Satyrium ilicis*
19. Small Copper *Lycaena phleas*
20. Grecian Copper *Lycaena ottomana*
21. Sooty Copper *Lycaena tityrus*
22. Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*
23. Lang's Short-tailed Blue *Leptotes pirithous*
24. Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*
25. Odd-spot Blue *Turanana taygetica*
26. Eastern Baton Blue *Pseudophilotes vicrama*
27. Grass Jewel *Chilades trochilus*
28. Balkan Zephyr Blue *Polyommatus pylaon*
29. Chelmos Zephyr Blue *Polyommatus brethertonii*
30. Silver-studded Blue *Polyommatus argus*
31. Brown Argus *Aricia agestis*
32. Pontic Blue *Neolysandra coelestina*
33. Mazarine Blue *Polyommatus semiargus parnassia*
34. Ripart's Anomalous Blue *Polyommatus ripartii*
35. Grecian Anomalous Blue *Polyommatus aroaniensis*
36. Anomalous Blue *Polyommatus admetus*
37. Escher's Blue *Polyommatus escheri*
38. Chapman's Blue *Polyommatus thersites*
39. Amanda's Blue *Polyommatus amandus*

- 40. Turquoise Blue *Polyommatus dorylas*
- 41. Adonis Blue *Polyommatus bellargus*
- 42. Meleager's Blue *Polyommatus daphnis*
- 43. Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*

LIBYTHEIDAE

- 44. Nettle Tree Butterfly *Libythea celtis*

NYMPHALIDAE

- 45. Two-tailed Pasha *Charaxes jasius*
- 46. Southern White Admiral *Limenitis reducta*
- 47. Camberwell Beauty *Nymphalis antiopa*
- 48. Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros*
- 49. Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*
- 50. Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*
- 51. Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*
- 52. Comma *Polygonia c-album*
- 53. Southern Comma *Polygonia egea*
- 54. Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia*
- 55. Niobe Fritillary *Argynnis niobe*
- 56. Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia*
- 57. Pearl-bordered Fritillary *Boloria euphrosine*
- 58. Southern Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea telona*
- 59. Spotted Fritillary *Melitaea didyma*
- 60. Heath Fritillary *Melitaea athalia*
- 61. Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*
- 62. Balkan Marbled White *Melanargia larissa*
- 63. Woodland Grayling/Eastern Rock Grayling *Hipparchia fagi/Hipparchia syriaca*
- 64. Balkan Grayling *Hipparchia senthes*
- 65. Freyer's Grayling *Hipparchia fatua*
- 66. Tree Grayling *Hipparchia statilinus*
- 67. Hermit *Chazara briseis*
- 68. Great Sooty Satyr *Satyrus ferula*
- 68. Great Banded Grayling *Brintesia circe*
- 69. Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*
- 70. Oriental Meadow Brown *Hyponephele lupina*
- 71. Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*
- 72. Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*
- 73. Wall Brown *Lasiommata megera*
- 74. Large Wall Brown *Lasiommata maera*
- 75. Lattice Brown *Kirinia roxelana*

HESPERIIDAE

- 76. Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus armoricanus*
- 77. Olive Skipper *Pyrgus serratulae*
- 78. Hungarian Skipper *Spialia orbifer*
- 79. Sage Skipper *Muschampsia proto*

80. Mallow Skipper *Carcharodus alceae*
81. Dinky Skipper *Erynnis tages*
82. Inky Skipper *Erynnis marloyi*
83. Lulworth Skipper *Thymelicus action*
84. Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*
85. Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*
86. Large Skipper *Ochlodes sylvanus*
87. Pigmy Skipper *Gegenes pumilio*