

Butterflies of the Italian Alps

16th - 23rd June 2022 Led by David Moore, Peter Eeles & Ben Greenaway



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Introduction

This was the second Greenwings trip to the Piedmont Alps, a delightful part of northwest Italy where the mountains rise dramatically as one travels west from Borgo San Dalmazzo. There are several scenic valleys in this area, the main ones being the Bella Stura and the Gesso valleys.

The base for the week was the Hotel Corborant in the little town of Termi di Vinadio, at an altitude of approximately 1,300m. Joining us were the following guests: Keith & Sam, Dave P, Peter, Caroline, Andrew, Clive & Fiona, Anthony & Lisa, Roger, Mark and Vernon.

What follows is a daily diary for the week, followed by photo gallery and species lists.

Day 1, Thursday 16 June: Arrival at Nice airport, transfer to hotel with stops along the mountain road to Col de la Lombarde

Day 2, Friday 17 June: North of Demonte for Scarce Fritillary, Termi di Vinadio

Day 3, Saturday 18 June: Various altitudes along Val d'Arma

Day 4, Sunday 19 June: Around Entracque and nearby quarry

Day 5, Monday 20 June: Trinita, mountain track above Termi di Valdieri, river valley below Termi di Valdieri

Day 6, Tuesday 21 June: Col de la Lombarde, roadside stop on Italian side at 2,250m, Thermi di Vinadio

Day 7, Wednesday 22 June: Thermi di Vinadio, track to waterfall beyond Besmorello

Day 8, Thursday 23 June: Col de la Lombarde, return to Nice airport for homeward flights

Day 1, Thursday 16 June

Given the problems surrounding airlines over the weeks prior to this tour, it was reassuring to find out that none of the guests' flights were seriously delayed, and by early afternoon the group were in the vehicles heading north along the Boulevard du Mercantour towards the mountain road



leading to Col de la Lombarde.

Two separate stops were made on the road up to the ski resort of Isola 2000, and it wasn't long before the first Apollos, *Parnassius apollo*, were sighted. A trio of Coppers; Sooty, *Lycaena tityrus*; Purple-shot, *L. alciphron* and Purple-e dged, *L. hippothoe* were also exciting and welcome 'firsts', whilst Escher's Blue, *Polyommatus escheri* and False Heath Fritillary, *Melitaea diamina*, were also notable records.

However, the biggest surprise came at the final stop at the 2,360m Col de la Lombarde, where some of the group found a male Cynthia's Fritillary, *Euphydryas cynthia*, a species that is not normally encountered until the very last days of June. This gave everybody a sign of how advanced the season was, with abnormally warm temperatures throughout much of April and May across most of France and this part of Italy being largely responsible.

Clearly, it was going to be an interesting week, and no-



one doubted the potential for an excellent butterfly return when we all arrived at the Hotel Corborant, nestled 5km up a river valley in the spa village of Termi di Vinadio. The accommodation was situated in prime Alpine territory, with a river opposite the car park which led down to a series of meadows.

Dinner was taken that evening and it was hoped that the following day would bring fine weather and more desirable butterfly species.

Day 2, Friday 17 June

On the agenda this morning was an attempt to track down the local populations of Scarce Fritillary, *Euphydryas maturna*, which can be found in the Demonte area about 15km east of Termi di Vinadio.

The first stop was on the minor road leading to Vanet Cavallo. It was a lovely morning and, prior to the sun rising sufficiently to provide light and warmth to the damp area near where the vehicles were parked, the group walked up the road to take a look in the meadows on the south side. Green

Underside Blue, *Glaucopsyche alexis*, High Brown Fritillary, *Fabriciana adippe*, Large Blue, *Phengaris arion* and Marbled Fritillary, *Brenthis daphne*, were all eye-catching additions, with Clouded Apollo, *Parnassius mnemosyne* and Almond Eyed Ringlet, *Erebia alberganus* also present.

Dave P and David, the guide, saw and photographed the eponymous Piedmont Ringlet, *Erebia meolans*, back at the damp stretch by the vehicles, but sadly it didn't hang around for the rest of the group, although Comma, *Polygonia c-album*, Wood White, *Leptidea sinapis* and Silver Washed Fritillary, *Argynnis paphia*, all paid lengthy visits to this spot whilst everybody eagerly awaited the appearance of the star turn, Scarce Fritillary.





By noon however, there had been no sign of the butterfly, so it was decided to move on to a nearby site up an equally narrow road which led to a rough track beyond Parafauda. This paid dividends as within minutes of walking into the top meadow, word got out that a handful of Scarce Fritillaries were active there, much to the relief of the guides.

The adjacent track was just as lively, with several more *maturna* being seen nectaring on the copious umbellifers, along with some fresh Scarce Coppers, *Lycaena virgaureae*, which are always a pleasure to encounter.

With the job now done, the group had time to go back to the hotel and explore the surrounding meadows. There was no shortage of butterflies, with numerous Apollos and a wide range of other species, including Titania's Fritillary, *Boloria titania*, Large Wall Brown, *Lasiommata maera*, Safflower Skipper, *Pyrgus carthami* and Swallowtail, *Papilio machaon*.

The evening count before dinner was 73 species in a single day, meaning that after just one full day of the trip an impressive 76 butterfly species had already been recorded.

Day 3, Saturday 18th June

Such was the sense of anticipation that several of the group headed out before breakfast with guides, Pete and Ben, to see what was on the wing early in the morning. Ironically, those who did so had more joy than the entire group had at the first scheduled site of the day, a few miles along the Val d'Arma. The main meadow had been completely strimmed, with part of it now a vegetable

patch. On the other side of the bridge, the grass remained long, and another Scarce Fritillary was recorded, along with several other commoner species.

Having moved on fairly quickly, another obstacle was presented when the vehicles had to stop at a roadblock further up the mountain road. There was a cycle event taking place and the road was not to be reopened for another hour and a half. Undeterred, the group simply meandered around the immediate area, and were rewarded when a Camberwell Beauty, *Nymphalis antiopa*, was seen by all flying around a gully by a waterfall in the village. The trip's first Idas Blue, *Plebejus idas*, was also found in a grassy section beside a small reservoir nearby.

Eventually, the waiting was over and the group pressed on to about 1,800m, where pickings were rather slim, but there was much more activity lower down at around 1,600m and then 1,350m, with Tufted Marbled Skipper, *Carcharodus flocciferus*, being sighted, as well as Alcon Blue, *Phengaris alcon*, and Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper, *Pyrgus armoricanus*.

Other firsts for the trip were in the form of Damon Blue, *Polyommatus damon*, Chalkhill Blue, *P. coridon*, Chapman's Blue, *P. thersites* and Turquoise Blue, *P. dorylas*.

There was still sufficient enthusiasm to head out along the valley track once back at the hotel, where Northern Wall Brown, *Lasiommata petripolitana* was also added to the list, giving a total of 90 species at the end of the second full day.



Day 4, Sunday 19th June

This was anything but a quiet sabbath as the group set out for the first time into the Valle Gesso to the south of the Valle Stura where basecamp was situated.

First stop was by a hairpin bend at Entracque, where a roadside meadow was scoured. This was productive as Short Tailed Blue, *Cupido argiades*, was found, as well as Lesser Spotted Fritillary, *Melitaea trivia*, and Amanda's Blue, *Polyommatus amandus*.



Across the road was another meadow where Sloe Hairstreak, *Satyrium acacia*, was identified for the first time, and although the site looked part-grazed, there were nonetheless tremendous numbers of butterflies given the limited area, with lots more seen on the track leading down the hill which the group explored with great interest. Ben spotted a Southern White Admiral, *Limentis reducta*, which was present amongst larger numbers of White Admiral, *L. Camilla*, although sadly they were not seen side by side.

After lunch, a nearby quarry was visited and with it being a Sunday, the place was

deserted, which was a good thing as a Southern Swallowtail, *Papilio alexanor*, was seen flying on the steep slope within five minutes of arrival. Soon after, a couple more were seen, although none were settling within easy range of anyone's camera!

With the group gathered at the entrance, Andrew mentioned that one was flying in the gully just beyond the bank by the entrance. Immediately, David, the guide, noticed two flying together but they suddenly disappeared out of view, and the fact they did not return led the guide to believe something odd was going on. Having climbed into the gully there was no trace of them, even though many in the group had been watching for them to take flight again. At that moment, Ben appeared from higher up the slope and

very soon spotted something amazing – the pair had decided to mate, suspended from some grasses growing a few feet up the bank.

Within minutes, most in the group had scrambled over the steep hill to take a closer look at this unique event. Spiny shrubs and dusty, rocky ground were forgotten as everyone took it in turns to take images of this beautiful pair of butterflies. Unsurprisingly, this moment was the highlight of the entire trip and will live long in the memories of all who witnessed it.



Day 5, Monday 20th June

Having spent yesterday at lower altitudes, today was the time to go up to 1,700m at a mountain track above Termi di Valdieri. Prior to this, the group visited a delightful site near the agricultural village of Trinita, although again there was a delay as the vehicles encountered another blocked road where a storage tank was being delivered to one of the properties along the road.

Given this was little over a 1km walk to the bridge leading to the site, the group got out and walked the remaining distance, whilst the guides patiently waited 10 minutes for the lorry to move out of the way before driving to the parking area at the site.

Although there were plenty of butterflies, including many that were puddling at a damp patch on the car park, no new species were seen. That abruptly changed on the drive back out of Trinita, as a huge, dark butterfly was seen fluttering round some municipal bins on the way back to Entracque. David M swiftly pulled the minibus into the car park and noted that this insect had to be a Poplar Admiral, *Limentis populi*. Unfortunately, it flew away from the bin area, so lunch was taken on the car park in the hope it would return. Sadly, it didn't, but the group were treated to the week's only Peacock, *Inachis io*, which was also seen near the open bins.

Following this distraction, the group eventually arrived at the car park by the higher mountain track an hour or so later. This change in altitude led to several new species being seen. First of all, Geranium Argus, *Aricia eumedon*, was seen in the area immediately beside the car park, and along the track, there were three *Erebia* firsts, namely Large Ringlet, *E. euryale*, Mountain Ringlet, *E. epiphron* and Bright Eyed Ringlet, *E. oeme.* For good measure, another Piedmont Ringlet turned up for those who hadn't seen the one on the first full day, whilst Mountain Green Veined White, *Pieris bryoniae*, was a first for everyone.

To end the day, the group stopped in the river valley below Termi di Valdieri. Another feast of butterflies was on offer, quite reminiscent of those in the habitat near to the hotel.

By the end of the day, the total number of butterfly species recorded had risen to 107.



Day 6, Tuesday 21st June

The weather forecast wasn't terribly promising for the afternoon, so it was decided to drive back up Col de la Lombarde in the morning in the hope that more Cynthia's Fritillaries could be found.

Sadly, there was a fair amount of cloud around and quite a breeze blowing, meaning that butterflies weren't especially active. However, Alpine Grizzled Skipper, *Pyrgus andromedae*, was quickly found, along with Grison's Fritillary, *Melitaea varia*, and several Mountain Clouded Yellows, *Colias phicomone*. Most of the group also saw the Mountain Dappled White, *Euchloe simplonia*, that was flying for quite some while near a stone wall with a steep slope beneath it.

It had been noticed on the way up to the col that there was promising looking habitat on a hairpin bend a couple of miles back on the Italian side, so a decision was made to take lunch there, although the grey skies and occasional drops of rain were not conducive to seeing flying insects.

The sun would break through every now and again, and when it did, the butterflies would reappear, with another male Cynthia's Fritillary being particularly well received, as well as a Mountain Clouded Yellow that was easy to approach in the cooler, cloudy conditions.



A deterioration in the weather meant the group headed back to the hotel, although upon arrival another Poplar Admiral was seen flying near the bridge. Several in the group decided to continue to look for it even in the light rain, and although it didn't return, there was excitement when a Lang's Shorttailed Blue. Leptotes pirithous, was spotted in the scrub nearby.

Eventually, the rain cleared up which allowed everyone to wander around the wonderful habitat close to the hotel. Apollos were again prominent, and the week's first Niobe Fritillary. Fabriciana niobe,

Lang's Short-tailed Blue © Mark

was seen nectaring in a thistle patch close to the river.

With one full day to come, the species tally had now reached 114.

Day 7, Wednesday 22nd June

Once again, the weather forecast suggested a deterioration in conditions in the afternoon, so the group decided to stay local and further investigate the area around Termi di Vinadio.

As on previous days, butterfly numbers and species range were excellent, although the cloud built as the morning progressed and things became noticeably guieter as butterflies took to roost. Ben

and Pete, the guides, had been up the track beyond the nearby village of Besmorello and suggested the group should take a look, as Silverv Argus, Aricia nicias, had been spotted in the trackside meadows.

Unfortunately, there was a storm soon after arriving, thoroughly drenching everybody. The group beat a retreat to the hotel, but when the skies cleared a couple of hours later, most decided to return as the habitat had looked promising.

There were plenty of butterflies active in the meadows as the sun had now returned, and Silvery Argus was located and seen by all, as well as lots of Coppers, with Purple-edged Copper being particularly prominent.

At dinner time, Franco, the hotel owner, presented everybody with a nice free gift of a panoramic image of the area near to the hotel, and with the addition of Silvery Argus, the final species count reached an excellent 115.

Departure day, Thursday 23rd June

Silvery Argus © Peter Eeles

The long drive back to Nice airport was broken up with a couple of stops, the first being Col de la Lombarde, where conditions were marginal as there was a blanket of cloud on the French side of the border.

This cloud was reluctant to shift although the group did see a few butterflies at a lower altitude site close to Isola village.

The roads back into Nice were thankfully quiet and everybody was dropped off in good time for their homeward flights.

Acknowledgements. Greenwings would like to thank all their guests on this trip for their convivial company throughout the week. This was a large group (16, including the three guides), but the hotel coped well and was of good standard. Even better were the environs of the hotel itself, with prime butterfly habitat literally on the doorstep.

115 species easily beat the total for the one previous Greenwings tour here in 2019, but it must be remembered that the early season had precipitated emergences of butterflies that one wouldn't normally expect during the third week of June.

The main target species were all seen, with Southern Swallowtail being an obvious highlight. The only real disappointment was missing out on Reverdin's Blue, which had been seen in 2019 but which had presumably finished its flight period this time due to the advanced season.

The weather was generally very kind, although there was some disruption on the final two afternoons due to heavy cloud and some rain.

It is hoped that all participants in this tour enjoyed an excellent trip in an exceedingly beautiful area of the Alps.





Systematic Species Checklist

Butterflies		16th June	17th June	18th June	19th June	20th June	21st June	22nd June	
Imag	Imago sightings are marked with a \checkmark , caterpillars are marked with a \precsim		day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7
	Family Papilionidae								
1	Southern Swallowtail	Papilio alexanor				√			
2	Swallowtail	Papilio machaon	√	~	~		1	√	√
3	Scarce Swallowtail	Iphiclides podalirius	√				1	√	
4	Apollo	Parnassius apollo	√	1	√	√	√	√	√
5	Clouded Apollo	Parnassius mnemosyne		1	1		1	√	
	Family Pieridae								
6	Black-veined White	Aporia crataegi	√	√	√	√	1	√	√
7	Large White	Pieris brassicae	√	1	√	√	√	√	√
8	Mountain Green-veined White	Pieris bryoniae					1	√	
9	Green-veined White	Pieris napi	√	1	1	1		√	√
10	Small White	Pieris rapae	√	√		1	1	√	 ✓
11	Orange-tip	Anthocharis cardamines	√	√	√	√	√	√	 ✓
12	Mountain Dappled White	Euchloe simplona						√	
13	Bath White	Pontia daplidice		√	√				
14	Berger's Clouded Yellow	Colias alfacariensis		√	√	√	√		 ✓
15	Clouded Yellow	Colias crocea	√	√	√	√	√	√	 ✓
16	Mountain Clouded Yellow	Colias phicomone						√	
17	Cleopatra	Gonepteryx cleopatra	√	√		√	√	√	
18	Brimstone	Gonepteryx rhamni	√	1	1	1	1	√	
19	Wood White	Leptidea sinapis	√	1	1	1	1	√	√
	Family Lycaenidae								
20	Green Hairstreak	Callophrys rubi		√	1	1	√		
21	Sloe Hairstreak	Satyrium acaciae				1			
22	Ilex Hairstreak	Satyrium ilicis		√		1			
23	Blue-spot Hairstreak	Satyrium spini		√		1		√	√
24	Purple-shot Copper	Lycaena alciphron	√	√	√	√	√	√	✓
25	Purple-edged Copper	Lycaena hippothoe	√	√	√	√	√	√	✓
26	Small Copper	Lycaena phlaeas	√	√	1	1		√	✓
27	Sooty Copper	Lycaena tityrus	√	√				√	✓
28	Scarce Copper	Lycaena virgaureae		√	√	√	√	√	√
29	Lang's Short-tailed Blue	Leptotes pirithous						√	√
30	Provençal Short-tailed Blue	Cupido alcetas	√						

Butterflies Imago sightings are marked with a √, caterpillars are marked with a ☆		16th June	17th June	18th June	19th June	20th June	21st June	22nd June	
		day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7	
31	Short-tailed Blue	Cupido argiades				1	√		
32	Small Blue	Cupido minimus	√	√	1	1	√	1	1
33	Holly Blue	Celastrina argiolus		1	1	1	√	1	1
34	Green-underside Blue	Glaucopsyche alexis	√	1	1		√	1	1
35	Large Blue	Maculinea arion	√	1	1	1	1	1	1
36	Alcon Blue	Maculinea alcon			1	1			
37	Silver-studded Blue	Plebejus argus	√	√	1	1	√	√	√
38	Idas Blue	Plebejus idas			1	1	√		
39	Brown Argus	Aricia agestis		√	1	1			√
40	Mountain Argus	Aricia artaxerxes			1	1	√	~	1
41	Geranium Argus	Aricia eumedon					√	√	1
42	Silvery Argus	Aricia nicias							1
43	Mazarine Blue	Cyaniris semiargus	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
44	Amanda's Blue	Polyommatus amandus				1			
45	Damon Blue	Polyommatus damon			√				
46	Turquoise Blue	Polyommatus dorylas			√	√			
47	Escher's Blue	Polyommatus escheri	√	√	√	√	√	√	1
48	Common Blue	Polyommatus icarus	√	√	√	√	√	√	1
49	Chapman's Blue	Polyommatus thersites			√	1			
50	Adonis Blue	Lysandra bellargus		1	1	1	√	1	√
51	Chalk-hill Blue	Lysandra coridon			1			1	
	Family Nymphalidae								
52	Duke of Burgundy	Hamearis lucina		√				√	
53	White Admiral	Limenitis camilla		√	1	1	√	1	√
54	Southern White Admiral	Limenitis reducta				1	√		
55	Poplar Admiral	Limenitis populi					√	√	
56	Peacock	Aglais io					√		
57	Small Tortoiseshell	Aglais urticae	√	√	1	1	√	√	
58	Camberwell beauty	Nymphalis antiopa			1				
59	Large Tortoiseshell	Nymphalis polychloros		√					
60	Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta		√	1		√	√	√
61	Painted Lady	Vanessa cardui	√	√	1	1	√	√	√
62	Comma	Polygonia c-album		√	√	1	√	√	√
63	Queen of Spain Fritillary	Issoria lathonia	√	√	1	1	√	√	√
64	Heath Fritillary	Melitaea athalia		√	1	1	√	√	√

Butterflies Imago sightings are marked with a \checkmark , caterpillars are marked with a \ddagger		16th June	17th June	18th June	19th June	20th June	21st June	22nd June	
		day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7	
65	Glanville Fritillary	Melitaea cinxia	1	√	√	√	√	√	1
66	False Heath Fritillary	Melitaea diamina	√	1	1		1	1	1
67	Spotted Fritillary	Melitaea didyma		1	1		1	1	1
68	Provençal Fritillary	Melitaea deign		1					1
69	Knapweed Fritillary	Melitaea phoebe	√	1	1	1	1	1	1
70	Lesser Spotted Fritillary	Melitaea trivia				√			
71	Grison's Fritillary	Melitaea varia						√	
72	Silver-washed Fritillary	Argynnis paphia		√	√	√	√	√	
73	Dark Green Fritillary	Argynnis aglaja		√	√	√	√	√	1
74	High Brown Fritillary	Argynnis adie		√	√	√	√		1
75	Niobe Fritillary	Argynnis niobe						1	1
76	Marbled Fritillary	Brenthis daphne		√	√	√	√	√	1
77	Lesser Marbled Fritillary	Brenthis ino		√					
78	Weaver's Fritillary	Boloria dia				√			
79	Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Boloria euphrosyne	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
80	Titania's Fritillary	Boloria titania		√	√	√	√	√	1
81	Marsh Fritillary	Euphedryas aurinia			√				
82	Cynthia's Fritillary	Euphedryas cynthia	√					√	
83	Scarce Fritillary	Euphedryas maturna		√	√				
84	Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria	√	√	√		√		
85	Large Wall Brown	Lasiommata maera		√	√	√	√	√	1
86	Wall Brown	Lasiommata megera			√		√	√	
87	Northern Wall Brown	Lasiommata petropolitana			√	√	√	√	√
88	Pearly Heath	Coenonympha arcania	√	√	√	√	√	√	1
89	Small Heath	Coenonympha pamphilus		√	√	√	√	√	1
90	Ringlet	Aphantopus hyperantus		√		√	√		
91	Meadow Brown	Maniola jurtina		√	√	√	√	√	
92	Almond-eyed Ringlet	Erebia alberganus	√	√	√	√	√	√	1
93	Common Brassy Ringlet	Erebia cassioides						√	
94	Large Ringlet	Erebia euryale					√		-
95	Mountain Ringlet	Erebia epiphron					√		
96	Piedmont Ringlet	Erebia meolans		√			√		
97	Bright-eyed Ringlet	Erebia oeme					√		
98	Marbled White	Melanargia galathea		√	√	√	√	~	√

Butterflies			16th June	17th June	18th June	19th June	20th June	21st June	22nd June
Imag	Imago sightings are marked with a \checkmark , caterpillars are marked with a \div		day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7
99	Great Banded Grayling	Brintesia circe		√		√	√		
100	Great Sooty Satyr	Satyrus ferula				1			 ✓
101	Woodland Grayling	Hipparchia fagi		√		√	√		
	Family Hesperiidae								
102	Large Grizzled Skipper	Pyrgus alveus			√	√	1		 ✓
103	Alpine Grizzled Skipper	Pyres andromedae						√	
104	Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper	Pyrgus armoricanus			1				
105	Safflower Skipper	Pyrgus cathami		√	1	√	√	√	✓
106	Southern Grizzled Skipper	Pyrgus malvoides				√	√	√	
107	Olive Skipper	Pyrgus serratulae	√	√	√				
108	Red Underwing Skipper	Spialia sertorius	√	√	1	√	√		✓
109	Dingy Skipper	Erynnis tages	√	√				√	✓
110	Mallow Skipper	Carcharodus alceae				√			✓
111	Tufted Marbled Skipper	Carcharodus flocciferus		√	√	√	√	√	✓
112	Marbled Skipper	Carcharodus lavatherae			√	√	1		
113	Essex Skipper	Thymelicus lineola	√	√	√	1	1		√
114	Small Skipper	Thymelicus sylvestris	√	√	√	1	1	√	√
115	Large Skipper	Ochlodes sylvanus	√	√	1	1	1	√	√





Photo Gallery



Bright-eyed Ringlets © Peter Eele















