

Butterflies & Botany of the Eastern French Pyrenees 2015

Holiday Report 21-28th May 2015
Led by Julian Dowding and Yiannis Christofides



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Pyreneean landscape © Y. Christofides



At La Torre de Goa © J. Dowding

Introduction

This butterfly and botanical holiday was based in the foothills of Mt Canigou, the sacred mountain for Catalonians on both sides of the French - Spanish border. Rising to 2,784 metres it dominates the eastern end of the Pyrenees at the borders of France, Spain and Andorra. The area is often referred to as French Catalonia and a minority of the population still speak the Catalan dialect. The dominant climatic influence of the Eastern Pyrenees is the Mediterranean and so the climate is warmer and the days sunnier than elsewhere in the Pyrenees. The area boasts a wide variety of habitats, including Mediterranean Garrigue, Holm, Downy Oak and Beech woods, schist and calcareous grasslands and alpine screes, all of which are home to a wealth of interesting butterflies and plants. The holiday was led by Julian Dowding and Yiannis Christofides. We stayed at a small family run hotel in Vernet-les-Bains. The guests joining us were Anne and J, Jim, Russell, Les, Rosemary, Michael, Geoff, James, Nick and David.



What follows is an outline of the week, followed by a daily diary, gallery and species lists.

Day 1, Thursday 21st May: Arrival at Perpignan airport, transfer to hotel and Fort Liberia.

Day 2, Friday 22nd May: Sournia and quarry

Day 3, Saturday 23rd May: High pass and Rivière d'Urbanya

Day 4, Sunday 24th May: Aude and Rebenty gully

Day 5, Monday 25th May: Canigou and la Torre de Goa

Day 6, Tuesday 26th May: Forca Real and limestone slopes

Day 7, Wednesday 27th May: Porté Puymerons and Llo

Day 8, Thursday 28th May: Return to UK.

Day 1, Thursday 21st May: Arrival at Perpignan.

Our group arrived at Perpignan Airport at 11am and after introductions, we made the hour's drive to our hotel in Vernet-Les-Bains and then unloaded our belongings and a quick chat about the week's programme. We reconvened at 1pm and drove with packed lunches to Fort Liberia. Conditions were warm if not hot, with wall-to-wall sunshine, 28°C and 22% relative humidity.

Stop 1. Meandering up the track to the fort, we ate lunch, some of us halfway up the track, the others at the top. We managed to see about 12 butterfly species en-route including, Spanish Festoon (which only Russell managed to photograph), Spanish Swallowtail, Osiris Blue, Chequered Blue, Large Wall Brown, Wall Brown, Speckled Wood, Southern White Admiral, Baton Blue, Brimstone, Cleopatra and Holly Blue including two 'in cop'. J also had a brief view of Green-underside Blue and James also found and photographed a Spanish Festoon egg on Aristolochia as he had promised to do!

Notable plants walking up the track to the fort were typical of Mediterranean habitat with garrigue and maquis. These included sclerophyllous evergreen shrubs such as *Quercus coccifera* and *Rhamnus alaternus* (the foodplant of Blue-spot hairstreak, Cleopatra and Brimstone). Many other plants that are used by butterflies were also seen, such as *Lonicera etrusca* (Southern White Admiral), *Sedum sediforme*, (Apollo and Chequered Blue), *Aristolochia rotunda* (Festoon), *Reseda lutea* (Bath White), *Dorycnium pentaphyllum* and *D. hirsutum* (Wood White). Other interesting and beautiful plants were *Aphyllanthes monspeliensis* (Liliaceae), *Linum narbonense*, *Osiris alba* (Santalaceae), *Geranium pyrenaicum* and *Limodorum abortivum*. Birds seen included Swift, Griffon Vulture, Serin and Subalpine Warbler.



At 4.45 pm we made our way back down the small track to our vehicles (some using the steps which was the quicker route) and then made the short drive back to our hotel. We arranged to reconvene at 7pm to do the checklists and for Yiannis to give a presentation on the flowers and butterfly larval food plants.



This was to be the pattern of events each evening, followed by dinner at around 7.30pm. Our first meal was a Catalan entree followed by escalopes, vege-burgers or a gluten-free meal, cheese and a strawberry dessert, all washed down with a glass or two of wine, water or juice.

Day 2, Friday 22nd May: Sournia and quarry .

Stop 1. After Breakfast, we set off at about 9am, reaching Sournia by about 10.30. Conditions were sunny and windy but the track we explored was warm and sheltered. This was a typical Mediterranean habitat with underlying schist geology. Our first butterflies were Marsh Fritillary and a pair of courting Wall Browns. The only definitive sighting of Spanish Fritillary was at the roadside where Geoff and Julian had stopped. A few large 'euphydryas' fritillaries were seen, some of them with 2-inch wingspans, and it may well be that some of these which fluttered past were indeed Spanish but without viewing all the markings, we couldn't really make a pronouncement. Certainly, on inspection of photos later on, *E. aurinia* form *beckeri* was also present and it is known as a large form of the nominate species. Other butterflies seen included a hatful of blues including Osiris Blue, Common Blue, Chapman's Blue, Green Underside Blue, Chequered Blue and Escher's, Blue along with the following species: Green Hairstreak, Small Heath, Spotted Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Painted Lady, Western Dappled White, Berger's Clouded Yellow and Marsh Fritillary.



Plants seen included *Thymus vulgaris* (Common Thyme), *Onobrychis* sp. (Sanfoin), *Anthericum liliago* (St. Bernard's Lily), *Astragalus monspessulanus* (larval foodplant of Escher's Blue), *Asphaltium bituminosum*, *Cistus albidus* (pink) and *Cistus laurifolius* (white), *Helianthemum appeninum* (white-flowered), *Leuzia conifera*, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, *Aceras anthropophorum*, *Vincetoxicum nigrum*, and one specimen of the Greater Butterfly Orchid, *Cephalanthera longifolia*.

Stop 2. After our picnic lunch, we moved to higher track and found Spanish Festoon, Hummingbird Hawk-moth, Speckled Wood, Red Admiral, Painted Lady and another Marsh Fritillary.

Stop 3. We then moved to a limestone quarry and begun searching the flowers. The first find was of a larva of Spanish Swallowtail on *Prunus* sp. In the sward, Red Underwing Skipper and Adonis Blues were seen flitting about with Painted Ladies while Berger's Clouded Yellows occasionally dashed past, soon to be joined by Clouded Yellow, Cleopatra, Large Wall Brown and Provençal Fritillary. Anne managed to find a Wood White which posed well for a photo. Other butterflies seen here included Marsh Fritillary and Chequered Blue. Flower-wise, the superb nectar plant *Valeriana angustifolia* was common around the quarry and attracted numerous butterflies. A Swallowtail spent quite some time on one of these plants and begged to be photographed. Other plants seen

were *Silene flos-cuculi* (Ragged Robin), *Teucrium aureum*, the quite beautiful *Orobanche gracilis* and *Achillea millerfolium*.

Stop 4. By about 4pm we were on our way and driving back to the hotel when Julian spotted an orchid growing on the verge. It proved to be *Dactylorhiza fuchsii*. There were a good number of these plants there. At the hotel we had an enjoyable dinner after first completing our checklists and going over the day's photos and enjoying Yiannis's fascinating plant presentation.

Day 3, Saturday 23rd May: High pass and Rivière d'Urbanya.

Stop 1. After breakfast, we set off in the direction of Urbanya and parked up at a place at about 1,000m with impressive views of the surrounding hills and mountains. The temperature was a warm 21°C with 33% relative humidity, with the wind on the southern side of the hillside.

We followed a track leading through *Cistus*, Broom and watched *Ilex* Hairstreaks flitting in and out of *Kermes* Oaks which are something of a feature of the area. *Baton Blue* was seen on rocks by the track and also *Provençal Fritillary*, showing its ginger palpi. It flew up into a bush and was 'just about' photographed. We ultimately reached a meadow which was heavily grazed and so spread out searching for anything that moved or fluttered. Les and Mike found *Marsh Fritillary* and shortly after, Nick homed in on *Spanish Swallowtail*. *Clouded Yellows* flew by, seldom resting and J found a number of *Small Heaths*. On the far side of the meadow the butterflies had a bit more shelter from the wind and here Julian and Mike found *Iolas Blue*. It was a fleeting glimpse as the butterfly flew off at our approach. There were other butterflies here including *Wall*, *Spotted Fritillary*, *Painted Lady* and *Black-veined White*, but the level of grazing had removed many of the nectar sources.



Provençal Fritillary © G. Woodcock



Cytinus hipocistis © J & A Menables

The dominant plants here were *Pinus mugo*, *Juniperus oxycedrus*, *Thymelaea tartonraira*, *Cistus laurifolius* (white) and *Lavandula stoechas*. Bird-wise, we had splendid views of *Griffon Vulture*. At first it was just a giant dark shape drifting only 50 feet above us until Mike with his birding hat on, identified it. The bird didn't seem to be bothered by us and so continued drifting, eventually disappearing from sight. Other birds included *Serin*, *Linnet*, and *Sardinian Warbler*.

With all the grazing, it took no more than the tinkling of bells and the arrival of a goat-herd to make us realise it was time to move on. Returning to the vehicles we discovered the strange parasitic plant of Cistus roots, *Cytinus hypocistis*. Its red and yellow flowers had pushed their way through the soil, emerging just above ground and appearing like some kind of cactus.

Stop 2. We then ambled down the road above the pass. In the lee of the wind, sheltered warm spots were encountered as the road twisted and turned. On the way down, we found Heath Fritillary in good numbers. Most were flying low along a damp stream at the roadside but a few were nectaring on plants such as *Achillea millefolium* which was growing on the rock faces. Green-veined Whites were seen puddling on the damp ground and it wasn't long before we were distracted by the dark fluttering forms of De Prunner's Ringlets. This was a butterfly we'd wanted to see, although they seldom posed for photos. Clouded Yellow fluttered past (as they usually did) and some of us saw Duke of Burgundy along with Large White and Black-veined White. Plant-wise, we found several species of *Sedum*, not yet in flower and the verge was dominated by the very pretty spurge, *Euphorbia cyparissias* and *Calluna vulgaris* commonly known in the UK as Ling.



Stop 3. We arrived at our picnic spot in the middle of Urbanya and as we settled down to eat, the friendly local mayor came over to say hello and asked of our interests. He spent a quite a time chatting with us in French. Over lunch, we managed to glimpse mating Provençal Short tailed Blues, two Spanish Swallowtails and a number of small fritillaries which didn't stop. Birds included Raven and a courting pair of Serins which Mike delighted in pointing out. In a nearby garden full of Cornflowers, another Spanish Swallowtail was taking nectar and our botanical interest was captured by a couple of spikes of *Orchis mascula*.

Stop 4. After lunch we walked a good track down by the river and caught sight of a pair of normally shy Bullfinches. Whilst stopping to watch these, we also heard the wonderful fluting song of Golden

Oriole. Eventually we arrived at one of two small meadows. The first, awash with Red Clover and Coronilla was literally fluttering with butterflies. As we ventured in, it was hard to know where to



look as the butterflies were everywhere, giving us plenty of photographic opportunities. Species included Glanville, Heath and Knapweed Fritillaries, Orange Tip, Large White, Black-veined White, (the latter often nectaring on the wonderful Tufted Vetch growing at the walls above), Turquoise Blue, Southern Grizzled Skipper, Tufted Marbled Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Holly Blue and Comma. Flower-wise, there was plenty to hold our interest with Armeria arenaria, Vicia sepia and the beautiful Geranium robertianum.

Stop 5. We could have spent the rest of the afternoon at the meadow, such was the abundance of butterflies but we decided to move on. At our second meadow we found our first Pearly Heaths and also more Duke of Burgundy and Small Blue. Julian discovered a few spikes of Platanthera chlorantha (Greater Butterfly Orchid), differentiated from Lesser Butterfly Orchid by its divergent pollinia. Continuing along the track, Geoff photographed Weaver's Fritillary, our first of the holiday and Les found our first Pearl bordered Fritillary.

After a quick drink of fruit juice and a fresh apricot or tangerine, we set off in the direction of Vernet, wanting to get back to our hotel early in time to freshen up for dinner in Villefranche. The town is an impressive UNESCO heritage site and we dined splendidly at L'Echougette, an excellent restaurant located near the Spanish Gate.

Day 4, Sunday 24th May: Aude and Rebenty Gully.

We made a slightly earlier than start this morning after breakfast, due to the longer drive through the mountains. Conditions at the start of the day were good, with the thermometer reading 16°C. As we approached Mosset, the walled town which appears to grow out of the hillside, we saw a Peregrine flying towards the 'Citadel'.

Stop 1. Driving slowly and scanning the verges as we went, we noticed some colourful roadside flowers and made a quick stop, finding both yellow and red forms of Elderflower Orchid. Our two ladies - Anne and Rose - were delighted to see these.

Stop 2. At around 1,000m we found more orchids - this time Bird's Nest and Early Purple - as well as some beautiful Aquilegias of an incredibly vivid deep blue hue. As we moved along the road, a pair of Honey Buzzards glided across in front of us, their small heads and striped tails easily visible. Nick was soon following Mazarine Blue, and not far away, Wall Brown was seen.

Stop 3. We made another wayside stop for butterflies including Weaver's Fritillary, Pearly Heath and Amanda's Blue, the latter on its larval host, Tufted Vetch.

Stop 4. We reached the Col de Jau at 1,506m. The wind was too strong to hang around but we made a quick search and found a small Gentiana aucale which unfortunately was going over. We also found plenty of Violas. Butterfly-wise, Sooty Copper and Small Copper were seen.

Stop 5a and 5b. Two brief roadside stops were made for orchid species and from there we arrived at a bank covered in *Biscutella*, the larval host of Provence Orange Tip. The butterflies weren't seen but we were treated to fly-bys of Berger's Clouded Yellows and a number of Whites. Berger's were becoming easy to spot with their light custard colours, looking very different to the familiar Clouded Yellow. It was a good place to linger and soon turned into something much better, as Mike latched onto a flying Camberwell Beauty and the shout went up. Our little troupe of naturalists stopped for at least 20 minutes photographing this wonderful insect. At first it perched in an Oak and after a while flew onto the rock face where it posed for photos. It was the first of three seen on the trip.

Stop 6. At 1.15pm we pulled into a lay-by for lunch. The thermometer was reading 21°C and so it was feeling rather pleasant. There were a few male Brimstones flying up and down the road and Julian found some Common Buckthorn - their larval host - growing from the rocks. Rosemary noticed Provençal Short-tailed Blues mating in the sward (the second pairing we'd seen), and most of us managed to photograph these. Julian also found False Heath Fritillary nectaring on the roadside flowers growing from the steep cliff faces. Other butterflies seen included three better known species, namely Orange Tip, Wall and a Large Skipper, the latter being found and photographed by Jim.



Camberwell Beauty © J & A Venables

Stop 7. After lunch we continued on our way still searching for Provence Orange Tip. A yellow shape floated past while we were driving so we stopped and very soon Yiannis yelled out. Thinking he'd found the butterfly, we hurried to him and discovered that his emotions had been stirred by Military Orchid! This was a great find and plenty of photos were taken. Whilst all this was going on, Nick and others remained quietly by the vehicles, having found Provence Orange Tip, quite still and perfectly camouflaged on Buckler Mustard!



Provence Orange Tip © J & A Venables

Stop 8. It was quite cloudy by the time we reached a good track for butterflies but every now and then the sun shone enough to lift them. Those found included Adonis Blue, Chequered Skipper (another super find by Nick) Berger's Clouded Yellow, Common and Chapman's Blue, False Heath Fritillary, Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper, mating Red Underwing Skipper, Olive Skipper, Large Wall Brown, Wood White, Small and Southern Small White, Small Blue and Osiris Blue. Provence Orange Tip was very much in evidence as well, not in huge numbers, but with perhaps 4 or 5 individuals continuously flying up and down the track. At one point we stopped to watch a male chasing a female Orange Tip. Russell also managed to grab a photo of a nice female Provence Orange Tip.

Stop 9. After an hour or so on the track and quite pleased with the day's finds, we moved to our last scheduled area, the gully at Rebenty, where we hoped to find Clouded Apollo. Our first

butterflies included a resting Bright Eyed Ringlet, and then Chapman's and Mazarine Blues feeding on animal droppings at the roadside. Traversing the gully, Jim's eagle eyes found our main target and very soon most of us were watching this wonderful butterfly.

It so happened that some of the guests including Les and Rosemary, had opted to venture only a short distance along the gully, (or stay roadside) and this turned out to be a fortuitous decision, for here they saw at least two Clouded Apollos and lots of Small Blues and Fly Orchid. The intrepid Yiannis went up the bank to the 'plateau' looking for more butterflies and found Mazarine Blue, Amanda's Blue and Small Skipper and lots of orchids. Mike saw and photographed Pearly Heath and on the way back to the roadside, Dingy Skipper was also spotted but very nearly overlooked, resting as it was on a small stone. Other species included Osiris Blue and a couple of Brimstones which flew tirelessly up and down the gully.

Significant plants this day included Cardamine heptapylla (Brassicaceae) with palm-like leaves, Saponaria ocymoides, Asphodelus albus, Digitalis lutea, Colutea arborescens, Ajuga reptans, Lamium galeobdolon, Caltha palustris, Euphorbia characias, Campanula speciosa, St Bernards lily, (Anthericum liliago) and two species of Globularia, G. vulgaris and G. repens. Orchids found during the day included Bird's Nest (Neottia nidus-avis), Early Purple Orchid, (Orchis mascula), Man Orchid (Aceras anthropophorum), Military Orchid (Orchis militaris), Lady Orchid (Orchis purpurea), Fly Orchid (Oprhys insectifera), Greater Butterfly Orchid (Platanthera chlorantha), Elderflower Orchid (Dactylorhiza sambucina), and Common Twayblade (Listera ovate).

It had been a good day for both butterflies and flowers, with a number of key species being observed, and so we made the journey back to our hotel in good heart and ready for another wonderful Catalan dinner.

Day 5, Monday 25th May: Canigou and la Torre de Goa.

The aim this day was to check out Canigou in the hope of finding Apollo, so we left after breakfast with temperatures only a cool 17°C (but increasing all the time) and 64 % relative humidity.



Clouded Apollo © N. Osler

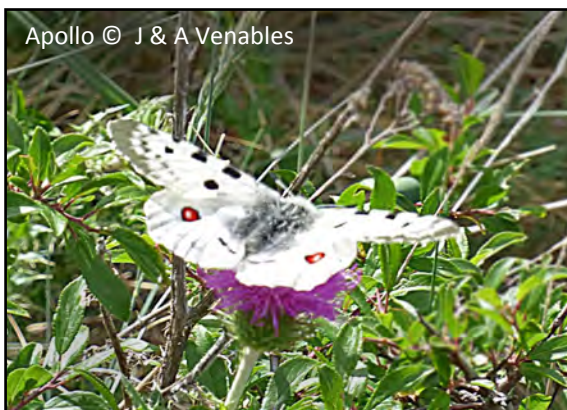


Saponaria ocymoides © Y. Christofides

Stop 1. After parking the vehicles, we ambled leisurely up the track leading to the tower. The day had started with thick cloud but by the time we reached the track, the sky revealed a little more blue and we were hopeful that the day would improve. The first butterflies seen were Green Hairstreaks, dashing about the plentiful Gorse and Broom which filled the air with its sweet coconut scent. Butterflies were generally slow in appearing so we searched the grasses and bushes to try and find them resting. Eventually they appeared, with particularly good numbers of Chequered Blue (resting on the rocks or feeding off thymes), Walls and one or two Painted Ladies which fluttered up the track, occasionally settling.

As we climbed higher, Jim gave the call, "Apollo!" and soon we were watching these magnificent insects fluttering and gliding over the slopes below. At least three were seen initially, sometimes flying right around us but never stopping near enough for a good photo. David, Les, Yiannis and Jim had had further fly-bys on their way to the Torre de Goa. Nick was intent on getting a good photo so he decided to linger by some flowering thistles - a wise choice because very soon he had some wonderful views of the butterfly - and took a number of photos. At the tower, David saw a Peregrine fly over, adding a touch of avian interest to the morning's proceedings.

On the way back down, Yiannis drew Julian's attention to an emerging Apollo which was struggling to rid itself of its pupal case. The 'face shield' was still stuck fast and the creature was running about with unexpanded wings, occasionally trying to brush off the offending item with its legs. It appeared in distress, so we guided it to a small twig in a tussock of grass which it duly climbed and settled upon. Its tiny wings were, we hoped, an exact miniature of the beauty to come. Fearful that somebody might step on it, Anne, Mike, Geoff and Russell mounted a vigil for a good hour, whilst it slowly pumped liquid into its unfolding wings. Eventually, these expanded fully and so we left it while we ate lunch.



Apollo © J & A Venables



Wall Brown © J & A Venables

After lunch, we were able to see the full splendour of the Apollo just as it was ready to fly. Other butterflies seen included De Prunner's Ringlet, Weaver's Fritillary, Small White, Large White, and Red Underwing Skipper. The morning had really belonged to the Apollo though and it was a real treat to be able to observe it at such close quarters. By 1.30pm the wind had got up so we decided to move on and explore more sheltered areas.

Stop 2. By 2pm temperatures had soared to 29°C with 33% relative humidity and after a quick rest break in Casteil, we drove to a promising roadside where water trickled down the rock face and formed a little stream and muddy splash. Below, there was a gushing river lined with Alder, Willow and Sallow, all of the elements contriving to create a wonderful atmosphere. It turned out to be a great spot for butterflies of course, offering shelter, food and warmth.

It was clear that a lot of butterflies were obtaining moisture from the stream as many were found

sipping. These included Heath Fritillary, Provençal Fritillary, Chequered Blue, Brimstone, and Duke of Burgundy Fritillary. While Julian and Yiannis were admiring 'The Duke', a large Camberwell Beauty flew into view. Mike came running and the butterfly circled him but never stopped for a photo. At one point it chased a small yellow leaf that spiralling down from one of the trees to the ground. There were plenty of other species here too and soon we were adding more images of Provence Orange Tip, Green-veined White, Large and Small White, Heath Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary, Small Blue, Mazarine Blue to our camera cards.

Stop 3. We decided to go on in search of another spot and arrived at a rough track with a wide pull-in for vehicles. Provence Orange Tip and Berger's Clouded Yellow were seen here, along with Mallow Skipper and Chequered Blue.

Stop 4. Our last stop of the day was a mile or so further up the road from Sahorre. Here, the meadow below the road was full of colour. Lots of Glanville Fritillaries and other small frits were on the wing when we arrived. A number of Southern Grizzled, Safflower (with characteristic Greek capital sigma mark on upperside forewing) and Oberthur's Grizzled Skippers were seen. After half an hour though, the sun was sinking below the surrounding hills and temperatures were dropping so we decided to head home. Michel the hotel owner was happy to see us and even happier to know that today our dinner would be served no later than 7.30pm! We dined happily on stew and salad, washed down as usual with a glass or two of wine, water or juice.



Plants this day included *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* and *Centaurea pectinata*, a flower with interesting bracts.

After Dinner, J put out his moth ropes in the hope of attracting some 'papillons de nuit' but temperatures were very cool, so few moths were attracted.

Day 6, Tuesday 26th May: Força Real and limestone slopes.

The aim this day was to head towards the coast, in the hope of finding some Mediterranean specialities including Spanish Gatekeeper and Provence Chalkhill Blue.

Stop 1. After breakfast, we set out in an easterly direction, arriving at a spot near Força Real about 20 km from the Med. The weather was cool, with the thermometer reading 20°C. Before getting out of the vehicles, we noticed gathering clouds and a storm to the northeast over the sea which appeared to be coming our way, threatening to spoil the day. Nevertheless, we walked a small track in the hope of escaping the wind and soon found our first Western Marbled Whites. After no more than half an hour we turned back, for the dark grey was now about to envelop us. Most of us were inside the vehicles as the first drops of rain began to fall but one or two stayed out, investigating a hillside of mixed scrub and grassland close to the vehicles. Quite soon, Julian and J found Spanish Gatekeeper, Wall and Grayling. In the time it took to walk back to the vehicles

and announce that at least one of the Spanish specialities had been seen, the rain ceased and the clouds miraculously parted. The Spanish Gatekeepers were a good reward for having persevered and so our expectations rose again. It was still rather breezy but as the butterflies rested in sheltered spots, we managed a few close wing photos of the striking undersides.

Stop 2. We made our way up to the view-point at Força Real and had a quick look at the Med over to the east then looped back around the hillside searching for Blue-spot Hairstreak and shelter, in the hope of finding a few more Spanish Gatekeepers. The 'Blue Spots' did not appear but the Spanish Gatekeepers did, and we found a few basking, allowing for good photos. We also witnessed a pairing.



Stop 3. We then moved on to Estagel and the river. Parking the vehicles, we got out in search of hairstreaks. We managed to find a number of Ilex and False Ilex but alas, still no Blue Spot. We also found a number of Burnet species and a few whites and Jim who seemed to be rather adept at finding skippers, announced the presence of Lulworth Skipper as we were settling down to eat our packed lunches.

Stop 4. We made a short roadside stop to look for more hairstreaks at a patch of grasses and Helichrysums, finding False Ilex Hairstreak and Berger's Clouded Yellow.

Stop 5. Our final stop was a hillside of limestone grassland. We soon found Western Marbled White, Spanish Gatekeeper and a handful of Osiris Blues. Reaching a track on the other side of the hill, we saw Southern White Admiral and Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper. Nick and David eventually met up with Julian and finally found our target Provence Chalkhill Blue which was another brilliant find! Julian was so impressed that he ran back to fetch the others and brought them back in one of the vehicles, thus avoiding the long hike 'over the top.' Everyone had a viewing of these wonderful butterflies even though perhaps only 4 were seen (2 on the track and 1-2 on the hill). In flight, they appeared silvery white with just a hint of blue, much paler than Chalkhill Blue. Bath White and Small Skipper were also found a little further on.



In this rich calcareous habitat, plants included *Buxus sempervirens*, *Dipcadi serotinum*, *Teucrium aureum*, *Helichrysum stoechas*, and *Phlomis lychnitis*.

Day 7, Wednesday 27th May: Porté Puymerons and Llo.

The day began warm, with wall-to-wall sunshine and temperatures of just below 20°C and 20% relative humidity. Our aim was to try and find Violet Copper in a place some two hour's drive from the hotel. We were optimistic.

After breakfast we set out a little earlier than usual, to take into account the long drive towards Andorra and Llivia. We drove up the N116, passing through some stunning landscapes en route.

Stop 1. We arrived at our parking spot at about 10am and made the short walk to the meadow. The Violet Coppers didn't disappoint. Scouring the area with our eyes to avoid trampling the food-plant, we eventually came across a group of 3 males 'dancing' in some kind of territorial dispute in the sunshine and one or two females.

The area is an incredibly sensitive one because the butterflies are very rare and thinly spread through Europe. For this reason, we agreed not to share the location with anyone, no matter how honourable their intentions. Other butterflies seen included Orange Tip, Glanville Fritillary, Green-veined White, Clouded Yellow and Dingy Skipper. Mike also followed a wonderful Meadow Fritillary and Anne soon had Pearl-bordered Fritillary in her sights.



Whilst watching the Violet Coppers, we'd noticed large orange butterflies flying overhead but hadn't paid too much attention. Once we'd left the 'copper sanctuary', we realised that we were witnessing a Painted Lady migration. They were flying northwards against the wind and up through a pass in the mountains. Throughout the day, we noticed dozens if not hundreds. Finally we returned to the vehicles and found Mazarine and Green Underside Blue close by. With a good morning behind us we spent a little time gazing at the Crag Martins gathering mud for their nests at a small muddy puddle at the roadside.

Stop 2. As lunch beckoned we moved up the road and stopped by the River Carol. The views of the mountains were spectacular, as was the rushing river. Bird-wise, Julian found a pair of Dippers flying up and down the stream.

Here we investigated a small meadow and then sat at the bridge to eat lunch. A Broad Bordered Bee Hawk-moth was seen by Geoff, along with Hummingbird Hawk, Common Blue, Pearl Bordered Fritillary, Small White and another Meadow Fritillary. Dingy Skipper, Small Tortoiseshell, Camberwell Beauty, Sooty Copper, Common Blue, Wall and Wood White also put in appearances and Les diligently scrutinised every 'white' in the hope of finding Southern Small or Mountain Small White.

Stop 3. At 2pm, we drove towards Llo where we hoped to find Escher's and Adonis Blues. It was a good hillside with the aforementioned blues, plus Dingy Skipper, Meadow Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Painted Lady and Provence Orange Tip showing. Small Blue and Osiris Blue were also seen taking advantage of the plentiful Kidney Vetch and Sainfoin for nectar, and as

larval host plants. Yiannis pointed out the call of a Marmot, sounding very much like a raptor.

We made a quick stop at the small river after leaving the hillside. Here we saw Duke of Burgundy, Sooty Copper, Orange Tip, Wood White and 2 Clouded Apollos. The ever watchful Nick found and photographed our first and only Long-tailed Blue of the holiday.

Stop 4. Our final stop was on the N116 at the Gorge de Caranças. As it was late in the day, we spent just half an hour or so here, having refreshments or ice creams, followed by a quick walk in the gorge.

Flowers this day were more typical of an alpine environment with some interesting new plants. *Dactylorhiza sambucina* appeared again in its two colour forms along with a couple of new species in the meadows, likely to be *Dactylorhiza elata* and *D. majalis* ssp. *alpestris* (Marsh Orchid). Other plants for the day included *Aster alpinus*, *Gentiana verna* (at Llo), *Tulipa saxatilis*, *Cardamine pratensis*, *Genista sagittalis* and *Pedicularis comosa*.

Day 8, Thursday 28th May: Return to UK

Our holiday had come to an end but it had been a very good week, with good food, excellent wildlife and all in wonderful company. After saying goodbye to our hosts, we made our way to the airport for our flight back to the UK.

Footnote: A total of 86 butterfly species were seen on the trip, with most target species seen by everyone, apart from Spanish Fritillary. For a spring-based holiday, this was an exceptionally good number, helped in part by favourable weather. Flowers were also abundant, with over 10 species of orchids and plenty of other Alpine and Mediterranean plants, many of these with butterfly associations.

Greenwings would like to thank all their guests on this holiday for their support, enthusiasm and good humour and also for the use of their photos in this report and helping to compile the species list each evening. Special thanks also to Mike for his help with the birds seen each day.



Photo gallery and species list overleaf

Spanish Festoon © J. Weightman



Mazarine Blue © J. Weightman





Provençal Short-tailed Blue © J. Weightman



Pearly Heath © J. Weightman



Amanda's Blue © N. Osler

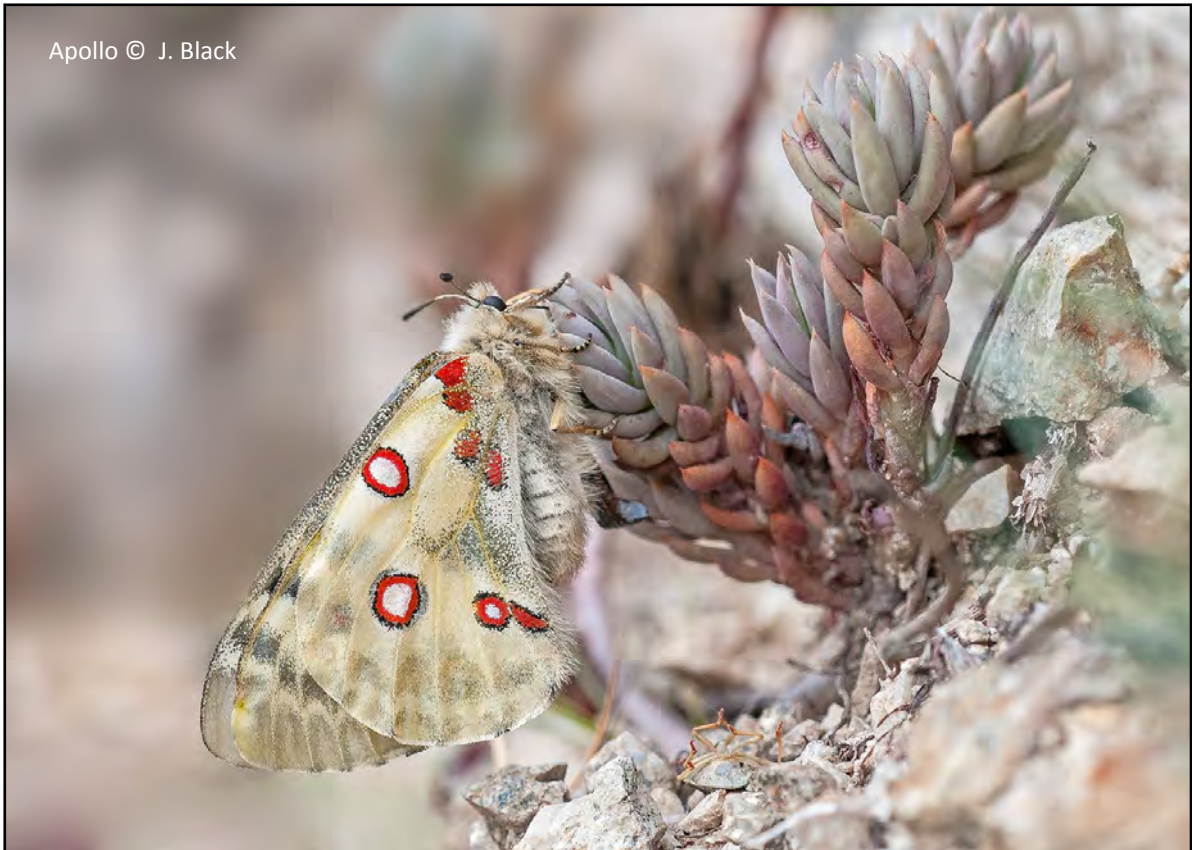


Apollo © N. Osler

Black-veined White © J. Black



Apollo © J. Black





Pyramidal Orchid © J & A Venables





Mazarine Blue © J & A Venables



Bath White © N. Osler



Bright-eyed Ringlet © J & A Venables

Turquoise Blue © J. Weightman





Spanish Gatekeeper © G. Woodcock



Provence Chalk-hill Blue © N. Osler

Violet Copper © J. Weightman



Sooty Copper © J. Dowding



Provence Orange Tip © G. Woodcock



Green-veined White © J & A Venables



Knapweed Fritillary © J. Weightman



False Heath Fritillary © N. Osler





Safflower Skipper © J. Black



Sooty Copper © N. Osler



Safflower Skipper © N. Osler





Provence Chalk-hill Blue © J. Weightman



Provence Orange Tip © J. Weightman



Provence Orange Tip larva © J. Weightman



Southern White Admiral © J. Weightman



Turquoise Blue © J. Dowding



Chequered Skipper © J. Weightman



Bright Eyed Ringlet © J. Weightman



1. Attending the Apollo © R. Taylor



2. Apollo © G. Woodcock



3. Apollo © G. Woodcock



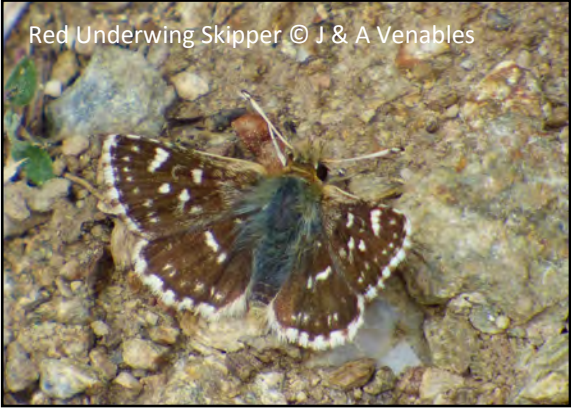
Above and overleaf, photos of the Apollo Yiannis found struggling to free itself from its pupal case.
Photo 1 Attending the Apollo. Photo 2 with remains of pupal case on head. Photo 3 inflating its wings.
Photo 4 waiting for its wings to dry. Photo 5 ready to fly with its wings fully expanded and dry.

4. Apollo © J. Weightman



5. Apollo © G. Woodcock





Red Underwing Skipper © J & A Venables



Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper © J & A Venables



Western Marbled White © N. Osler



Llo view © J. Weightman



Clouded Apollo © J. Weightman



False Ilex Hairstreak © N. Osler



Wood White © J & A Venables



Green Underside Blue © A & J Venables



Marsh Fritillary © G. Woodcock



Yiannis © N. Osler



In the field © J. Weightman



Battered boots © R. Taylor



Tufted Marbled Skipper © G. Woodcock



Photos on this page © Yiannis Christofides

1. *Aristolochia rotunda*; 2. *Andryala intefrifolia*; 3. *Linum narbonense*; 4. *Phyteuma spicatum*.





Photos on this page © Yiannis Christofides:
1. *Silene alba*; 2. *Silene italica*; 3. *Centaurea pectinata*;
4. *Lavandula stoechas*; 5. *Lathyrus pratensis*.





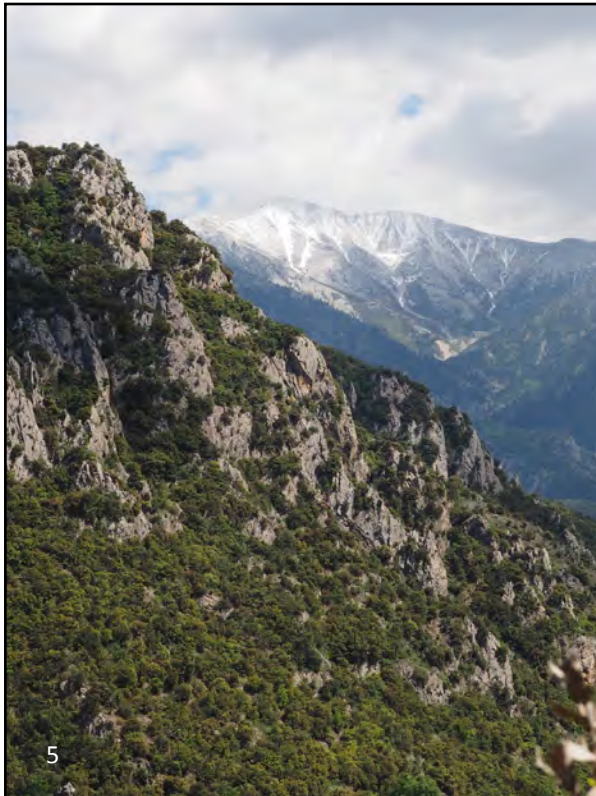
Photos on this page © Yiannis Christofides

1. *Cistus laurifolius*; 2. *Dactylorhiza sambucina*; 3. *Jasione Montana*; 4. *Asphodelus tenuifolius*.





Photos on this page © Yiannis Chirstofides
1. *Anthyllis vulneraria*; 2. *Dipcadi serotinum*;
3. *Urospermum dalechapii*; 4. *Aster alpinus*;
5. Pyrenean landscape view.





Provençal Short-tailed Blues © J. Black



Red-underwing Skippers © J. Black



Glanville Fritillary J. Weightman



Marsh Fritillary *beckeri* © Y. Christofides



Spanish Festoon larval food-plant and egg

Pedicularis comosa © J. Black



Fly Orchid © J. Black



Man Orchid © J. Black



Provence Orange Tip larva © J. Black



False Ilex Hairstreak © J. Black



Glanville Fritillary © J. Black

Butterflies and Botany of the Eastern French Pyrenees, 21-28 May 2015 species checklist			Thu 21 May	Fri 22 May	Sat 23 May	Sun 24 May	Mon 25 May	Tue 26 May	Wed 27 May
Butterflies			day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7
		Family Hesperiidae							
1	Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓
2	Mallow Skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>			✓	✓	✓		
3	Tufted Marbled Skipper	<i>Carcharodus flocciferus</i>			✓				
4	Red Underwing Skipper	<i>Spialia sertorius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
5	Southern Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓
6	Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>				✓	✓		
7	Olive Skipper	<i>Pyrgus serratulae</i>				✓			
8	Rosy Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus onopordi</i>				✓			
9	Safflower skipper	<i>Pyrgus carthami</i>					✓		
10	Chequered skipper	<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>				✓			
11	Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>				✓		✓	
12	Lulworth Skipper	<i>Thymelicus acteon</i>						✓	
13	Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>				✓			
		Family Papilionidae							
14	Apollo	<i>Parnassius apollo</i>					✓		
15	Clouded Apollo	<i>Parnassius mnemosyne</i>				✓			✓
16	Spanish Festoon	<i>Zerynthia rumina</i>	✓	✓					
17	Spanish Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides feisthamelii</i>	✓	✓+ larvae	✓		✓		✓
18	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓
		Family Pieridae							
19	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
20	Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓
21	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
22	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23	Southern Small White	<i>Pieris manni</i>				✓			
24	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
25	Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>		✓					✓
26	Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
27	Provence Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis euphenoides</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓
28	Western Dappled White	<i>Euchloe crameri</i>		✓					
29	Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
30	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
31	Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>	✓	✓	✓				
32	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
		Family Riodinidae							
33	Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>			✓		✓		✓
		Family Lycaenidae							
34	False Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrrium esculi</i>						✓	
35	Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrrium ilicis</i>			✓			✓	
36	Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
37	Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓
38	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>			✓	✓	✓		
39	Violet Copper	<i>Lycaena helle</i>							✓
40	Long-tailed Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>							✓

	Butterflies		day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7
41	Provençal Short-tailed Blue	<i>Cupido alcetas</i>			✓	✓			
42	Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓
43	Osiris Blue	<i>Cupido osiris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
44	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	✓		✓				
45	Green Underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>	✓	✓	✓				
46	Baton Blue	<i>Pseudophilotes baton</i>			✓				
47	Chequered Blue	<i>Scolitantides orion</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		
48	Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓
49	Turquoise Blue	<i>Polyommatus dorylas</i>			✓				✓
50	Amanda's Blue	<i>Polyommatus amandus</i>			✓	✓			
51	Escher's Blue	<i>Polyommatus escheri</i>		✓		✓			✓
52	Chapman's Blue	<i>Polyommatus thersites</i>		✓	✓	✓			
53	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
54	Adonis Blue	<i>Lysandra bellargus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
55	Provence Chalk Hill Blue	<i>Lysandra hispana</i>						✓	
56	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
57	Northern Brown Argus	<i>Aricia artaxerxes</i>					✓		
58	Iolas Blue	<i>Iolana iolas</i>			✓				
		Family Nymphalidae							
59	Southern White Admiral	<i>Limenitis reducta</i>	✓	✓			✓		
60	Camberwell Beauty	<i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>				✓	✓		✓
61	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓
62	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>			✓	✓			
63	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		
64	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
65	Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>				✓			
66	Glanville Fritillary	<i>Melitaea cinxia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
67	False Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea diamina</i>		✓		✓			
68	Knapweed Fritillary	<i>Melitaea phoebe</i>			✓		✓		
69	Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea didyma</i>		✓	✓		✓		
70	Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea athalia</i>			✓	✓	✓		
71	Provençal Fritillary	<i>Melitaea deione</i>		✓	✓				
72	Meadow Fritillary	<i>Melitaea parthenoides</i>			✓			✓	✓
73	Marsh Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>		✓					
74	Spanish Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas desfontainii</i>		✓					
75	Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>		✓	✓				✓
76	Pearl Bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>			✓				✓
77	Weaver's Fritillary	<i>Boloria dia</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓
78	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
79	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
80	Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>	✓	✓		✓			✓
81	Pearly Heath	<i>Coenonympha arcania</i>			✓	✓			
82	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
83	Spanish Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia bathseba</i>						✓	
84	Bright-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia oeme</i>				✓			
85	de Prunner's Ringlet	<i>Erebia triaria</i>			✓		✓	✓	
86	Western Marbled White	<i>Melanargia occitanica</i>		✓				✓	

Burnets & notable moths			day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7
1	Auspicious Burnet	<i>Zygaena fausta</i>	✓					✓	
2	Slender Scotch Burnet	<i>Zygaena loti</i>		✓					
3	White-collared burnet	<i>Zygaena lavandulae</i>						✓	
4	Forester	<i>Adscita</i> sp				✓			✓
5	Chimney Sweep	<i>Odezia atrata</i>				✓			
6	Angle Shades	<i>Phlogophora meticulosa</i>				✓			
7	Burnet Companion	<i>Euclidia glyphica</i>							✓
8	Broom moth	<i>Ceramica pisi</i>							✓
9	Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>		✓			✓		
10	Broad Bordered Bee Hawk-moth	<i>Hemaris fuciformis</i>							✓
Birds - simple listing - seen or heard									
1	Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	
2	Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	✓					✓	✓
3	Barn Swallow	<i>hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓				✓
4	House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓		✓				
5	Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓					✓	
6	Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
7	Woodchat Shrike	<i>Lanius senator</i>		✓				✓	
8	Stonechat	<i>Saxicola rubicola</i>		✓					
9	Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>		✓				✓	
10	Subalpine Warbler	<i>Sylvia cantillans</i>	✓				✓		
11	Sardinian Warbler	<i>Sylvia melanocephala</i>			✓			✓	
12	Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>					✓		
13	Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>						✓	
14	Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>						✓	
15	Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓				
16	Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			✓				
17	Spotless Starling	<i>Sturnus unicolor</i>						✓	
18	Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>		✓	✓		✓		
19	Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>		✓				✓	
20	Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	✓	✓					
21	Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>		✓			✓		
22	Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>			✓				
23	Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montana</i>							✓
24	Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>			✓				
25	Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓
26	Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>							✓
27	Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
28	Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			
29	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>						✓	
30	European Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	
31	Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>			✓			✓	
32	Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓			✓	
33	Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>			✓	✓	✓		
34	Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>				✓			

	Birds cont'd		day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7
35	Pied Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				✓			
36	Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>				✓			✓
37	Turtle Dove	<i>Streptopelia turtur</i>						✓	
38	European Bee eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>						✓	
39	Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>						✓	
40	Yellow Legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>						✓	
41	Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	✓		✓		✓		
42	Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>						✓	
43	Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>							✓
44	Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>				✓	✓		
45	Peregrine	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>				✓		✓	
46	Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>							✓
47	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>						✓	
48	Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>						✓	