

# Butterflies of the Eastern French Pyrenees

**Holiday Report**  
**21 - 28 May 2014**



Greenwings Wildlife Holidays

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## Introduction

This was to be the first of two new butterfly tours in 2014, led by Tristan Lafranchis, the eminent naturalist and author of many books on butterflies and flowers. Julian Dowding assisted.

Greenwings welcomed ten guests for an enjoyable week spent observing spring butterflies and other flora and fauna. The magical landscape of this part of France, close to north eastern Spain, would provide an interesting mixture of butterfly habitats including garrigue, streams and damp meadows, wooded valleys and limestone hillsides, all set against impressive mountain backdrops. Some of the areas we were to explore were close to the Mediterranean and therefore it was hoped that the trip would also provide some diversity in the form of Mediterranean and Spanish specialities, as well those more normally associated with the Eastern French Pyrenees.



During our week, we stayed in a small family run hotel in Vernet-les-Bains, a village nestled in a sheltered valley into the foothills of Mount Canigou. The Massif, which has a peak of around 2,785m, was visible from our hotel and occasionally dusted with a fresh fall of snow. It is the emblematic mountain of Spanish and French Catalonia and has attracted walkers, artists and poets alike for hundreds of years. Kipling praised it as 'magical among mountains' and Jacint Verdaguer i Santaló, 'The Prince of Catalan Poets', immortalised it with his poem 'Canigó', in which he likens the mountain to an immense magnolia. The areas we visited were fiercely Catalan, the red and yellow striped flags visible in most of the little towns and villages we passed through. The neighbouring town of Villefranche-de-Conflent, is also a fine example of a medieval walled town and is a UNESCO world heritage site.

The programme for the week was as below, followed by a description of each day, gallery and species lists.

**Day 1, Wednesday 21st May:** arrival at Perpignan and transfer to hotel.

**Day 2, Thursday 22nd May:** Sournia and quarry.

**Day 3, Friday 23rd May:** Towards Nohèdes and the high Pass above Urbanya.

**Day 4, Saturday 24th May:** Aude Valley, Rebenty, Pays de Sault and le Route des Sapins.

**Day 5, Sunday 25th May:** Mt Canigou, Col de Jou and la Torre de Goà above Sahorre.

**Day 6, Monday 26th May:** Towards Tautavel, Bélesta, Lower Corbières and Força Réal.

**Day 7, Tuesday 27th May:** Towards Llivia.

**Day 8, Wednesday 28th May:** Fort Libéria and return to UK.



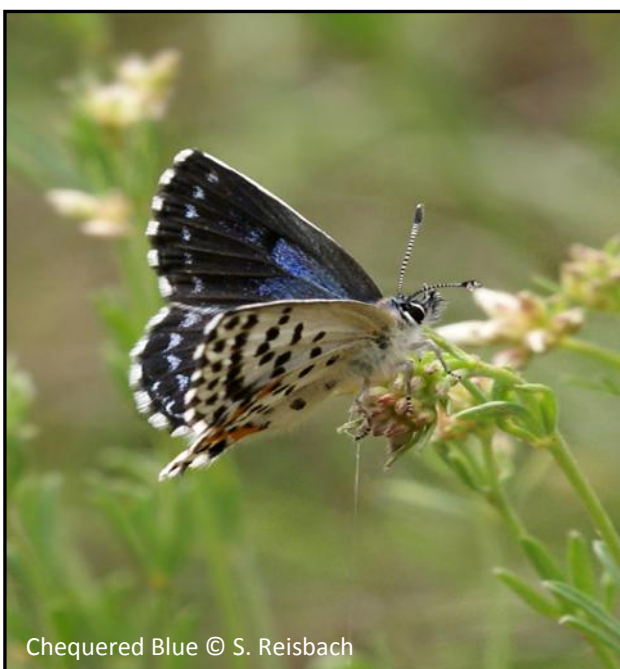


### Day 1: Wednesday 21st May

Tristan and Julian had arranged to meet the guests at Perpignan airport in the afternoon but a re-routed flight caused delays with an eventual arrival at the hotel at around 8pm in the evening. However, the trip back from the airport was interesting, with wonderful views of mountain scenery, and in particular, Mt. Canigou, and also Vinça reservoir. Our hosts were very welcoming and once everyone had settled in to their rooms, we were served a traditional Catalan dinner, which gave everyone the chance to get acquainted. The food throughout the week was very good, with a thoughtful mixture of different Catalan dishes for dinner all washed down with locally produced wine, water or juice. The hotel also provided our picnic lunches throughout the week and offered our guest Ron the chance to do some moth trapping at night in their garden. This was really good since it meant that on most mornings over breakfast, we had a selection of moths to look at before we journeyed out for the day.

### Day 2: Thursday 22nd May

We set off on our first day in the field, bathed in beautiful spring sunshine with the sounds of Swifts filling the skies near our hotel. The first stop we made was at a roadside near Sournia, where we parked in preparation for a walk up a track leading onto a dry flowery slope, with impressive views of the Pyrenees. Ian discovered our first butterfly here, an Adonis Blue, which had settled low down in the sward. After taking photos, we crossed the road and moved up a track where we soon saw numerous Osiris Blues and then a Small Blue. Tristan remarked that he had never seen so many Osiris Blues in one place. In all we counted possibly ten individuals. They were mainly males and were found settled on or flying around Prostrate Canary Clover, or their larval host plant Sainfoin. Our first Chequered Blues and Green Underside Blues of the trip were also spotted on the same plants. There were plenty of other colourful flowers providing a banquet of nectar for many butterflies, including Blue Flax *Linum narbonense*, the pink flowers of Rock Soapwort *Saponaria ocymoides* and also a white Italian Catchfly *Silene italica*. Also here, we found Marsh



Chequered Blue © S. Reisbach



Marsh Fritillary © J. Dowding

Fritillary, often perched up on the many bushes and scrubby trees, whilst in the background, we could hear the unmistakable sounds of Cuckoos and Woodlarks.

After a while we left the main track, diverting through some bushes and traversing stone terracing before picking up an almost imperceptible path, in the search for more butterflies. Here we found Western Marbled Whites, a species with an attractive brown striped and spotted patterning on the undersides, which is found mainly in Spain and up to the foothills of the Pyrenees and southern Alps. One of our target species was Spanish Fritillary. We found these quite quickly and with many of them in perfect condition, Tristan was able to point out the post discal black spots on the forewing undersides and beautiful deep colouration.



Passing over terracing © J. Dowding



Slate Burnet © M. Thomas

We also found Chapman's Blues and Wall Browns, the latter flying around and occasionally alighting on the large rocks which were used to terrace the slopes. It was well worth the scramble and as we moved upwards, the hillside opened out and we encountered quite a strong breeze but the butterflies were still in evidence. Here we found Black-veined Whites and another beautiful Spanish Fritillary found basking at the top of the hill. This one proved very approachable and provided good photo opportunities.

A Slate Burnet Moth, *Zygaena rhadamanthus* was seen on Prostrate Canary Clover *Dorycnium pentaphyllum* - from which the moth gets its French name 'Zygène de la dorycnie' - and on the plentiful Sainfoins, both of which are its larval host plants. There were plenty of other beautiful flowers growing in profusion all around, including Catalan Astragalus *Astragalus mospessulanus*, the larval food plant of Escher's Blue and other butterflies. We also found Pyramidal Orchid, Woodcock Orchid *Ophrys scolopax*, Blue Lettuce, Cheddar Pink, Proliferating Pink *Petrorhagia prolifera*, (a true Mediterranean species of the Carnation family with a characteristically large calyx), Felty Germander *Teucrium aureum*, Muscari, Spurge and the appropriately named Pinecone Flower *Leuzea conifer*. It wasn't long before we found our first beautifully marked Spotted Fritillaries. Some of the males were a fiery orange red



Spanish Fritillary © M. Thomas



colour of the form *meridionalis*, and easy to differentiate from the Knapweed Fritillaries which were also found here.

After a while spent exploring, we decided to escape the breeze and made our way back down the hillside to meet at the vehicles for our picnic lunch. On our return back down, we found more Black



Western Marbled White © B. Raven



Knapweed Fritillary © M. Thomas

-veined Whites, Large Wall Browns, Cleopatra, and Hummingbird Hawk-moths, the latter hovering in and out of the flowers as they drank. Some Gladioli were found around the scrub, their magenta colours quite dazzling and worth a photo. Arriving back at the roadside, we found another Green Underside Blue waiting for us.

After lunch, some of the group walked a more westerly track while Julian and Sue Lloyd stopped lower down for a breather by a promising area which was full of flowers. It felt much warmer now, partly because we had escaped the breeze higher up, but also because the sun had risen higher. The flowers growing in the shelter of the banks drew in plenty of butterflies including at least a dozen Berger's Clouded Yellows, seen flying back and forth, their beautiful light custard colour giving them away. There were also two Cardinals dashing in to feast upon the many thistles, showing wonderful pinkish red markings on the underside fore wings. One of these was a beautiful male showing its sex brands. Several Adonis Blues, the males with their striking azure livery, were seen clinging to the grasses. Up the track, the rest of the group saw Chequered Blue, Marsh Fritillary and Berger's Clouded Yellow. On the way down to the vehicles we met the photographer, James Gibbs, who was showing a keen interest in the butterflies seen on the flowers. These included Queen of Spain, Chequered Blue and Green Hairstreak.

We moved to our third site at around 3pm and started moving uphill along a track which passed by a quarry. A couple of Southern White Admirals were seen drifting down the path and one settled for a photo. We soon reached a point where a stream cuts across the path and found Adonis Blues, Turquoise Blues, Chapman's Blues and Osiris Blues taking moisture and salts. We also came upon more Spotted Fritillaries, a Marsh Fritillary of the darker form *beckeri*, a number of handsome



Spanish Swallowtail © J. Parrott

Cardinals on the large thistles growing there, False Heath Fritillary, Cleopatra, Southern Grizzled Skipper, Small Skipper, Tufted Marbled Skipper, Meadow Brown and Large Wall Brown. Returning back down the track, we found three species of Hawk-moths: Broad Bordered, Narrow Bordered and Hummingbird, all taking nectar from the Valerians growing by the cliff faces. At least two Spanish Swallowtails were seen, one in the company of the Hawk-moths and another which was taking nectar from a small patch of flowers near to the vehicles. White-collared Burnet was also seen. It had been a very good first day's butterflying and we drove back to Vernet-les-Bains, ready for our Catalan dinner.

**Day 3: Friday 23rd May**

After breakfast we set out in the direction of Nohèdes and the high pass near Urbanya. After parking the vehicles we took a narrow path up through some pines and scrub. We found Cistus Broomrape *Cytinus hypocistus* - a rather curious looking red parasitic plant - here, utilising the many Rockroses (*Cistus laurifolius* and *albidus*). It was almost hidden by the Rockroses and the carpet of dry leaves and needles, appearing something like a red cactus. We also found Violet



Eublemma purpurea © J. Dowding

Bird's nest Orchid. Our first butterfly was a Provençal Fritillary, distinguished from some of other small frits by the ginger/orange hairs on its palpi when seen from underneath. A French Partridge took off in front of us causing a stir, the eruption of wings cutting the air which was filled with the scents of the many brooms growing there. Spotted Fritillaries were soon seen and were the most abundant butterfly here. The females were quite different from the reddish males, being

suffused with a very dusky shade on the upperside forewings, the hind wings being more orange. We also found Large Wall Browns and a few more Spanish Swallowtails, along with some superb moths. One of these, *Eublemma purpurea* was a wonderful rhubarb and cream colour. Not long after, we found a gorgeous metallic green Forester Moth (*Adscita* sp.), gleaming in the sunshine. Small Heaths were plentiful, darting amongst the low vegetation, sometimes apparently following us as we moved! A number of Speckled Woods caught the attention of Sue and Ian, being much more orange in colour than UK specimens and sometimes looking a bit like another Fritillary species when seen at a distance. The difference in ground colour has been attributed to



Spotted Fritillary © J. Dowding



Walking through the Broom © B. Raven



temperature and humidity. As we returned back down the pass, our first Holly Blue of the trip dropped in from above, mimicking the sky, with its wonderful powder blue colours. We found another Knapweed Fritillary too, looking very much like its Provençal cousin (but lacking the ginger palpi and a few other identifying features), Mallow Skipper, Black-veined White, some beautifully marked Glanville Fritillaries and also Green Hairstreaks. On the way back we were treated to a wonderful cloud formation.

Our second stop began with a walk down a hill by the roadside, before Tristan and Julian drove the vehicles to our parking spot. A couple of De Prunner's Ringlets which appeared almost black



Sooty Copper © S. Reisbach

in flight were seen. Those walking watched Small Tortoiseshells and Wood Whites flying up the road, the former occasionally basking on some of the sheer rocks rising steeply above the road. When we arrived at the parking spot near Urbanya, we could hear Nightingales in full song. The area was a river valley and shaded by many trees and bushes. The first part of the walk was beside a rushing stream, which made an interesting backdrop.

Our first butterfly here was a Peacock and then more De Prunner's Ringlets, giving a chance for those that hadn't seen them on the road, nice views of their striking dark brown background colour with bright ocelli set off by orange bands on the uppersides. Ian soon found a resting Wood White, which afforded some good photo opportunities. Moving lower down the track, Small Heaths were in evidence and a couple of Orange Tips, the latter reminding us that this was indeed spring in France! Tristan pointed out a Duke of Burgundy and then we caught sight of our first Sooty Copper. He explained that in this area the Sooty Coppers carry more orange yellow on their uppersides, although they're still dark.

The moisture from the stream helped keep the area lush with vegetation and in the dappled light a beautiful creamy yellow Greater Butterfly Orchid *Plantathera chlorantha* was found, just as our first Pearly Heath of the trip glided past and settled. Further down the track, behind a fenced off area with water and lush vegetation, another Duke of Burgundy was seen. On the mud, Amanda's Blue was found in the company of Adonis and Common Blues. Here we found our first Provençal Short-tailed Blue, along with a Marbled Skipper, the latter showing typical pale undersides and



Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper © J. Dowding



De Prunner's Ringlet © S. Reisbach



strong white hindwing markings. As we moved along the path, past the mud puddling butterflies, the area opened out before us with small flowery meadows, often filled with Tufted and Hairy Vetches. These wonderful purple flowers provided a veritable banquet for butterflies to nectar upon, including Southern Grizzled Skippers and other Pyrgus family members. We were committed to not wading through the flowers and trampling them so we let the other skippers be, temporarily unidentified. There were many Violas growing here as well and it was not long before we found Pearl-bordered Fritillaries with one of them laying an egg on Viola. Eventually, the skippers became



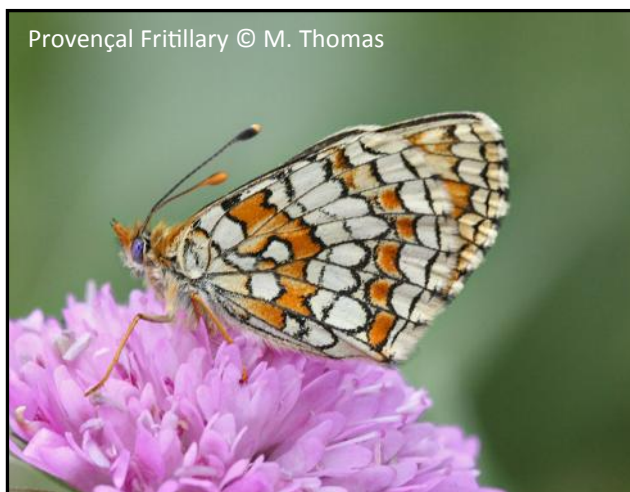
Tristan's Fritillary Masterclass © M. Thomas

more obliging and we were then able to identify Mallow Skipper and Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper. Returning up the path to our base for lunch, we passed a beautiful Pyrenean Valerian *Valeriana pyrenaica* with lacy heads of tiny pale pink flowers growing from a bank. We also found one of the Stonecrops, the larval host plant of Chequered Blue. A solitary Small Copper was also seen before we arrived at the vehicles to eat a salad lunch, satisfied with the morning's walk.

The next location was a rising path above a river with a small hydro-electric plant. The weather had clouded over and the butterflies were hunkering down on the flowers and grasses, making them harder to find but Tristan put his experience to good use and we found Adonis Blue and its host plant, Horseshoe Vetch, Orange Tip and another Large Wall Brown. A Lasiocampid moth



Knapweed Fritillary © J. Parrott



Provençal Fritillary © M. Thomas

*Macrothylacia rubi* was seen and photographed taking cover on a Narrow - leaved Heleborine *Cephalanthera longifolia* near to a group of Spiked Rampions. Then, Marian and Stephen found a number of small fritillaries on a very large Scabious. Here, Tristan was able to give us a valuable lesson in small fritillary identification with Provençal, Knapweed and Spotted Fritillaries all on the same plant! Across the track, a Glanville Fritillary was also seen, resting on lush vegetation and clearly identified by its patterning with dark brown to almost black spots in the orange post discal band. We also found Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper and on our way back down to the parking spot, a resting Tufted Marbled Skipper was observed. It had taken up an unusual position, with its wings folded down and its tail curved upwards in scorpion - like fashion. Tristan explained that



Tufted Marbled Skipper © J. Parrott



Olive Skipper © S. Reisbach

this was a resting position and that to sleep, it folds its wings down and that the only butterfly that sleeps with its wings wide open was Southern Swallowtail. Given the dull weather conditions and spots of rain, it had been a surprisingly good afternoon and we drove back to Vernet-les-Bains in good heart, and dinner at Le Canigou, a small restaurant in Villefanche-de-Conflent.

#### Day 4: Saturday 24th May

We awoke this morning, optimistic that the day's weather would be better than the previous afternoon, and looking out at Canigou from our hotel over breakfast, some blue sky gave us hope. Just after 9am, we set off towards Aude and after parking the vehicles, walked the track beside some high rock faces. Angela and Ian soon found Early Purple Orchid *Orchis Masculula* with either a Wood White or a Réal's Wood White resting upon it. Without dissecting the genitalia, these species could not be differentiated so we took photos and let it be.



Wood White © I. Collins



Provence Orange Tip © I. Collins



One of the butterflies we were all really hoping to see on the holiday was Provence Orange Tip. Walking the track, Tristan's amazing instinct guided him to a male and female of the species resting on Buckler Mustard *Biscutella laevigata* (or related species, it is a very difficult group). This is the butterfly's host plant and the insects were perfectly camouflaged as their bi-coloured undersides of greenish and soft yellow tones blended in with the petals. There were innumerable nectar flowers for butterflies here, including Common Globularia *Globularia bisnagarica* and the mat-forming *G. nana* (which looked like a tiny blue Scabious), Horseshoe Vetch, Dwarf Crown Vetch *Coronilla minima* and Kidney Vetch. It wasn't long before we found Adonis Blue and Small Blue which use these latter two plants as larval hosts. Tristan even managed to find Small Blue eggs on one of the Kidney Vetches. He and Bryn also found larvae of Provence Orange Tip at varying stages of development. We were able to add Osiris Blue near their host plant Sainfoin, Wall, Large Wall Brown and Olive Skipper to our list. Tristan pointed out a useful diagnostic feature for Olive Skipper; the clear oval spot in space 7 (S7) of the underside hind wings. The area was also home to many Burnet Moths including a beautiful Slender Scotch Burnet *Zygaena loti*, and Southern Six-spot Burnet *Z. transalpina* which could be identified by the small white tips on the antennae and the broad border on the hind wing. The species is found only in southern Europe. Our first Pearly Heaths were seen near to a beautiful Military Orchid, to go with a Man Orchid Angela and Jean found and Bryn was able to positively identify a Provençal Fritillary, putting to good use Tristan's outdoor classroom of the day before!



Provence Orange Tip © S. Reisbach

Further up the track a fairly large brown bird suddenly flew out, showing white markings on the wings. Ron confirmed it was a Nightjar. An interesting small fritillary caused some confusion a little later, in spite of our previous 'classroom session'. Tristan was able to gently manipulate the body of the butterfly and check the shape of its genitalia. It turned out to be the southern form of Heath Fritillary. We then ate another wonderful lunch, sitting on the boulders which lined the track and then moved off back down the track to the vehicles and set off in the direction of Sault.

We passed a beautiful male Red-backed Shrike on overhead wires, before arriving at the gully,



Provençal Fritillary © S. Reisbach



Clouded Apollo © I. Collins

our third stop. There was quite a steep hillside which we were able to move along, keeping close to the small wooded valley floor. Almost as soon as we set off, Tristan, who was walking beside some conifers, found a huge edible yellow brown Morel *Morchella esculenta*. Moving through the sward, we soon found Mazarine Blue, Olive Skipper, and Green-veined White. As we approached the end of our walk, both male and female Clouded Apollo were seen. We then retraced our steps back to the roadside and found an immaculate Green - underside Blue, perched on a lichen encrusted twig. We also saw Southern Grizzled Skipper, Orange Tip, Heath Fritillary and an obliging False Heath Fritillary, resting on a *Ranunculus*. Flower-wise, the roadside was really good, with yellow Elderflower Orchids *Dactylorhiza sambucina*, a profusion of White Saxifrages, Fly Orchid *Ophrys insectifera* another Military Orchid *Orchis militaris*, Twayblade *Neottia ovata* Man Orchid *Orchis anthropophora* and a scattering of Common Spotted Orchid *Dactylorhiza fuchsia* being seen.



Green Underside Blue © I. Collins

We'd seen Dippers near the hotel most mornings, and the bird life at this spot had been equally fascinating, with Tree Pipit and Short-toed Eagle but when we arrived back at the vehicles and saw five Griffon Vultures flying high above us, we became quite excited. Even at such height, one could appreciate just how large these magnificent birds were. We then moved off back towards the hotel, making one last stop by a large rock face as the sun reappeared. Ian and Sue found a lot of



Limestone scenery above Rébenty © J. Dowding



Adonis Blues and Berger's Clouded Yellows and beckoned the rest of the group over for a look. Up on the difficult slopes, Hummingbird Hawk-moths could be seen on the Blue Bugloss whilst above, numerous Crag Martins enjoyed the afternoon sun. Red Admiral 'tents' were found on the nettles by the river on the opposite side of the road and close by, a Marsh Fritillary was seen. A beautiful Rosy Garlic *Allium roseum* was found growing in the sward by the roadside by Angela, Jean, Bryn and Sue Lloyd but by then, the sun had begun to play its game of hide and seek again, and so we set off back to the hotel in time for our Catalan dinner.

**Day 5: Sunday 25th May**

After a typical breakfast of croissants, cereal, juice and coffee, we made the short journey to Mt. Canigou and set out up a track towards the tower. As we ascended, we were aware of numerous



Wall Lizards scurrying about our feet or seen basking on the rocks and stones. Spotted Fritillary and Queen of Spains were seen and Tristan pointed out Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*, which some of the fritillaries use as a host plant. Moving upwards along a track we found more Queen of Spains,



and were able to appreciate the large silver panels on their undersides of one that had settled. At least two Swallowtails had been fluttering in and out of view and finally near the tower, one landed on the ground giving everyone good views. Upon reaching the tower, we caught sight of some Swifts which had been dashing about the building and then a couple of Buzzards were seen overhead. We also heard some deep soft 'caws' and then above us saw the bird which was making



them; a Raven. This was then joined by another, while somewhere else a Cuckoo was also calling. As we wandered, we found our first Weaver's Fritillary of the trip, along with Small Tortoiseshell and Green-veined White, Chequered Blue and Wall. The butterflies were numerous as we made our way downwards to a woodland skirted by a flower rich hillside; these included Orange Tip, Small Skipper, Large Skipper, De Prunner's Ringlet, Meadow Fritillary (whose larval food plant is Plantain), Provençal Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary and then a lovely Duke of Burgundy Fritillary, nectaring on Euphorbia. Two more Weaver's Frits were seen, as well as a female Sooty Copper, Red Admiral, Small Heath, Wall, Small Blue, Cardinal, lots of Spotted Fritillaries and Adonis Blues. The group then took a long path cross country towards a nearby village. With very good weather,





we had an interesting descent back down towards a small village. Along the way we found Adonis Blue, De Prunner's Ringlet, Speckled Wood, Small Heath, Provence Orange Tip, Western Dappled White, Chequered Blue, Small Copper and Large Skipper. When we arrived at the village some 2.5 hours later, Tristan was waiting for us with our lunch and also showed us our first Apollo of the trip. The rain put a stop to the afternoon's activities at about 4pm, but it had been a good day in the field with plenty of new species and we returned to our hotel in good time for dinner.

**Day 6: Monday 26th May**

The morning's weather this day started cloudy but we were determined to set off in the hope of finding Spanish Gatekeepers and sunshine. The great thing about Tristan is that butterfly-wise, he is able to produce most things, and will move to sunnier locations in the mountains, where conditions can be very localised, to find them. Sure enough, at our first stop by another terraced hillside, he was almost immediately able to locate our first Spanish Gatekeeper which was resting in a bush. The individual was beautifully marked, with a bold creamy stripe and ocelli ringed with gold. In spite of the dull conditions, we had a pleasant morning but the butterflies were a little hard to come by. We were luckier with the birds and saw or heard Cirl Bunting, Nightingales, Corn Bunting, Turtle Dove and a female Cuckoo, which flew off issuing a bubbling call. We also saw lots of lovely flowers, including Sheep's Bit *Jasione montana* and the yellow aster known as Umbrella Milkwort *Tolpis barbata* and also Smooth Golden Fleece *Urospermum dalechampii*.



Spanish Gatekeeper © S. Reisbach

Our second stop was an old vineyard near the village of Bélesta. Here we found Heart-flowered Serapias *Serapias cordigera* and Long Lipped Serapias *Serapias vomeracea*. We also saw Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis tremolsii*. It is the first *Epipactis* to bloom in the region and therefore had mainly gone over, but one or two good blooms remained and were photographed. A Turtle Dove was seen perched obligingly on a branch, giving Sue Collins and the rest of the group good



Sheep's Bit © J. Dowding



Turtle Dove © M. Thomas

views. Marian even managed to photograph it. Julian was able to point out Fumitory, one of the bird's favourite foods. Two Hoopoes which had earlier been making their wonderful "Boo boo-boo-boo" calls, flew over us, and many Nightingales were heard singing from the bushes whilst around us, Ravens were calling.

We then moved on to eat lunch at a high spot at Força Réal, with distant views down to the Med. It was very

windy by the time we'd finished and so we moved off towards the river near Lower Corbières, and the limestone hillsides offering dry grasslands and stony slopes with small streams. A Short Toed Eagle was seen overhead and with temperatures around 17.5 degrees, we again set off looking for butterflies. Several Spanish Gatekeepers were found along with our first False Ilex Hairstreak of the trip and also Auspicious Burnet. We also saw a Hobby, two Black Kites and numerous House Martins. Moving off once more, we stopped briefly at the roadside after spotting a Bee-Eater colony. We were able to appreciate their exotic colouring and watery calls but we didn't linger too long, so as not to disturb them. Whilst watching the Bee-Eaters, we saw another Short-toed Eagle, hovering in search of its prey, probably some unsuspecting snake from which it gets its alternative name, Snake Eagle.



Auspicious Burnet © S. Reisbach

Our next stop was a promising looking limestone hillside. Some of the group moved higher up the slopes but the wind there was too strong, so we concentrated on the lower parts and an area lower down on the other side of the road. In spite



Grayling © M. Thomas



Blue-spot Hairstreak © I. Collins

of windy conditions, it proved to be a worthwhile location and we were able to find more Spanish Gatekeepers, Western Marbled Whites, Grayling, Bath White, Speckled Wood and our first Blue-spot Hairstreak. We made one final stop by an old vineyard where we discovered lots of Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis*.

Returning for an excellent dinner at the little restaurant 'Le Temps de Cerises' close to our hotel, we played a little game of 'Which Butterfly Would you Like to Be?' Sue Lloyd chose Orange Tip, Jean opted for Green-veined White, Bryn chose a Red Admiral, Sue Collins the Southern White Admiral, Ian chose the Hermit, Marian the Piedmont Blue, Stephen the Woodland Brown, Tristan the Cleopatra, Angela the Bath White, Ron the Grizzled Skipper, Judy the Brimstone and Julian the Cardinal.



## Day 7: Tuesday 27th May

After breakfast, we set off towards Llivia, with the promise of sunshine and exciting species such as Violet Copper and Apollo. These insects would require a little more warmth before they moved, so we decided to check an area at lower altitude first. Our first stop was near Fontepédrouse, about half an hour beyond Villefranche-de-Conflent, heading up into the mountains. Here, we found Queen of Spain, Green-underside Blue, Adonis Blue, larvae of the Emperor Moth and *Zygaena romeo* (a Burnet Moth which is a real mountain specialist). We also found lots of Owlly Sulphurs *Libelloides coccajus*.

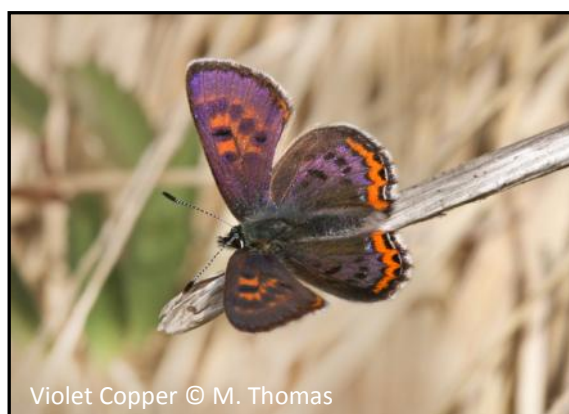


*Zygaena romeo* © M. Thomas

We moved on and after about an hour's drive, passing above the River Têt and through some magical snow peaked mountain landscapes near the Spanish enclave, we arrived at our second stop. Here, we were to search the area for Violet Coppers. Tristan informed us that this species and its habitat has suffered like many others over the years. The remaining small isolated colonies of this butterfly are extremely vulnerable to pressure from many sources, including collecting, habitat loss and simply human trampling. Therefore, we adopted a very careful and sensitive search for the butterfly, forming two small groups and walking single file across the bog. Since the butterfly's host plant only grows in certain areas, this would keep disturbance to a minimum. As we made our way across the bog, stopping briefly for Marsh Orchids and Cuckoo flowers, the sun began to shine and at that moment we noticed a single specimen of the butterfly, making the most of the sunshine. It was even smaller than a Small Copper and appeared to be a very fresh female. From our viewing point, we could also make out a slight violet suffusion. Our esteemed guide told us that sometimes the females do sport a little violet. Continuing our careful search, we found more. Our final tally was about 5 or 6 individuals, including worn males, fresh females and one pristine male. The males would often bask in the trees, making them almost impossible to locate. With such low numbers and on such tiny sites, we could understand just how vulnerable the species was and therefore felt really privileged to have been able to observe it and take photos. It made the journey from Vernet-les-Bains worthwhile. The area also produced several Dingy Skippers, Southern Grizzled Skippers, Orange Tips (male and female), Small Blue, Small White, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Brimstone and Small Heath. After a while spent watching, we settled down for an enjoyable picnic and were treated to



Southern Grizzled Skipper © J. Dowding



Violet Copper © M. Thomas

three Buzzards floating over our heads, and numerous Crag Martins. There was also a family of Black Redstarts nesting nearby.

After lunch, we set off in the direction of a nearby mountain and arrived at a hillside where we walked the small track upwards. Here, Tristan astonished us by searching for and finding Escher's Blue caterpillars under Astragalus plants. The area was very colourful, being festooned with bright blue Spring Gentians, Alpine Asters and many other flowers. A number of Glanville Fritillaries were seen resting or basking and the occasional Berger's Clouded Yellow popped in and out of view. Adonis Blues were as ubiquitous as



ever and we found the southern form of the Heath Fritillary again. In some Pines, a party of Crested Tits were seen by some of the guests. We reached the tower and then hiked back down the slope to pick up another track in search of our target species, the Apollo. En route, we found yet more Glanville Fritillaries and Adonis Blues. Making our way back to the car, Bryn and Sue Lloyd finally discovered an Apollo resting on a bush below a stone wall and called to the rest of the group. It was a most welcome sighting, but after a few minutes, the creature simply took off and was swept at great speed up the mountain slope and out of view.

At a lush meadow by the stream in the little valley below the slope, Ian and Sue were able to find Provençal Short-tailed Blue, Weaver's Fritillary and Provence Orange Tip, whilst across the meadow by an old seat, Julian, Tristan, Angela, Jean, Bryn and Sue Lloyd watched a couple of Pearl-bordered Fritillaries flying past into an old garden. Meeting up with Ron and Judy, we then moved to another track. To our amazement, Marian and Stephen found a hybrid Chalkhill Blue x Adonis Blue (*Polyommatus x polonus*) here. At first we thought we'd seen Provence Chalkhill Blue but the altitude was too high for that species, which flies up to about 1000m. This individual bore the hallmarks of both parents and when it finally opened its wings, we were able to appreciate the brighter blue hindwings and greyer blue forewings. It was an amazing butterfly. After many photographs, we returned to our vehicles, where we were treated to a flyover by Griffon Vultures, before returning to our hotel for dinner.





## Day 8: Wednesday 28th May

A sunny morning awaited us, so we decided to make the most of it before driving to the airport for the afternoon flights back to the UK. After saying goodbye at the hotel to Isabelle, who gave us some lovely Catalan gifts, our first stop was made near Villefranche-de-Conflent. We parked the vehicles and walked up a winding track, and were soon looking at one of our key species, the Spanish Festoon. The males and females we saw were beautifully marked with a lovely patterning similar to the other Festoons, but also displaying fabulous red spots on the fore wings. The butterfly had been reported at least six weeks earlier in other areas, and yet some of the specimens we saw here were incredibly fresh. As we moved on towards the fort, we also found Blue-spot Hairstreak, (invariably seen nectaring on Spurges) and a number of Marsh Fritillaries alighting on the track, together with Common Blue, Southern Small White (our first of the holiday), Southern White Admiral, Queen of Spain and Wall Brown. On the way down, there were more Spanish Festoons and a fully grown Spurge Hawk-moth caterpillar on Spurge. We also found Wall Lizards basking on the rocks and a Glow worm.

We then moved on to a little stop for lunch, a wooded area beside a little river near to Perpignan. Butterflies were in evidence with Large White, Large Skipper and Comma. Tristan reminded us that these were all 'English' species but nonetheless, still pleasant to be able to see in France. The bird life was very good too, with Griffon Vulture, several Nightingales singing, Cetti's Warblers erupting into song, and down the little track, Golden Orioles had perched on an old weathered tree and were seen by one or two of the group. After lunch we drove off to the airport where we had to say our goodbyes. Sadly the holiday had come to an end but it had been a great trip led by Tristan. Many species were seen and much was learned in his company.



Spanish Festoon © J. Parrott



Blue-spot Hairstreak © J. Parrott

## Acknowledgements

Greenwings would like to thank all the guests for their support and enthusiasm on the trip and their help in compiling the species lists and photo galleries and especially to Tristan for his superb efforts with the butterflies and Ron for his work with the moths and running a moth trap.

## Photo gallery overleaf



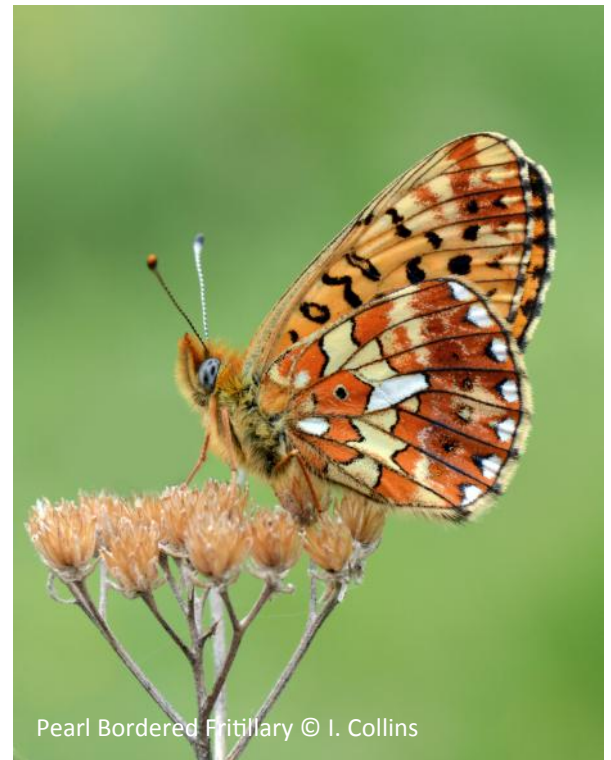
Black-veined White & pupa © I. Collins



Osiris Blue © I. Collins



Spanish Festoon © J. Dowding



Pearl Bordered Fritillary © I. Collins



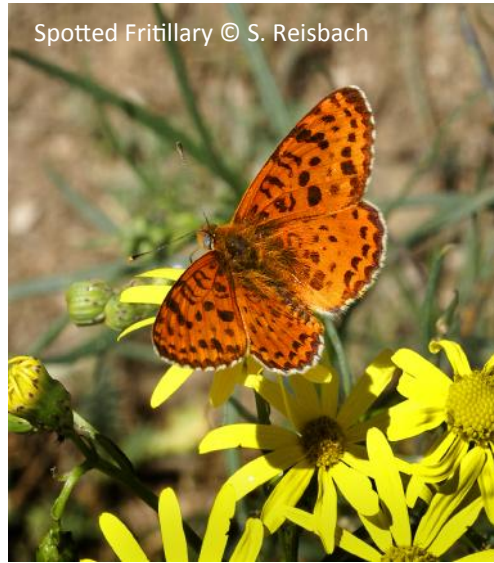
Knapweed Fritillary © I. Collins



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Spotted Fritillary © S. Reisbach



Chequered Blue © I. Collins





Cardinal © J. Dowding



Tristan and the Morel © J. Dowding



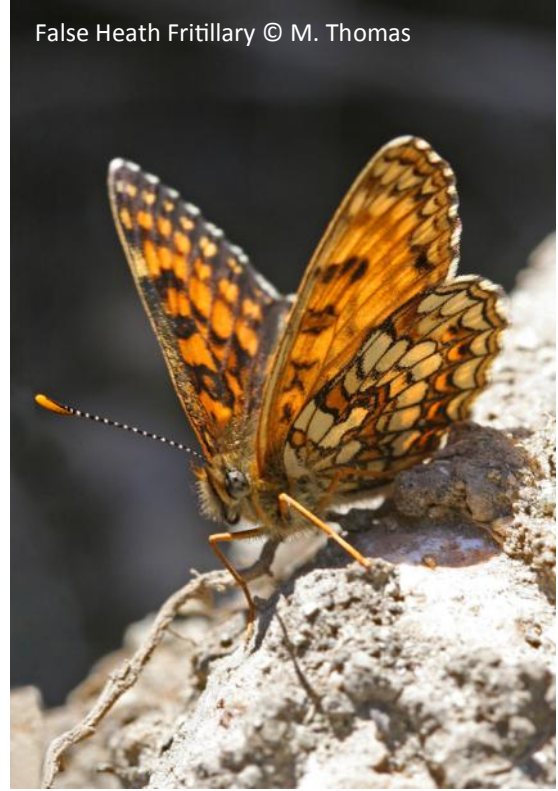
Swallowtail © I. Collins



Zygaena lavandulae © J. Dowding



False Heath Fritillary © M. Thomas



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Sky above Urbanya © J. Dowding



Forester Moth sp. © J. Dowding



Adonis at hand © B. Raven



Cheddar Pink © S. Lloyd



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Watching the Spanish Fritillary © J. Dowding



Spanish Fritillary © S. Reisbach





Ophrys sphegodes *litigiosa* © J. Dowding



Gladioli sp. © J. Dowding



Ophrys Scolopax © S. Reisbach

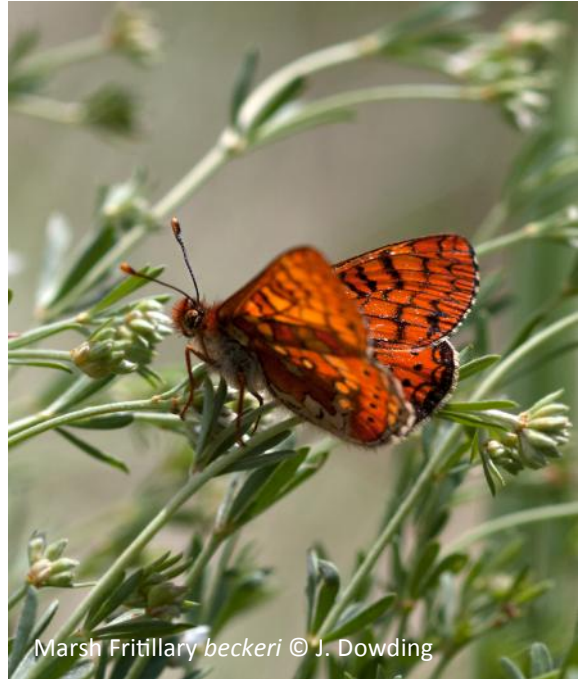


Military Orchid © S. Lloyd





Elderflower Orchid © S. Reisbach



Marsh Fritillary *beckeri* © J. Dowding



Knapweed Fritillary © I. Collins





Black-veined White © J. Parrott



Spanish Swallowtail © M. Thomas





Osiris Blues © I. Collins



Adonis Blue © M. Thomas



Southern White Admiral © M. Thomas



Provence Orange Tips © J. Dowding





False Heath Fritillary © J. Dowding



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Man Orchid © J. Dowding



Veronica austriaca ssp. teucrium © J. Dowding



Meadow Fritillary © J. Dowding



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Violet Copper female © M. Thomas



Photographing hybrid Chalkhill x Adonis Blue © J. Dowding





Smooth Golden Fleece © S. Lloyd



Alpine Rhododendron © S. Lloyd









Spanish Fritillary M. Thomas

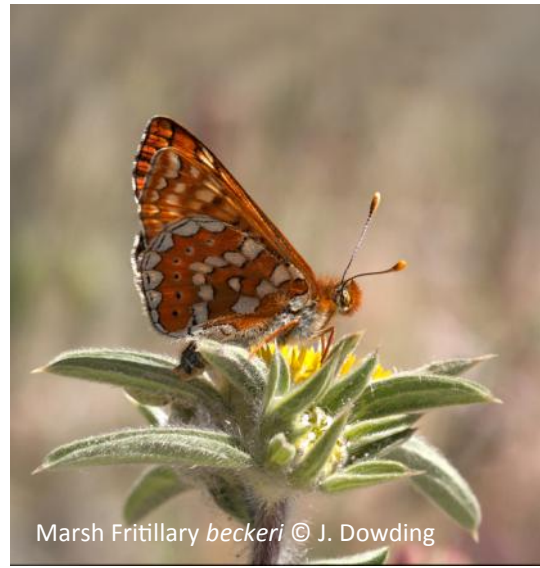


Gentiana verna © S. Lloyd





Duke of Burgundy © I. Collins



Marsh Fritillary *beckeri* © J. Dowding



Wall Brown © J. Parrott



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Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk-moth © J. Dowding



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Hummingbird Hawk-moth © M. Thomas



Broad Bordered Bee Hawk-moth © M. Thomas







*Herminia tarsicrinalis* © T. Lafranchis



*Eublemma purpurea* © T. Lafranchis



*Heterogynis* sp. © T. Lafranchis



*Jocheaera aini* © T. Lafranchis



*Ideaea ochrata* © T. Lafranchis



*Isturgia famula* © T. Lafranchis



*Hyphoraia testudinaria* © T. Lafranchis





Chrysocrambus sp © T. Lafranchis



Anaxis funebria © Tristan Lafranchis



Cephis advenaria © T. Lafranchis



Watsonalla binaria © T. Lafranchis



Dysauxes punctata © Tristan Lafranchis



Chlorissa cloraria © Tristan Lafranchis



Aplocera plagiata © Tristan Lafranchis





*Mythimna albipuncta* © T. Lafranchis



*Olethreutes arcuella* © T. Lafranchis



*Scopula decorata* © T. Lafranchis



*Minucia lunaris* © T. Lafranchis



*Sitochroa verticalis* © T. Lafranchis



*Minoa murinata* © T. Lafranchis



*Micro* © T. Lafranchis



*Lomaspilis marginata* © M. Thomas

## Eastern French Pyrenees, 21-28 May 2014

### Butterfly species list

Vernacular name	Family <i>Hesperiidae</i>	Comments
1 Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>	Scarce (day 7)
2 Mallow Skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>	
3 Tufted Marbled Skipper	<i>Carcharodus flocciferus</i>	Widespread
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 Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>	
9 Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>	
	Family <i>Papilionidae</i>	
10 Apollo	<i>Parnassius Apollo</i>	Seen twice
11 Clouded Apollo	<i>Parnassius mnemosyne</i>	Scarce (day 4)
12 Spanish Festoon	<i>Zerynthia rumina</i>	(day 8)
13 Spanish Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides feisthamelii</i>	Widespread
14 Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>	Widespread
	Family <i>Pieridae</i>	
15 Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	
16 Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>	
17 Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	
18 Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	
19 Southern Small White	<i>Pieris mannii</i>	Villefranche (day 8)
20 Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>	
21 Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>	
22 Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	
23 Provence Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis euphenoides</i>	Scattered (days 4, 5 and 7)
24 Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>	
25 Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>	
26 Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>	(day 2)
27 Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	
28 Western Dappled White	<i>Euchloe crameri</i>	
	Family <i>Riodinidae</i>	
29 Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>	Scattered (days 3 and 5)
	Family <i>Lycaenidae</i>	
30 False Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium esculi</i>	In the garrigue (day 6)
31 Blue Spot Hairstreak	<i>Satyrium spini</i>	Scattered
32 Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>	



33	Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>	
34	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	
35	Violet Copper	<i>Lycaena helle</i>	Scarce (day 7)
36	Provençal Short Tailed Blue	<i>Cupido alcetas</i>	
37	Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	
38	Osiris Blue	<i>Cupido osiris</i>	
39	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	
40	Green Underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>	
41	Chequered Blue	<i>Scolitantides orion</i>	
42	Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>	
43	Turquoise Blue	<i>Polyommatus dorylas</i>	
44	Amanda's Blue	<i>Polyommatus amandus</i>	
45	Escher's Blue	<i>Polyommatus escheri</i>	Caterpillars at Llo
46	Chapman's Blue	<i>Polyommatus thersites</i>	
47	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	
48	Adonis Blue	<i>Lysandra bellargus</i>	
49	Adonis Blue x Chalkhill Blue	<i>Polyommatus x polonus</i>	1 on (day 7)
50	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>	
<b>Family <i>Nymphalidae</i></b>			
51	Southern White Admiral	<i>Limenitis reducta</i>	
52	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	
53	Peacock	<i>Inachis io</i>	
54	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	
55	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	
56	Glanville Fritillary	<i>Melitaea cinxia</i>	
57	False Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea diamina</i>	
58	Knapweed Fritillary	<i>Melitaea phoebe</i>	
59	Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea didyma</i>	
60	Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea athalia</i>	Plus southern form
61	Provençal Fritillary	<i>Melitaea deione</i>	(days 3, 4 and 5 )
62	Meadow Fritillary	<i>Melitaea parthenoides</i>	Scarce (day 5)
63	Marsh Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>	
64	Spanish Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas desfontainii</i>	Scarce (day 2)
65	Cardinal	<i>Argynnis pandora</i>	
66	Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>	
67	Pearl Bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>	
68	Weaver's Fritillary	<i>Boloria dia</i>	Scarce (days 5 and 7 )
69	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>	
70	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>	
71	Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>	
72	Pearly Heath	<i>Coenonympha arcania</i>	
73	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	
74	Spanish Gatekeeper	<i>Pyronia bathseba</i>	In the garrigue (day 6)
75	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	
76	de Prunner's Ringlet	<i>Erebia triaria</i>	

77	Western Marbled White	<i>Melanargia occitanica</i>	scattered
78	Grayling	<i>Hipparchia semele</i>	in the garrigue (day 6)

## Moth species list

		Family <b><i>Incurvariidae</i></b>	
1		<i>Adela australis</i>	Small Fairy Longhorn moth type
		Family <b><i>Zygaenidae</i></b>	
2	Forester species	<i>Adscita sp.</i>	Forester species.
3	Slender Scotch Burnet	<i>Zygaena loti</i>	
4	New Forest Burnet	<i>Zygaena viciae</i>	Caterpillar seen, not adult
5	Auspicious Burnet	<i>Zygaena fausta</i>	
6	Slate Burnet	<i>Zygaena rhadamanthus</i>	
7	Southerly Burnet	<i>Zygaena transalpina</i>	
8	White-collard Burnet	<i>Zygaena lavandulae</i>	
		Family <b><i>Psychidae</i></b>	
9		<i>Sterrhopteryx fusca?</i>	Bagworm species.
		Family <b><i>Tortricidae</i></b>	
10		<i>Phtheochroa rugosana</i>	
11		<i>Olethreutes arcuella</i>	
12		<i>Pammene fasciana</i>	
		Family <b><i>Pyrallidae</i></b>	
13		<i>Chrysocrambus craterella</i>	
14		<i>Thisanotia chrysonuchella</i>	
15		<i>Scoparia ambigualis</i>	
16		<i>Evergestis frumentalis</i>	
17		<i>Pyrausta sanguinalis</i>	
18		<i>Pyrausta nigrata</i>	
19		<i>Sitochroa verticalis</i>	
20	Small Magpie	<i>Eurrhyncha hortulata</i>	
21		<i>Anania terrealis</i>	
22		<i>Anania funebris</i>	
23		<i>Mecyna lutealis</i>	
24		<i>Mecyna asinalis</i>	
25		<i>Dolicharthria punctalis</i>	
26		<i>Etiella zinckenella</i>	ID from photo
27		<i>Dioryctria sylvestrella</i>	
28		<i>Delplanqueia dilutella?</i>	Metzneria type
29		<i>Homoeosoma sinuella</i>	
30		<i>Phycitodes saxicola</i>	



		<b>Family <i>Pterophoridae</i></b>	
31	Thyme Plume	<i>Merrifieldia leucodactyla</i>	
		<b>Family <i>Lasiocampidae</i></b>	
32	Fox Moth	<i>Macrothylacia rubi</i>	
		<b>Family <i>Drepanidae</i></b>	
33	Oak Hook-tip	<i>Watsonalla binaria</i>	
		<b>Family <i>Geomedtridae</i></b>	
34	Southern Grass Emerald	<i>Chlorissa cloraria</i>	
35	Lace Border	<i>Scopula ornata</i>	
36		<i>Idaea filicata</i>	Similar to Least Carpet
37		<i>Idaea ochrata</i>	Asmall Orange Wave
38		<i>Rhodostrophia vibicaria</i>	Red marked Ribbon wave type
39	Portland Ribbon Wave	<i>Idaea degeneraria</i>	
40	Garden Carpet	<i>Xanthorhoe fluctuata</i>	
41	Common Carpet	<i>Epirrhoe alternata</i>	
42	Yellow Shell	<i>Camptogramma bilineata</i>	
43	Purple Bar	<i>Cosmorhoe ocellata</i>	
44	Grey Pine Carpet	<i>Thera obeliscata</i>	
45	Oak-tree Pug	<i>Eupithecia dodoneata</i>	
46	Treble-bar	<i>Aplocera plagjata</i>	
47	Drab Looper	<i>Minoa murinata</i>	
48		<i>Scotopteryx coarctaria</i>	Grey Carpet type
49	Latticed Heath	<i>Chiasmia clathrata</i>	
50	Frosted Yellow	<i>Isturgia limbaria</i>	
51		<i>Isturgia famula</i>	Similar to Frosted Yellow
52	Little Thorn	<i>Cepphis advenaria</i>	
53	Brown Silver-line	<i>Petrophora chlorosata</i>	
54	Speckled Yellow	<i>Pseudopanthera macularia</i>	
55	Willow Beauty	<i>Peribatodes rhomboidaria</i>	
56	Ringed Carpet	<i>Cleora cinctaria</i>	
57	Common Heath	<i>Ematurga atomaria</i>	
58	Light Emerald	<i>Campaea margaritata</i>	
59	Black-veined Moth	<i>Siona lineata</i>	
60	Clouded Border	<i>Lomaspilis marginata</i>	
		<b>Family <i>Sphingidae</i></b>	
61	Lime Hawk-moth	<i>Mimas tiliae</i>	
62	Narrow-bordered Bee Hawk	<i>Hemaris tityus</i>	
63	Broad-bordered Bee Hawk	<i>Hemaris fuciformis</i>	
64	Humming-bird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>	
65	Spurge Hawk-moth	<i>Hyles euphorbiae</i>	Caterpillar seen

		<b>Family <i>Arctidae</i></b>	
66	Orange Footman	<i>Eilema sororcula</i>	
67	Hoary Footman	<i>Eilema caniola</i>	
68	Cream-spot Tiger	<i>Arctia villica</i>	
69	Patton's Tiger	<i>Hyphoraia testudinaria</i>	
70		<i>Dysauxes punctata servula</i>	Very small tiger moth
		<b>Family <i>Noctuidae</i></b>	
71	Heart and Dart	<i>Agrotis exclamationis</i>	
72	Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>	
73	Small Square-spot	<i>Diarsia rubi</i>	
74	Bright-line Brown-eye	<i>Lacanobia oleracea</i>	
75	Small Ranunculus	<i>Hecatera dysodea</i>	
76	White-point	<i>Mythimna albipuncta</i>	
77	White-speck	<i>Mythimna unipuncta</i>	
78	Alder Moth	<i>Acronicta alni</i>	
79	Rustic Shoulder-knot	<i>Apamea sordens</i>	
80	Marbled Minor	<i>Oligia strigilis</i>	One of three species
81	Vine's Rustic	<i>Hoplodrina ambigua</i>	
82	Pale Mottled Willow	<i>Paradrina clavipalpis</i>	
83	Goldwing	<i>Synthymia fixa</i>	
84	Beautiful Marbled	<i>Eublemma purpurina</i>	
85	Oak Nycteoline	<i>Nycteola revayana</i>	
86	Lunar Double-stripe	<i>Minucia lunaris</i>	
87	Mother Shipton	<i>Callistege mi</i>	
88	Burnet Companion	<i>Euclidia glyphica</i>	
89	Shaded Fan-foot	<i>Herminia tarsicrinalis</i>	