



## Butterflies of The Italian Alps

19th - 26th June 2024

Led by Peter Eeles & Ben Greenaway



**Greenwings Wildlife Holidays**

Tel: 01473 254658

Web: [www.greenwings.co.uk](http://www.greenwings.co.uk)

Email: [enquiries@greenwings.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@greenwings.co.uk)

# Italian Alps Butterfly Tour 2024

## Holiday Report 19 – 26 June

### Led by Ben Greenaway & Peter Eeles

#### Introduction

This was the fourth Greenwings trip to the Piedmont Alps, a delightful part of north west Italy where several valleys offer the opportunity to explore their hidden treasures.

The base for the week was in a small town, which lies at an altitude of approximately 1,300m. Joining us were the following guests: Carla & Lee, John & Catherine, Neil, Helen & Peter, Andrew, Charles, Mark, Claire and Simon.

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

#### Day 1, Wednesday 19 June

With all of the guests assembled at Nice airport, we were soon on our way to the hotel, heading north out of Nice and following the Tinée River, with the distinctive colours of male Cleopatra butterflies providing a welcome boost. We eventually turned towards Italy and started to climb.

Our first stop was at 1400m, although the cloudy and cool conditions meant that nothing was flying. However, we were able to find a few roosting butterflies, including Common Blue, Small Blue, Mazarine Blue and Brown Argus. A male Black-veined White was also found roosting along with several Black-veined Moth and, incredibly, an Apollo was also found, which we had never found in this area on previous trips.

Another stop a couple of hundred metres higher up gave us our first Adonis Blue and Heath Fritillary of the trip.

Moving on, we were soon at the Col that is the crossing from France into Italy. This pass had only opened up three days before, due to the snow that still lay on the ground. We would normally spend some time here looking for alpine specialists, such as Cynthia's Fritillary and Grison's Fritillary, but the season was three to four weeks behind a normal year, with no possibility of anything flying here.

We pushed ahead and were soon to be greeted by Franco, the owner of the marvellous hotel.



Apollo © Mark T

#### Day 2, Thursday 20 June

There is a good reason for staying where did – the local area is extremely rich in biodiversity, and butterflies in particular. It is possible to get into prime habitat within minutes of leaving the hotel. We also woke up to a poor weather forecast, meaning that it would make no sense to travel further afield on our first full day.



Glanville Fritillary © John W

The lack of sun didn't put us off from exploring a local site, with the guests (and guides!) enjoying searches for roosting butterflies, larval foodplants and immature stages. Fortunately, the occasional bright spell would see some of the roosting butterflies climbing up from their resting spots, while others would suddenly appear out of nowhere.

New species for the trip included Red-underwing Skipper, Clouded Apollo, Wood White, Large Blue, Titania's Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary, Pearly Heath and our first *Erebia*, the Almond-eyed Ringlet.



Our focus on immature stages also paid dividends, with larvae of Apollo, High Brown Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary and Marbled Fritillary all found. Despite the challenging conditions, the guests really made the most of the day, with 23 species seen for the day and 25 species seen in total for the trip up until this point.

### Day 3, Friday 21 June

With more favourable weather away from our base, we decided to head east, first stopping at a quarry site where our main target was the Southern Swallowtail.

One of the first species seen at the site was a superb Rock Grayling that showed well as it nectared on low-growing plants. Beautifully fresh Safflower Skippers were also a welcome site, flying alongside several Adonis Blue, Marbled Skipper and Tufted Marbled Skipper. A freshly emerged Blue-spot Hairstreak and Purple-shot Copper also made an appearance.

Walking further along the quarry, several new species were found, including Marbled White, Bath White, Southern Small White and several fresh Spotted Fritillary, although the weather took a turn for the worst, with almost nothing seen for the next two hours. We could see brighter weather some distance away but, as quickly as our hopes for better conditions would find us, a bank of cloud would come across.

Purple-shot Copper © Neil M



Southern Swallowtail © Helen B

Making our way back to the quarry entrance, the conditions suddenly improved. It was then that we bumped into some other enthusiasts that were staying at same hotel and, not long after, heard a shout from one of them, alerting us to a Southern Swallowtail that was flying close to the quarry rock face. As we got closer, it was obvious that there were several Southern Swallowtail in the vicinity, with most of the guests witnessing the interaction between a male and female, although she had presumably already mated since no mating was observed. However, everyone had extremely good views of our target species for the site and we left extremely happy. Things were looking up!

With the weather improving, we moved to a hot meadow that has always delivered on past trips, and we were not to be disappointed. While eating lunch, our first Scarce Swallowtail for the trip was seen flitting around some nearby bushes.

The Lycaenids (coppers, hairstreaks and blues) put on a very good show, with several new species for the trip seen including Green Hairstreak, Silver-studded Blue, Reverdin's Blue and several very fresh specimens of Turquoise Blue. We also found several obliging Large Blue that settled with their wings open.

Several High Brown Fritillary were also flying and it was lovely to see what we would consider a real rarity back home. The meadow is a fairly small site, but the variety of species found here is quite incredible. Comma, White Admiral and Southern White Admiral were all seen, alongside some of the 'browns' that were new for the trip, including the Wall, Large Wall, Ringlet and Meadow Brown.



Large Blue © Peter Eeles

This was a good day, with 48 species seen, 29 of which were new for the trip, bringing our total for the trip to 54.

### Day 4, Saturday 22 June

After a 30 minute drive from the hotel, we were at a series of meadows. Butterflies were just waking up as we arrived, with low numbers of most species, although finding several very fresh Queen of Spain Fritillary showing off their large silver spangles caused much excitement! Marbled Fritillary were also in relatively good numbers here.

Scarce Fritillary © Helen B



We eventually moved on to a nearby site to try and connect with a target species for the trip – the Scarce Fritillary – a butterfly that certainly lives up to its common name, residing in very restricted colonies wherever it is found. Within minutes of arriving, the first ‘scarcities’ showed themselves, with several Scarce Fritillary and a single Scarce Copper found nectaring on the umbellifers growing just off the road. Unfortunately, the spring rains and snow melt had left a very wet and impassable area between the road and the butterflies, although everyone had good, albeit remote, views.

Another patch of flowers, and umbellifers in particular, were inhabited by Clouded Apollo, together with several Duke of Burgundy. As we ate lunch, a very obliging female Scarce Fritillary decided to join us, and everyone was happy as they managed to have a closeup experience with one of Europe’s rarest butterflies.

Nearby areas also gave us our first sightings of Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Weaver’s Fritillary.

In late afternoon, we decided to head back to the area near the hotel to see what we might find during decent weather! The ubiquitous Heath Fritillary and Almond-eyed Ringlet were everywhere, although we had several new ‘firsts’ for the trip.

A Southern Grizzled Skipper showed itself, along with an Olive Skipper. There were several sightings of Swallowtail and the ‘whites’ also showed well – along with the usual suspects, such as Black-veined White, we also saw Orange-tip, Brimstone and Berger’s Clouded Yellow. In one of our favourite spots, we also came across both Small Copper and a few freshly emerged Purple-edged Copper, with several Mountain Argus thrown in for good measure. Pearly Heath were also found in good numbers.



Purple-edged Copper © Neil M

There were also several groups of ‘puddling’ blues, with one group containing a very diverse mix of Adonis Blue, Mazarine Blue, Small Blue, Geranium Argus, Southern Grizzled Skipper and others.



Geranium Argus © Simon P

Further up the road we came across a series of unspoilt meadows that held their own treasures. As well as seeing our first de Prunner’s Ringlet, we also came across good numbers of Geranium Argus on their larval foodplant, after which they are named. The icing on the cake was finding several female Clouded Apollo falling deep into vegetation and going through the motions of egg laying, although no foodplant or eggs could be found despite an extensive search.

This was to be the most productive day of the trip with 61 species seen (exceeding the number of resident and regular migrant species found in Britain and Ireland), with 23 new for the trip, bringing our total to 77 species.

**Day 5, Sunday 23 June**



Orange Tip larva on Tower Mustard © John W



Unfortunately, our luck ran out when it came to the weather, with rain forecast for the next few days, with no respite within any reasonable distance. This really was an awful year and the latest and wettest summer in living memory according to Franco, the hotel owner.

We made the most of things, however, by venturing upward behind the hotel where, after parking up, it is possible to have a good walk up to a rather spectacular waterfall. While 19 species of butterfly were seen, most were found roosting, including a rather drenched Glanville Fritillary. We also decided to focus on species ecology, and this helped us find

various immature stages as larval foodplants were encountered.

A spectacular Titania's Fritillary larva was found and Heath Fritillary and Spotted Fritillary larvae were found every few minutes in their favoured areas. Closer to the hotel, Orange-tip eggs and larvae were found on Tower Mustard (also known as Tower Rock-Cress), together with Red Admiral larvae in their distinctively-folded nettle leaves. Very colourful Lackey moth larvae were also found just about everywhere, and on a variety of foodplants.

### Day 6, Monday 24 June

The following day was a complete washout – with sheets of rain coming down for most of the day. Making the most of a bad situation, the group was happy to spend time together discussing various topics. A big thanks to Mark for his contribution to a photography workshop (with a practical session focused (!) on some flowers in a sheltered area at the front of the hotel), an identification session led by Ben, and a presentation on butterfly life cycles led by Pete.

Following lunch, a number of the group ventured out to some meadows near the hotel, where two roosting Apollos were found, along with a solitary Almond-eyed Ringlet.



'Very wet' Apollos © Mark T

### Day 7, Tuesday 25 June



Fire Salamander © Peter Eeles

The final full day at the hotel was a little better, simply because it wasn't raining! However, there was still heavy cloud and so we decided to stay in the area around our base – the rich meadows found here were, after all, the reason for staying here. We decided to travel to the end of the valley within which the hotel is nestled. While a few roosting butterflies were found, and larvae encountered, it was the discovery of a Fire Salamander that caused the most excitement.

Intermittent spells of sunshine resulted in us finding 24 species in total. Interestingly, the group found the slower pace relatively relaxing and enjoyed taking a closer look at the species they found, along with the flora and also taking a deeper interest in the ecology of the species being found.

Since we were travelling back to Nice airport the following day, the pressure was on to find a rewarding stopping point.

### Day 8, Wednesday 26 June

We would normally stop at the Col on the return journey to the airport, but conditions there hadn't really changed since the week before. We therefore decided to find a site closer to Nice and are so glad we did! We decided to stop at a small hilltop village with a fort – an area that is well known to

butterfly enthusiasts.

Setting off deliberately early to maximise our time there, while allowing plenty of time to ensure a relaxing drive to the airport, the time passed quickly and we were soon in the village, where we decided to take the path up to the fort.

Incredibly, we found a couple of Southern Swallowtail flying around, almost as soon as we turned the first corner! A Southern White Admiral, High Brown Fritillaries and Cleopatra were seen nectaring on the Red Valerian found on the steep-sided slopes below the fort. New species for the trip were seen every 10 metres or so and included Lulworth Skipper, Ilex Hairstreak, Baton Blue, Escher's Blue, Silver-washed Fritillary, Painted Lady, Large Tortoiseshell and Great Banded Grayling.

With 40 species seen at this stop, and 8 new for the trip, we ended on 85 species for the trip in total. Given the late season and the weather, this was quite an achievement!

The roads back into Nice were thankfully quiet and everybody was dropped off in good time for their homeward flights. Amazingly, this was not the end of our sightings since, while at the airport, we saw the very large Palm Moth (*Paysandisia archon*), a native of Uruguay and Argentina that was accidentally imported to Europe in the mid 1990s, flying around the palm trees outside of the arrivals area.

**Acknowledgements.** On behalf of Greenwings, Ben and Pete would like to thank all their guests on this trip for their convivial company throughout the week.



## Systematic species checklist

Butterflies ✓ denotes imago sightings, ☆ denotes larva sightings, ☆✚ denotes egg sightings, ○ denotes pupa sightings			19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th	26th
			day 1	day 2	day 3	day 4	day 5	day 6	day 7	day 8
Family <b>Papilionidae</b>										
1	Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclidides podalirius</i>			✓					✓
2	Southern Swallowtail	<i>Papilio alexanor</i>			✓					✓
3	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>				✓				✓
4	Apollo	<i>Parnassius apollo</i>	✓	☆	✓	✓		✓	✓	
5	Clouded Apollo	<i>Parnassius mnemosyne</i>		✓	✓	✓				
Family <b>Pieridae</b>										
6	Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	✓	✓		✓	☆✚		☆✚	
7	Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
8	Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfajariensis</i>				✓				✓
9	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>			✓	✓				✓
10	Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>	✓							✓
11	Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>				✓				✓
12	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓

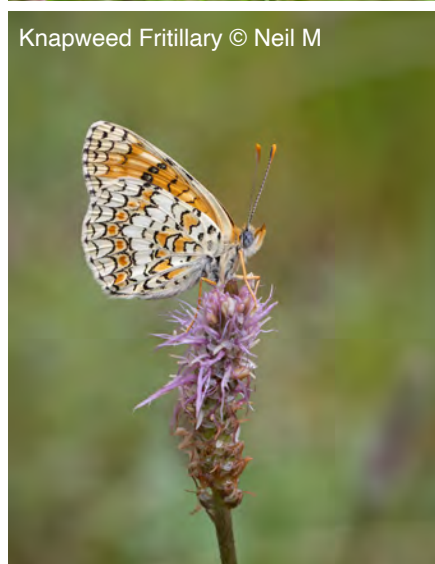
<b>Butterflies</b> ✓ denotes imago sightings, ☆ denotes larva sightings, ✚ denotes egg sightings, ○ denotes pupa sightings			19th	20th	21st	22nd	23rd	24th	25th	26th
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13	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
14	Southern Small White	<i>Pieris mannii</i>			✓					✓
15	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
16	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	
17	Bath White	<i>Pontia daplidice</i>			✓					
	<b>Family <i>Lycaenidae</i></b>									
18	Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>			✓	✓			✓	
19	Ilex Hairstreak	<i>Satyrrium ilicis</i>								✓
20	Blue-spot Hairstreak	<i>Satyrrium spini</i>			✓					✓
21	Purple-shot Copper	<i>Lycaena alciphron</i>			✓					
22	Purple-edged Copper	<i>Lycaena hippothoe</i>				✓			✓	
23	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>				✓				
24	Scarce Copper	<i>Lycaena virgaureae</i>				✓				
25	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>	✓		✓	✓				✓
26	Mountain Argus	<i>Aricia artaxerxes</i>				✓				
27	Geranium Argus	<i>Aricia eumedon</i>				✓	✓			
28	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
29	Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
30	Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
31	Large Blue	<i>Phengaris arion</i>		✓	✓	✓				
32	Silver-studded Blue	<i>Plebejus argus</i>			✓					
33	Reverdin's Blue	<i>Plebejus argyrognomon</i>			✓					
34	Adonis Blue	<i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
35	Turquoise Blue	<i>Polyommatus dorylas</i>			✓	✓				
36	Escher's Blue	<i>Polyommatus escheri</i>								✓
37	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
38	Baton Blue	<i>Pseudophilotes baton</i>								✓
	<b>Family <i>Riodinidae</i></b>									
39	Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>				✓				
	<b>Family <i>Nymphalidae</i></b>									
40	Peacock	<i>Aglais io</i>				✓				
41	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>				✓			☆	
42	White Admiral	<i>Limenitis camilla</i>			✓					
43	Southern White Admiral	<i>Limenitis reducta</i>			✓					✓

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44	Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>								✓
45	Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>			✓	✓				
46	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>			✓	☆			☆	✓
47	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>								✓
48	Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>								✓
49	High Brown Fritillary	<i>Fabriciana adippe</i>		✓☆	✓	✓				
50	Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>				✓				
51	Weaver's Fritillary	<i>Boloria dia</i>				✓				✓
52	Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>				✓				✓
53	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>				✓				
54	Titania's Fritillary	<i>Boloria titania</i>		✓		✓	☆			
55	Marbled Fritillary	<i>Brenthis daphne</i>		○	✓○	✓	✓○		✓○	
56	Scarce Fritillary	<i>Euphedryas maturna</i>				✓				
57	Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea athalia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	☆		✓	✓
58	Glanville Fritillary	<i>Melitaea cinxia</i>		✓		✓	✓			
59	Spotted Fritillary	<i>Melitaea didyma</i>			✓	✓	✓		☆	✓
60	Knapweed Fritillary	<i>Melitaea phoebe</i>		✓☆		✓	✓		✓	
61	Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>			✓					
62	Great Banded Grayling	<i>Brintesia circe</i>								✓
63	Pearly Heath	<i>Coenonympha arcania</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
64	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
65	Almond-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia albertanus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
66	de Prunner's Ringlet	<i>Erebia tiarus</i>				✓				
67	Woodland Grayling	<i>Hipparchia fagi</i>			✓					
68	Rock Grayling	<i>Hipparchia hermione</i>			✓					
69	Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>			✓	✓				✓
70	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>			✓	✓				
71	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>			✓	✓				✓
72	Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>			✓	✓				✓
73	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>				✓				
	Family <b>Hesperiidae</b>									
74	Mallow Skipper	<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>				✓				
75	Tufted Marbled Skipper	<i>Carcharodus flocciferus</i>			✓	✓				

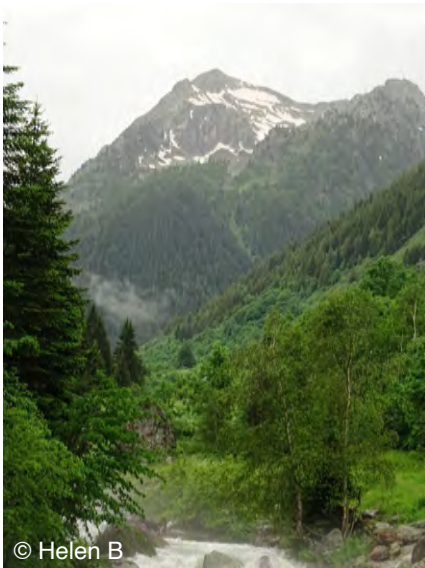


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76	Marbled Skipper	<i>Carcharodus lavatherae</i>			✓	✓				✓
77	Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>				✓				
78	Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>			✓	✓				✓
79	Safflower Skipper	<i>Pyrgus carthami</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
80	Southern Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>				✓				
81	Olive Skipper	<i>Pyrgus serratulae</i>				✓				
82	Red-underwing Skipper	<i>Spialia sertorius</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
83	Lulworth Skipper	<i>Thymelicus acteon</i>								✓
84	Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>			✓					
85	Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>			✓					✓

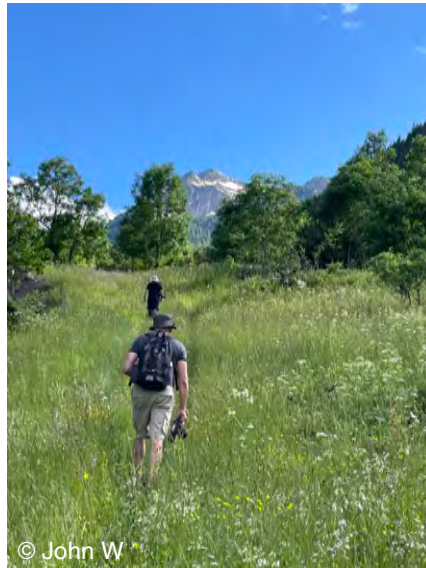
## Photo Gallery







© Helen B



© John W



Purple-edged Copper © John W



Palm Moth © Peter Eeles



Large Wall Brown © Simon P



Southern Swallowtail © John W



Orange Tip © Simon P



Mazarine Blue © John W



© Simon P

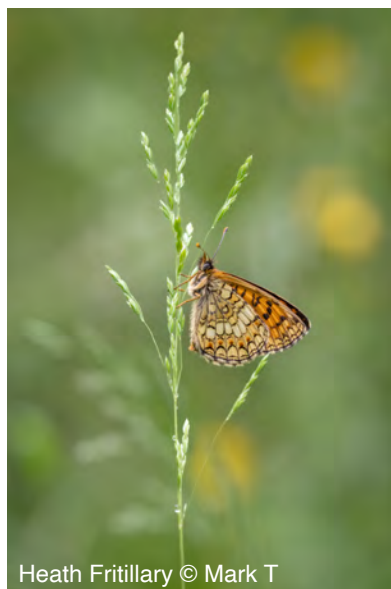




Black-veined White © John W



© John W



Heath Fritillary © Mark T



High Brown Fritillary © Simon P



Turquoise Blue © Simon P



© Peter Eeles



Spotted Fritillary © John W



Mountain Lettuce © Helen B



Southern Swallowtail © Neil M

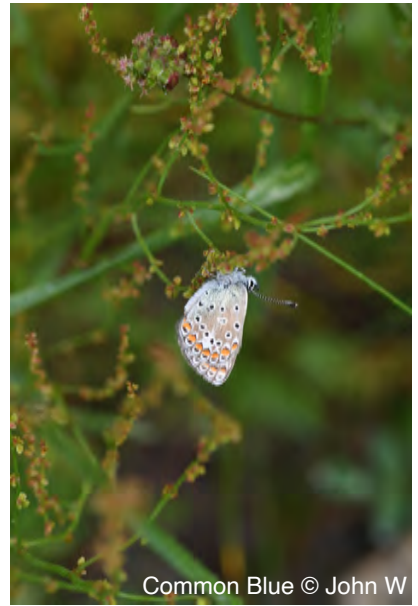




Blue-spot Hairstreak © John W



Burnt-tip Orchids © Neil M



Common Blue © John W



Scarce Fritillary © Simon P



Southern Swallowtail © John W



Mazarine Blue © John W



Southern Grizzled Skipper © Helen B



Scarce Copper © Simon P



Large Wall Brown © John W



Black-veined White © Simon P



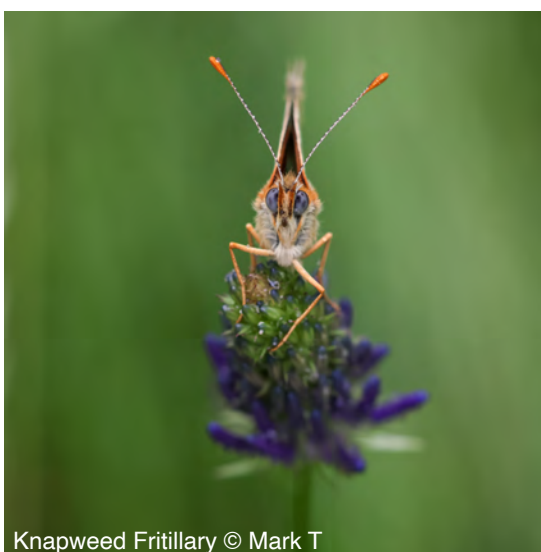
Pearly Heath © Simon P



Lackey Moth larva © Peter Eeles



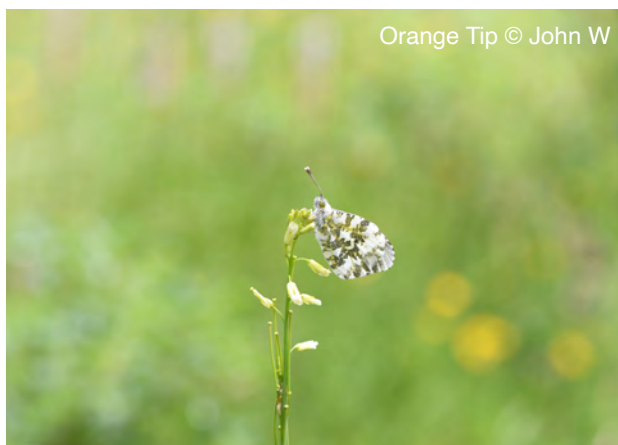
Knapweed Fritillary © Mark T



Knapweed Fritillary © John W



Orange Tip © John W



Safflower Skipper © Mark T



Puddling Blues © Peter Eeles







© Simon P



Blue-spot Hairstreak © Helen B



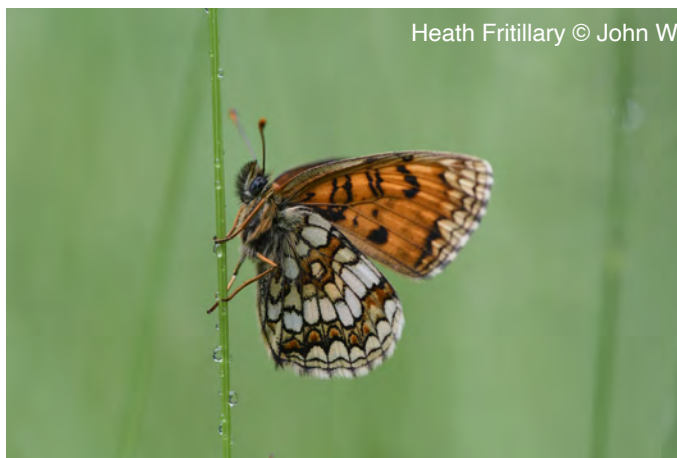
Mazarine Blue © John W



Orange Tip © Helen B



Heath Fritillary pupa © Peter Eeles



Heath Fritillary © John W



Apollo © Neil M



Almond-eyed Ringlet © Peter Eeles



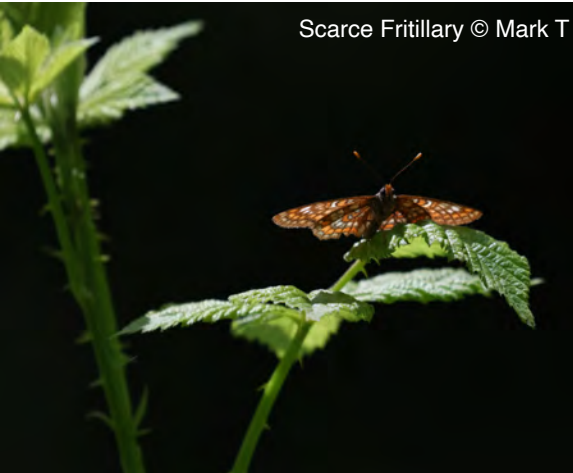
Small Skipper © John W



Heath Fritillary © Helen B



Scarce Fritillary © Mark T



Heath Fritillary © John W



Blue-spot Hairstreak © John W



Clouded Apollo © Helen B



Black-veined White © Mark T



Baton Blue © Peter Eeles





© Mark T



Black-veined White © Helen B

Apollo © John W



Mazarine Blue © John W



Heath Fritillary © Helen B



© Claire F

Fritillary sp. © Helen B



Heath Fritillary © Helen B





Southern Swallowtail © Mark T



Marbled Fritillary © Mark T



Small White stack © Mark T



Cleopatra © Mark T

