

Butterfly Safari in Gauteng and Mpumalanga, South Africa
19th – 27th September 2025
Led by Callan Cohen and Steve Woodhall



Hutchinson's Highflier
Aphnaeus hutchinsonii
KwaMhlanga



Southern Red Tip
Colotis antevippe gavis
Loding



Narrow-banded Widow
Dingana angusta
Graskop



Natal Silverline
Cigaritis natalensis
KwaMhlanga

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The seventh butterfly tour in South Africa organized with Greenwings Wildlife Tours marked the first excursion held during the spring season. The itinerary initially called for direct travel from the airport to the summit ridge (approximately 1600 meters) of the Magaliesberg, a mountain range spanning 120 kilometers westward from just east of Pretoria and then north towards the Pilanesberg. This range serves as a geographic boundary, separating savanna bushveld to the north from highveld grasslands to the south, and creates a transitional zone that supports numerous plant species adapted to nutrient-poor soils derived from ancient quartzite formations. The region is home to several specialized butterfly species, including Hutchinson's Highflier, *Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*.

A bush fire occurred shortly before arrival, impacting the originally planned starting location. Spring fires are common prior to the main rainfall period when vegetation remains dry, often resulting in decreased butterfly activity. Consequently, the team relocated to an alternative site east of the original area, near KwaMhlanga, featuring distinct geology and a lower altitude (~1400m). This hill exhibited comparable mountain vegetation and butterfly diversity, and the visit produced notable observations.

Our initial accommodation was situated just south of the Magaliesberg, positioned on a ridge within a subsidiary range characterised by diverse vegetation. Outdoor lighting at this location attracted a variety of moth species. The following day, we proceeded to our primary destination atop the Magaliesberg, where we observed significant fire-related damage to the local vegetation; nevertheless, some butterfly and moth activity persisted.

The group travelled to the bushveld at Loding, north of KwaMhlanga (altitude approximately 1000m), an area known for savanna butterfly species. Despite the absence of spring rains, some flowers were present and attracted butterflies. Accommodation was arranged on a nearby bushveld farm, where early morning surveys recorded additional butterfly specimens. A subsequent visit to the KwaMhlanga hill involved ascending via an alternative route, resulting in further sightings.

The tour continued east to Dullstroom, a fly-fishing resort located in grassland at the top of Mpumalanga Province's escarpment. Dinner took place at a local pub serving trout dishes. The following day included a visit to Verloren Valei, a high-altitude wetland, where conditions remained dry but early spring butterflies were observed on rocky slopes.

Travel continued across the high escarpment to Graskop via Long Tom Pass, including a stop at a 2200m peak for grassland butterfly surveys. Surveys of lower grassland habitats documented rare Lycaenid butterfly species.

Upon reaching Graskop, the weather became cloudy with drizzle, a frequent occurrence in the region. As a contingency, the group descended to a lower elevation at the base of the escarpment, where it was still cloudy but warmer. Forest habitats in Blyde River Canyon yielded additional butterfly records.

On the final full day, morning cloud cover persisted, prompting travel north to previously surveyed grasslands. A nearby waterfall in a forested gorge provided more opportunities to observe forest-dwelling butterfly species.

Day 1 – Friday 19th September: OR Tambo International Airport to KwaMhlanga area – 26 butterflies

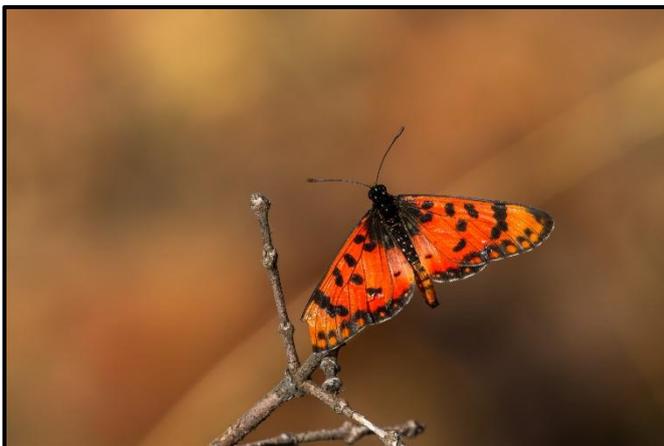
The initial plan to visit the summit of the Magaliesberg mountains was changed due to a bush fire that significantly impacted the local vegetation. As an alternative, KwaMhlanga was chosen, approximately 85km east-northeast of the Magaliesberg, at a lower elevation but with comparable vegetation. Supplies for the trip—such as water, fruit juices, sandwiches, chocolate bars, and biscuits—were purchased at airport shops. Bakers' Lemon Creams were included as usual for notable observations.

We arrived at the base of the hill around 14:30 and parked next to a dry riverbed, which we then crossed on foot. During the ascent towards the hilltop, butterflies were observed moving from the undergrowth and feeding on flowers. Guineafowl butterflies *Hamanumida daedalus* were seen settling on the ground, while African Three-rings *Ypthima asterope* were flying within the grassy layer. Wild Medlar bushes *Vangueria infausta* were blooming and being visited by species such as the Narrow Green-banded Swallowtail *Papilio nireus lyaeus*. Common Meadow Whites *Pontia helice* and Broad-bordered Grass Yellows *Eurema brigitta brigitta* were also present. Occasionally, an African Migrant *Catopsilia florella* flew by. Along the route, specimens of Wild Syringa *Burkea africana*, which serves as Hutchinson's Highflier's host plant, were noted.



A grove of Wild Syringa, *Burkea africana*, on the slope at KwaMhlanga

Around halfway up, we observed the first notable species of the day: a shocking pink Waterberg Acraea, *Tildia barberi*. The males are visually striking as they move across the veld, seldom pausing. On this occasion, one individual perched for enough to be photographed, while others continued past without stopping. Pursuing them rapidly with cameras is challenging due to the rocky terrain, which poses risks to equipment.



Waterberg Acraea ♂, *Tildia barberae*



Apricot Playboy ♂, *Capys dinochares*

As we ascended further, we encountered additional flowering Wild Medlars supporting lycaenid butterflies such as the Apricot Playboy, *Deudorix dinochares* and Eastern Scarlet, *Axiocerses tjoane*, observed nectaring. Progressing into an area featuring scattered Transvaal Milkplum trees *Englerophytum magalismontanum*, a plant that territorial lycaenids, including our target species, typically perch on their glossy dark green foliage. Natal Silverline, *Cigaritis natalensis* and Ella's Silverline, *Cigaritis ella* were also active in this vicinity

Subsequently, we found the target species, Hutchinson's Highflier, *Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*. Additionally, a male Brown-line Sapphire *Iolaus alienus alienus* was observed nearby perching on a sparsely foliated Medlar bush, displaying characteristic alert behaviour during photography. The observation was interrupted when a Highflier engaged with the Sapphire, causing it to depart before a joint photograph could be obtained. Shortly thereafter, two more Highfliers appeared in rapid succession; however, they did not remain long enough for a photo opportunity.



Ella's Silverline ♂, *Cigaritis ella*



Hutchinson's Highflier ♂, *Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*



Natal Silverline ♂, *Cigaritis natalensis*



Brown-line Sapphire ♂, *Iolaus alienus*



Lan next to a Transvaal Milkplum at KwaMhlanga with the savanna in the distance

Not all of us managed to get photographs of Hutchinson's Highflier, making a return a priority. At the summit, a collection of short, stunted trees characteristic of this habitat provided an opportunity to closely observe perching butterflies at near eye level. The area featured small Milkplums and Medlars, accompanied by a cluster of Cork Bush, *Mundulea sericea* shrubs distinguished by their silky grey-green foliage and attractive purple, pea-like flowers.

Despite the late hour of 16:30, butterfly activity on the hilltop remained substantial. Citrus Swallowtails, *Papilio demodocus*, were observed engaging in aerial pursuits. Silverlines, and Pea Blues *Lampides boeticus* buzzed around the bushes, accompanied by sightings of Foxy Charaxes, *Charaxes saturnus saturnus*. Male Patrician Giant Cupids, *Lepidochrysops patricia*, distinguished by their vivid blue colouring, were noted for their continuous flight without settling. Striped or Common Sandmen, *Spialia ferax*, navigated among the stones, and a single Apricot or Yellow Russet, *Aloeides aranda*, was present. An unexpected observation included a male Morant's Orange, *Parosmodes morantii morantii*, perching low on a dead twig and displaying territorial behaviour. Typically associated with forest habitats, this species does exhibit hilltopping tendencies, suggesting the existence of remnant forests in these regions—a notion also supported by the presence of the Narrow Green-banded Swallowtail. The deep gullies traversing the hills are formed by weathering of igneous dolerite dykes, which provide nutrient-rich soils and serve as natural drainage channels for streams.



Bushveld Plain Buff ♀, *Cnodontes penningtoni*



Morant's Orange ♂, *Parosmodes morantii morantii*

To avoid arriving at our accommodation after dark, we set off back to the car at 17:00. Activity remained high in the area. Painted Ladies *Vanessa cardui* were present, as well as occasional African Yellow Pansies *Junonia hierta cebrene*. Additional Waterberg Acraeas were observed, including a female with transparent, hyaline wings that flew past as we descended the hill. Near the riverine bush, small yellow butterflies were seen fluttering in the canopy; these were identified as Bushveld Plain Buffs *Cnodontes penningtoni*, a group of lichen-feeding lycaenids from the subfamily Poritiinae, tribe Liptenini. While butterflies from this tribe can be common in tropical Africa, they are generally rare in South Africa. The day concluded with celebratory Lemon Creams consumed en route to the lodge.

Day 2 – Saturday 20th September: Magaliesberg summit ridge – 11 butterflies

The Blue Sky Lodge is strategically located on a spur overlooking a deep gully on the northern slope of a hill range situated south of the main Magaliesberg range. Morning observations included notable avian activity, as well as a troop of baboons engaged in conflict across the gully. Several Emperor moths (Saturniidae) were observed flying along the gully, occasionally being preyed upon by early birds. Although none were attracted to the external lights, they appeared to be Pallid Emperors, *Cirina forda*, which share the Wild Syringa host plant with Hutchinson's



Pallid Emperor ♀, *Cirina forda*

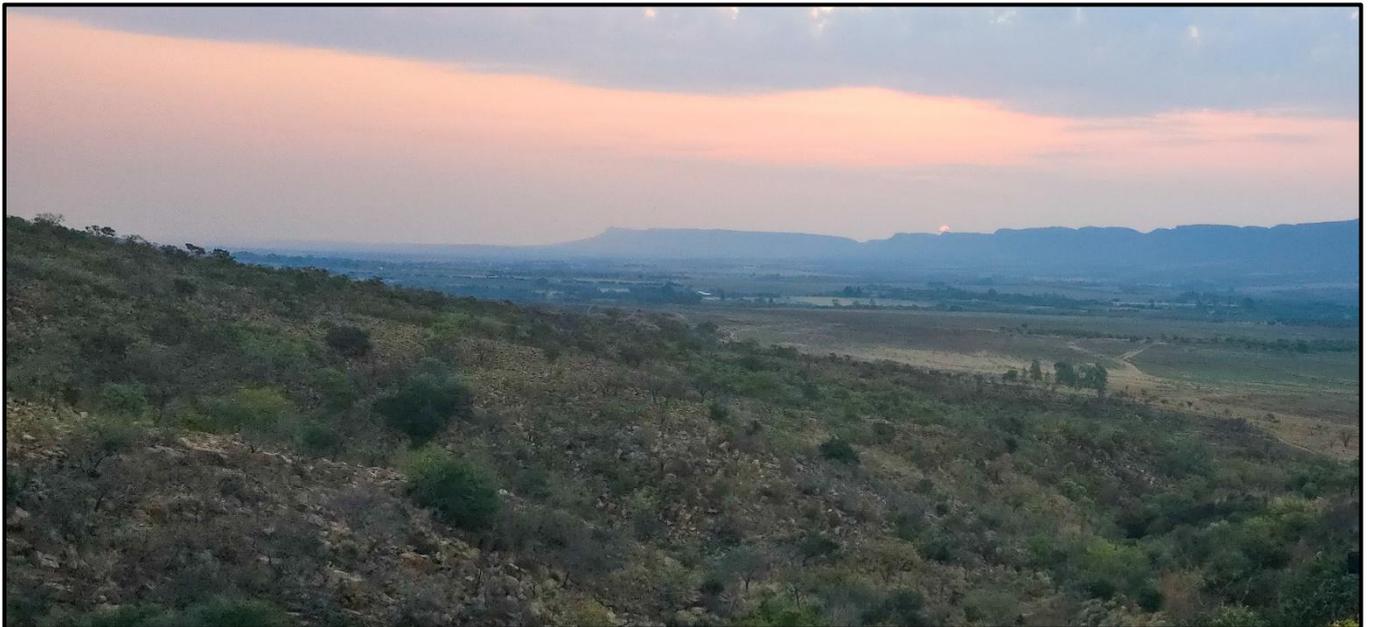


Branched Ermine ♂, *Paralacydes arborifera*

Highflier. Additional moth species were documented at the lights, including the visually distinctive Branched Ermine, *Paralacydes arborifera*.

We discovered a reputable restaurant nearby that provided both breakfast and dinner, as well as high-quality packed lunches. The area is a well-known destination for day visitors from Johannesburg, resulting in a wide array of amenities. The lawns featured numerous African Grass Blues, *Zizeeria knysna knysna*, with one of their host plants, Creeping Woodsorrel, *Oxalis corniculata*, present in dense patches.

We undertook a visit to the Magaliesberg to determine whether any noteworthy features remained following the fire.



The view of the Magaliesberg from the lodge at sunset was particularly striking

The ascent along the northern slope of the escarpment provided a stimulating drive; however, as we advanced, it became evident that the vegetation had suffered extensive fire damage. Most grasses had been reduced to charcoal, and the tree foliage appeared shrivelled and brown. A limited number of plants were protected by rocky outcrops, offering some encouragement for regeneration. This was a good demonstration of the area's fire-dominated vegetation...

Upon traversing the summit ridge, the majority of observed butterfly species were common and widespread ones, including Painted Ladies, *Vanessa cardui*, a notably resilient species, as well as the Pea Blue *Lampides boeticus*.



Magaliesberg *Aphnaeus hutchinsonii* spot badly burned



Pale Ciliate Blue ♂, *Anthene livida livida*

African Migrants *Catopsilia florella* were observed migrating without pausing, while occasional sightings of the Plain Black-eye *Leptomyrina henningi henningi* indicated the persistence of its host plants, *Crassula* species, which are safeguarded within rock crevices throughout the Magaliesberg. Another sighting was the Pale Ciliate Blue *Anthene livida livida*, the sole lycaenid observed perching on local shrubs. This species' larvae also feed on succulents that probably provide protection from fires. Additionally, a single Garden Inspector *Precis archesia archesia* was recorded at one of the hilltops, and both Citrus and Narrow Green-banded Swallowtails were seen individually crossing the terrain.



Peppered Hopper ♂, *Platylesches ayresii*



Striped Policeman ♂, *Coeliades forestan* scent marking

Notably, the only specialist butterfly species observed in significant numbers was the Hesperiid, Peppered Hopper *Platylesches ayresii*, whose larvae subsist on the geoxylic suffrutex known as the Sand Apple *Parinari capensis*. These unique underground trees display canopy leaves positioned close to the soil surface, with branches and trunks buried beneath ground level, thus affording protection from fire. The grassland-savanna ecosystem of the Magaliesberg is characteristically fire-adapted, supporting plant species that have evolved various protective strategies such as succulence, corky-insulated bark, or geoxylic suffrutex growth forms. Butterflies that depend on these plants may face temporary population decreases when adults succumb to fire; however, their pupae, often situated near or under the soil, remain protected and subsequently emerge post-fire. This life cycle enables them to capitalize on new plant growth shortly after a fire event by ovipositing on the fresh shoots.

During our return to the vehicle, we observed another notable butterfly species belonging to the HesperIIDae family: the Striped Policeman, *Coeliades forestan*. The term "Policemen" refers to the behaviour of males, which patrol their territories in a circular pattern reminiscent of traditional London police officers. Notably, the Striped Policeman is unique among butterflies for its territorial marking technique, which involves depositing scent—similar to canine territory marking. We witnessed a male applying scent from its anal hairs onto leaves as part of this behaviour.

The number of butterflies observed was lower than anticipated, but some species characteristic of Africa's fire-dominated ecosystems were still observed.

Day 3 – Sunday 21st September: Savanna at Loding – 33 butterflies

Following another evening at Blue Sky Lodge, we successfully photographed several moth species attracted to the lights, including the Pallid Emperor moth, *Cirina forda*. After breakfast, our team travelled northeast to Loding, a town situated near semi-arid savanna renowned for its notable butterfly sightings. Located approximately 25 km north of KwaMhlanga and 300 m lower in elevation, this area provided optimal field conditions. We were joined by local LepSoc Africa member Steve Ball, nephew of esteemed lepidopterist Dr Jonathan Ball. Steve demonstrated advanced techniques in capturing wings-open images using high-speed burst shooting with an Olympus camera.



Queen Purple Tip ♂, *Colotis regina*



Zebra White ♂, *Pinacopteryx eriphia*



Pioneer Caper White ♂, *Belenois aurota*



Northern Damara Russet ♂, *Aloeides damarensis mashuna*



Broad-bordered Acraea ♀, *Tildia anemosa*



Southern Red Tip ♂, *Colotis antevippe gavisia*

We arrived around midday under hot and dry conditions; despite this, several flowering forbs and trees were present, attracting various butterfly species. The Highveld Curryflower *Lasiosiphon canoargenteus* drew in multiple Pieridae species such as Zebra White *Pinacopteryx eriphia*, Queen Purple Tip *Colotis regina*, and Southern Red Tip *Colotis antevippe gavisa*. Numerous 'Tip' butterflies were observed actively flying, although their behaviour tended to be erratic, making photography challenging. We documented a mating pair of Banded Gold Tips *Teracolus eris eris*, which remained stationary long enough for photographs. In contrast, the Lemon Traveller *Teracolus subfasciatus* displayed highly mobile behaviour, consistent with its common name.

Occasionally one of the Caper Whites would appear, such as Pioneer Caper White *Belenois aurota*. One was found nectaring on a flowering *Diospyros* bush.

Damara Russets *Aloeides damarensis mashona* flitted low down in the clearings. Steve Ball managed to get one in flight, which is usually the only way to get wings-open shots of *Aloeides*.

Guineafowl butterflies *Hamanumida daedalus* were flying low down, settling on the ground and waiting for someone to try and focus a camera on them before taking off and flying a few feet away to settle again.



Bowker's Marbled Sapphire ♂, *Stugeta bowkeri tearei*



Bowker's Marbled Sapphire ♂, *Stugeta bowkeri tearei*

Later in the afternoon, we observed flowering Wild Medlars *Vangueria infausta* attracting several butterfly species, including both Ella's and Natal Silverlines, an Apricot Playboy *Deudorix dinochares*, and a Green-marbled Skipper *Gomalia elma*. A single female Broad-bordered Acraea *Tildia anemosa* remained inaccessible to photographers by staying high within a Wild Medlar and concealing itself behind foliage. Nevertheless, Nigel eventually obtained a



Bowker's Marbled Sapphire ♀, *Stugeta bowkeri tearei*



Green-marbled Skipper ♂, *Gomalia elma*

clear photograph through the leaves, demonstrating the value of persistence. The genus *Tildia* is noted for having the most vividly coloured Acraeas. Additional species, such as the Window Acraea *Stephenia oncaea*, were present, though most exhibited elusive behaviour and were observed only by the guides. Several Sourplum bushes *Ximenia caffra* were present in the area, attracting notable butterfly activity. At 3:00 p.m., a male Bowker's Marbled

Sapphire *Stugeta bowkeri tearei* was observed nectaring on Wild Medlar blossoms. Subsequently, additional individuals were seen perching on low twigs while displaying open-wing behaviour, which is recognized as sexual signalling in this species. Female butterflies were later located near the Sourplum bushes, all in fresh condition. The consensus among the team was that these encounters constituted the highlights of the day. Cue more Lemon Creams!

Following these observations, we proceeded to our next accommodation at Zebra Nature Reserve, situated closer to KwaMhlanga and providing a more convenient location for subsequent travel.

Day 4 – Monday 22nd September: Zebra Nature Reserve and KwaMhlanga again – 33 butterflies

Zebra Nature Reserve is located within a scenic wooded savanna area, with accommodations positioned near a road ascending to a ridge. Early in the morning, Callan observed a White Pie *Tuxentius calice* during his walk prior to breakfast. This prompted the group to embark on a pre-breakfast search for the species; however, it was not sighted again. A female Hintza Pierrot *Zintha hintza hintza*, which possesses a similar black-dotted white underside, was seen resting low on a bush and briefly opened her wings before departing when approached. African Three-rings *Ypthima asterope asterope* were noted flying close to the grass but did not present clear opportunities for photography. Additionally, a solitary male Apricot Playboy was observed circling a nearby bush.



Hintza Pierrot ♀, *Zintha hintza hintza*



African Grass Blue ♂, *Zizeeria knysna knysna*

There was a significant presence of parasitic *Agelanthus natalitius* (Loranthaceae) in the trees near the lodge. Observations included Eastern/Common Dotted Borders, *Mylothris agathina agathina*, which utilise these as host plants. The lawns contained numerous Creeping Woodsorrel, *Oxalis corniculata*, resulting in several sightings of African Grass Blue, *Zizeeria knysna knysna*, which also use this plant as a host.

After breakfast, the group travelled to KwaMhlanga, ascending the hill via the western side. Patrician Giant Cupids, *Lepidochrysops patricia*, were observed flying close to the ground across the veld. A female was seen ovipositing



Sabi Smoky Blue ♀, *Euchrysops dolorosa*



Patrician Giant Cupid ♀, *Lepidochrysops patricia*

on Cat's-Whiskers, *Ocimum obovatum*. Sabi Smoky Blues, *Euchrysops dolorosa*, were also observed frequenting this plant, which is recognised as one of their host species. Based on available records, however, *Ocimum obovatum* has not previously been documented as a host for the Patrician Giant Cupid.

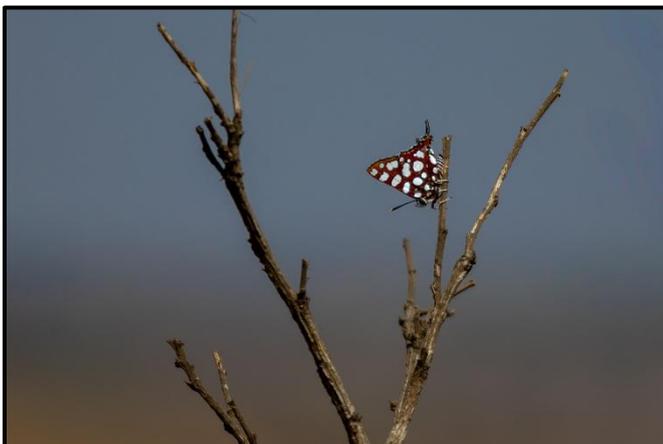


Wandering Donkey *Acraea* ♂, *Acraea neobule*



Pearl-spotted Charaxes ♂, *Eriboea jahlusa rex*

By noon, at the hilltop, the area appeared more active than the previous Friday. Cork-bushes had Wandering Donkey *Acraea neobule*, and Pearl-spotted Charaxes, *Eriboea jahlusa rex*, species not recorded earlier. Foxy Charaxes was also seen, alongside the blue winter form of the Southern Gaudy Commodore, *Precis octavia sesamus*. Bright blue male Patrician Giant Cupids were flying around the summit, together with a Twin-spot Giant Cupid, *Lepidochrysops plebeia plebeia*, which by contrast has a grey upper side. Wild Medlars supported additional Ella's Silverlines and a Silver-spotted Grey, *Crudaria leroma*. More Waterberg *Acraea*s appeared but they were all males – the females remained elusive.



Hutchinson's Highflyer ♂, *Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*



Hutchinson's Highflyer ♂, *Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*

Just after 13:00 the Hutchinson's Highflyers arrived and stole the show. They favoured some bare dead twigs next to the Cork-bushes where their brilliant silver undersides flashed in the sun like miniature heliographs. As I've noticed in the past, this species can be very confiding when perched like this, allowing photographers to approach closely. The antics of the photographers were almost as entertaining as the butterflies.

The Morant's Orange returned to the same low twigs it had perched on the previous week. Many of the same species seen that day were present. There were some additional sightings like Spotted Joker, *Byblia ilithyia*, Dancing Telchinia, *Telchinia serena*, and Pioneer Caper White, *Belenois aurota*.



Hutchinson's Highflyer ♂, *Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*



Hutchinson's Highflyer ♂, *Aphnaeus hutchinsonii*



The 'paparazzi' in action: Nigel, Ian and Callan ganging up on the Highflyer shown above.

Mindful of the 2½ hour drive to our accommodation at Dullstroom, we set off down the hill just after 14:30.

Day 5 – Tuesday 23rd September: Dullstroom and Verloren Valei – 5 butterflies

This was the day to visit a high altitude wetland noted for its special butterflies. The full rains had not yet started and the grasses around the marshes were still very dry. The butterfly species we saw were the ones typical of early spring.

As we signed in at the reserve reception a Southern Gaudy Commodore and a Painted Lady came to greet us. A day-flying Oriental Bee Hawkmoth *Cephonodes hylas virescens* was visiting flowers outside the building. Common Meadow Whites *Pontia helice* were flying, a sign that the season was only just starting. Our first stop was a low ridge at the entrance to the reserve, where Lydenburg Opals *Chrysothrix aethon* were flying among the rocks.

The other notable species on the wing was a Drakensberg Brown, *Pseudonympha poetula*. This is usually the first of its genus to emerge in spring and flies when the grass is still moribund and sere. We looked around the short grasses around the wetlands and saw little else except for Brown Russets *Aloeides trimeni trimeni* that were keeping down in the boundary layer, sheltering from the fierce hot 'Berg' wind (rather like the European 'Mistral') that was blowing. Such winds usually precede a cold front with icy weather, mist and rain. These are conditions we local lepidopterists are used to... spring can provide special butterflies, but she can be spiteful with her weather!



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Lydenburg Opal ♂, *Chrysothrix aethon*



Drakensberg Brown ♂, *Pseudonympha poetula*

Day 6 – Wednesday 24th September: Long Tom Pass and Sabie area – 13 butterflies

The weather forecast was wet and misty on the high escarpment we planned to cross on the way to Graskop. There was high overcast on the road from Dullstroom to Lydenburg. As we drove up Long Tom Pass (Long Tom being an old naval gun dating back to the Anglo-South Africa war at the beginning of the 20th century – it's still there) the sun was shining occasionally through gaps in the alto-stratus cloud with alto-cirrus above.

We found the concrete strip road leading to the 2218m summit of the Mauchsberg, above the top of the pass. At the top there was no low cloud, but also little sun. We set about searching for the Endangered Cloud Russet, *Aloeides nubilus*. This consisted of tramping around the grass waving walking sticks around the rocks in the hope of scaring one up... a time honoured activity of South African lepidopterists! We had split up and were wandering around the summit where there are rocky ridges typical of *Aloeides* habitat, and after about an hour the sun began to shine, and I saw the first ones flying around chasing one another among the rocks. Tally Ho! Went the cry. Before long we were all spotting them and found a broad colony stretching across the summit ridges of the mountain.



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The Steve, Ian, and Nigel at the summit of the Mauchsberg, 2210m. The background gives a sense of the immense scale of this landscape. In the foreground is the Russets' male patrolling terrain. They whirl around a few centimeters above the low rocks, settling often but usually with a blade of grass between them and the camera...

At first, we thought they were all Cloud Russets, but once the news got out on the LepSoc Africa WhatsApp group it transpired that there were two species. A few were Cloud Russets (only Nigel got a photo) but the majority of them were a different species. Opinions vary as to what exactly they were, because the genus is currently subject

to a lot of DNA based research. For now, we've tentatively identified them as 'Mountain' Russets, *Aloeides cf. titei*, but there are at least three other species they might be, or even something new. The jury is out on this one.



Cloud Russet ♂, *Aloeides nubilus*



'Mountain Russet' ♂, *Aloeides cf. titei*



Lebombo Ciliate Blue ♂, *Anthene princeps*

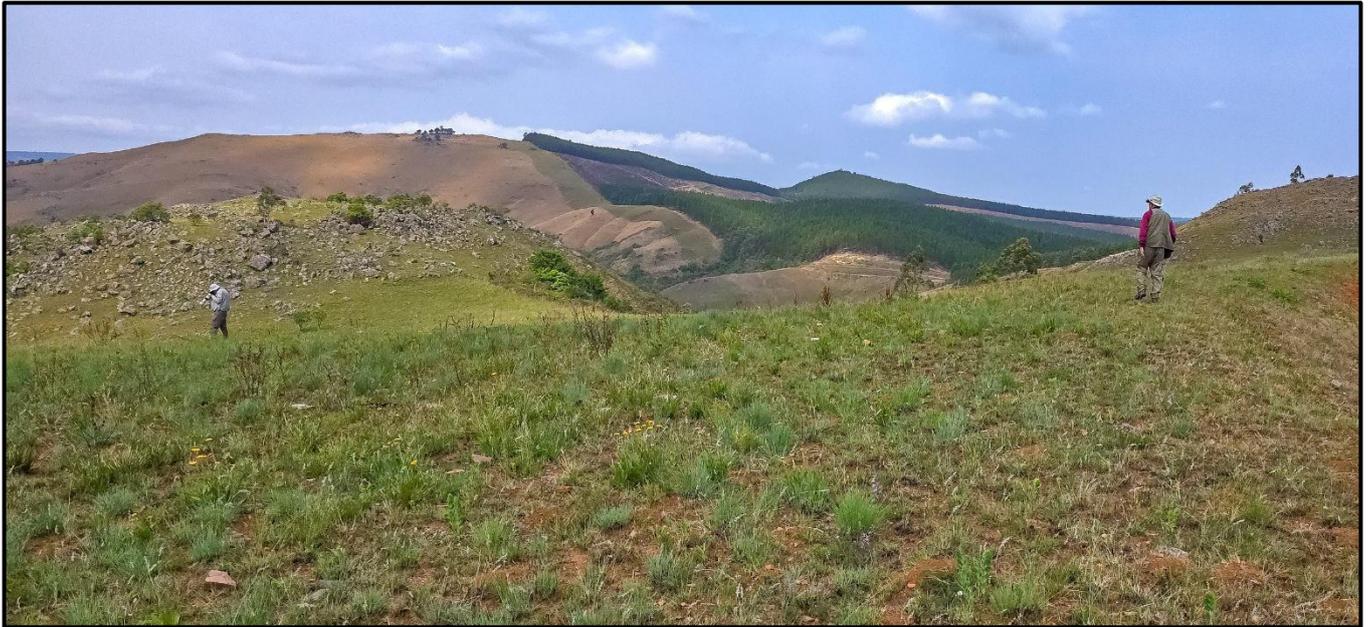


Drakensberg Brown ♂, *Pseudonympha poetula*

There were some other butterflies on that mountaintop. We saw a couple of Red-banded Widows, *Dingana alticola*, but they were flying too fast over rocky ground to follow safely and only settled for a few seconds – not enough time for a photo. There was one Drakensberg Brown *Pseudonympha poetula*, the same early species we'd seen on the previous day. The Southern Gaudy Commodores were flying, as were Common Meadow Whites. The almost ubiquitous Pea Blues were on the highest peaks and there was a single Lebombo Ciliate Blue, *Anthene princeps*, on a flowering shrub protected by a rocky outcrop.

The views were amazing and conjured up the thoughts of the lepidopterist-novelist Vladimir Nabokov: '...the highest enjoyment of timelessness—in a landscape selected at random—is when I stand among rare butterflies and their food plants. This is ecstasy, and behind the ecstasy is something else, which is hard to explain. It is like a momentary vacuum into which rushes all that I love. A sense of oneness with sun and stone. A thrill of gratitude to whom it may concern—to the contrapuntal genius of human fate or to tender ghosts humouring a lucky mortal.'

Continuing in this theme we drove down the pass towards the town of Sabie and took the turn to the lowveld capital of Mbombela. A few kilometres along that it opens out from the pine plantations that cover the lower slopes and enters a patch of grassland. Many years earlier I had found a colony of the Vulnerable Sabie Giant Cupid, *Lepidochrysops irvingi*, at this spot. To my joy, we found it again, and a specimen welcomed us by posing with open wings! There were also Common Meadow Blues *Cupidopsis cissus*, a Grass Jewel Blue *Chilades trochylus*, and the eye-catching Light-Red Acraea, *Rubraea nohara nohara*. This is a grassland species, most Acraeas being forest or savanna butterflies. It can be as shocking pink as the Waterberg Acraea but the ones we saw were badly worn.



An area of pristine Afromontane grassland just outside Sabie on the road to Mbombela. A colony of Sabie Giant Cupid, *Lepidochrysops irvingi*, was discovered here in 1991 and it was heartening to find it still thriving.



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Sabie Giant Cupid ♂, *Lepidochrysops irvingi*, different views of the same butterfly by Ian and Callan

Day 7 – Thursday 25th September: Lowveld – 18 butterflies

Graskop, translating to "grassy hill," is situated at the edge of a prominent gorge carved through ancient Black Reef Quartzite—a geological formation dating back 2.5 billion years that forms the foundation beneath younger rocks in the Mpumalanga, Gauteng, and Limpopo Provinces. Erosion has exposed this quartzite in the Graskop region, which is distinguished by its striking gorges and unique rock formations. These features often harbour species-rich Scarp Forests or nutrient-poor grasslands supporting diverse native forbs and shrubs. The quartzite is characterized by a substantial lichen covering, sustained by the area's frequent mist and cloud cover. Additionally, butterfly biodiversity within this habitat is notably high.

On the morning of our visit, the area demonstrated its characteristic mistiness. Initially, conditions were sunny with mist present in the gorge. During breakfast at our lodge, situated on the edge of the gorge, an easterly breeze developed and carried the mist towards us. Attempts to explore the quartzite formations proved ineffective due to increasing mist, prompting a change of plans.

Subsequently, we drove north to Abel Erasmus Pass, recognised as the gateway to the lowveld, where temperatures and conditions were more favourable for observing savanna and low altitude forests. En route, we employed a common lepidopterist strategy for inclement weather by searching for larvae in *Protea* heads; however, the cold and wet conditions persisted.



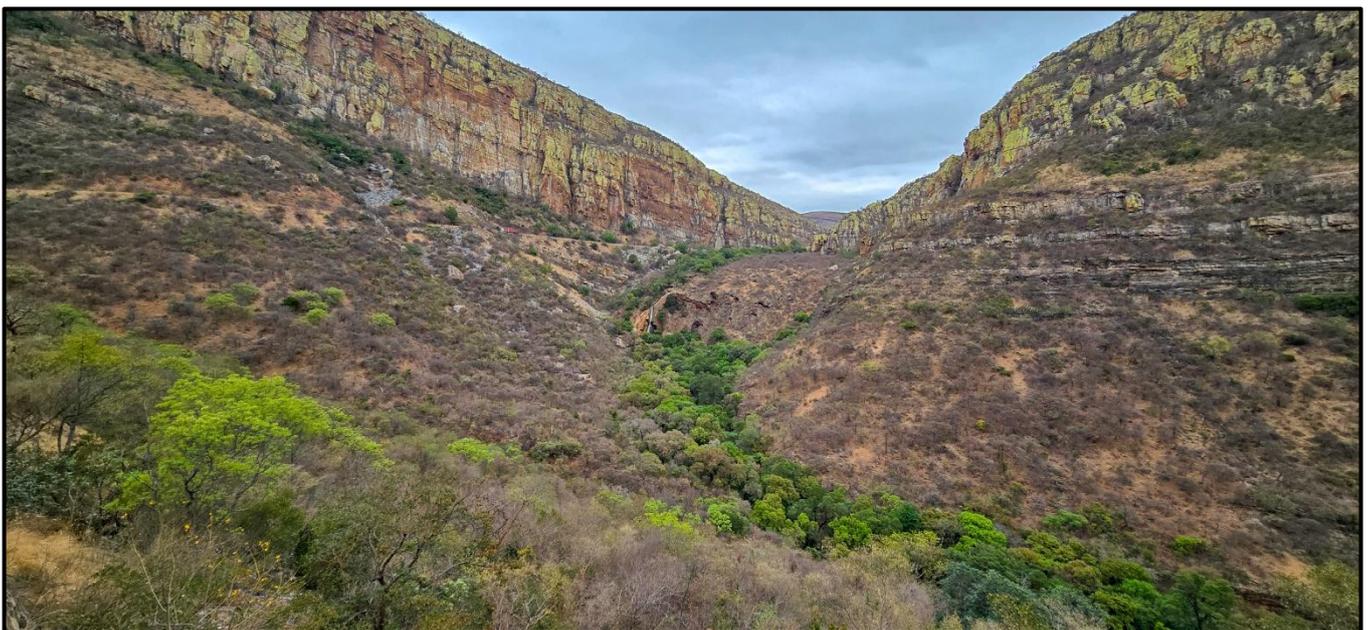
Mist among the jumbled Black Reef Quartzite above Panorama Gorge, Graskop – not something a lepidopterist wants to see. Sunlight works better...



A very cold Cupreous Ash Blue,, *Eicochrysoptera messapus*



The team at Abel Erasmus Pass



The view looking up to Abel Erasmus Pass showing contrasting colours between the red dolomite cliffs and the green lichens, and the green riverine vegetation against grey bush that still hasn't come into full leaf.

Our efforts resulted in the observation of a solitary Cupreous Ash Blue *Eicochrysops messapus mahallakoena* clinging to a dead twig, exposed to the harsh, icy wind.

The journey took us past notable landmarks such as the aforementioned pass, the Three Rondavels and Mariepskop Mountain, ultimately leading to the base of the Blyde River Canyon and the trail to Swadini Waterfall. The elevation at this location was 630 meters, in contrast to the 1,400 meters at our lodge. Despite continued overcast conditions and the savanna's arid state—with only a few flowering trees in bloom—the river path beneath the waterfall featured some sleepy butterflies.

In a relatively short period, observations included both the Common Mother-of-Pearl *Protogoniomorpha parhassus* and Clouded Mother-of-Pearl *Protogoniomorpha nebulosa*, which were disturbed from their roosts in the undergrowth. Several Pieridae species were also noted among the riverine vegetation, such as the African Angled Grass Yellow *Eurema desjardinsii regularis*, Pointed Caper White *Pseudanaphaeis gidica abyssinica*, notably the attractive winter form exhibiting a streaky brown underside on the hindwing—and Queen Purple Tip *Colotis*



Pointed Caper White ♀, *Pseudanaphaeis gidica abyssinica*



Marsh Patroller ♂, *Brakefieldia perspicua perspicua*



Vine-leaf Vagrant ♂, *Eronia cleodora*



Apaloderma narina ♂, Narina Trogon

regina. Additional sightings included Vine-leaf Vagrant *Eronia cleodora* and a number of African Wood Whites *Leptosia alcesta inalcesta* moving slowly through the undergrowth. The presence of Pearl Charaxes *Charaxes varanes varanes* was also noted.

Forests at this time of year are good places to spot winter forms of Satyrinae and other Nymphalids. We saw several Evening Browns *Melanitis leda*, which would spring up from our feet, head rapidly for the leaf litter, and promptly disappear as their camouflaged undersides did their job. We managed to spot some of them and get photos. Winter forms of Marsh Patroller *Brakefieldia perspicua* and Squinting Bush Brown *Bicyclus anynana anynana* would follow suit, although their bright white forewing underside ocelli usually gave them away. This is apparently a device used in sexual signalling.

A Golden Pimper, *Eurytela dryope angulata*, was seen as was a Soldier/Yellow-banded Pansy, *Junonia elgiva*. There were a few Skippers (Hesperiidae) about, like the Long-horned Swift, *Borbo fatuellus fatuellus*, the winter form with the grey patch on the underside hindwing. We also found a Forest Elfin, *Sarangesa motozi*, resting wings-open among the leaf litter and almost impossible to spot unless one saw it settle. This is where a green laser pointer comes in really handy!

On the way back to the car, Callan spotted a special forest bird, Narina trogon *Apaloderma narina*. We all got good views and some photos and even a video were taken.

Day 8 – Friday 26th September: Panorama Gorge, Graskop, and Mac Mac area – 23 butterflies



The gorge below Mac Mac Falls viewed from the path – haunt of uncooperative Bush Kites...

The quartzite rocks were again covered in early morning mist after breakfast, so we headed for Mac Mac Falls. That area has similar rock formations but is further from the edge of the escarpment. It is less likely to get 'socked in' by low cloud coming up from the lowveld. I wore a red T-shirt because Bush Kites, *Papilio euphranor*, are known to be attracted to red things.

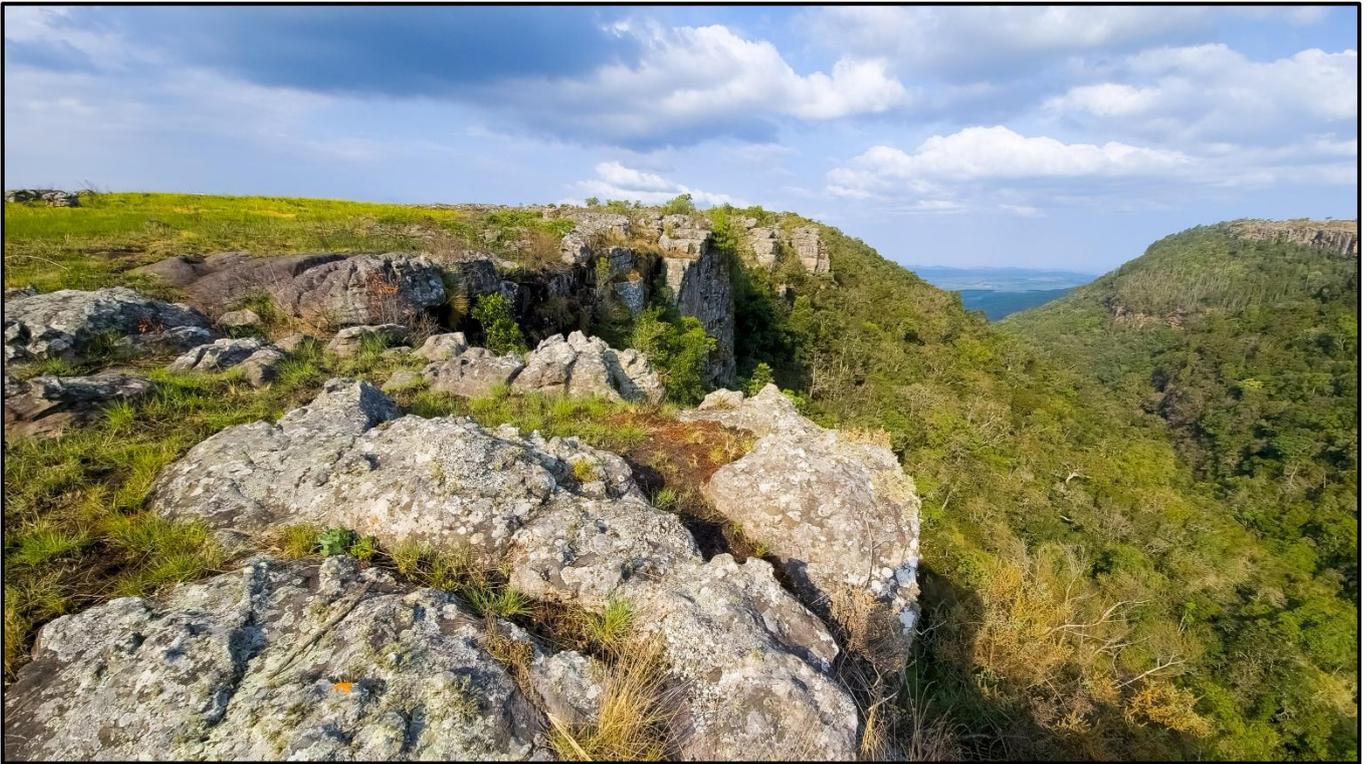


Stream Hawker ♂, *Pinheyschna subpupillata*



Dierama galpinii, Angel's Fishing Rod

The path to the falls follows the edge of a gorge where forest butterflies like Bush Kite have been known to fly over and along the canopy. We parked at the visitor centre and walked along the path. The hillside next to the path had a lot of flowering forbs that were attracting grassland butterflies like Pea Blues, Grass Jewel Blues, Zebra Blues and Garden Inspectors. Southern Gaudy Commodores were also on the wing.



The spectacular Panorama Gorge near Graskop with the lowveld in the distance. The rocks on the left hand (northern) side are where the interesting butterflies fly.

There was a lot of flowering *Indigofera* in the grassland, and it was attracting blues that warranted closer inspection in case they were the rare Violescent Cupid, *Orachrysops violescens*, which had been seen in this area on previous trips. Narrow Green-banded Swallowtails, Pearl Charaxes, and Variable Diadem *Hypolimnas anthedon wahlbergi* were all seen on the forest edge. There was also a Dead-leaf Commodore, *Precis tugela*. I got a bit ahead of the group and the inevitable happened – a Bush Kite, no doubt attracted by my red T-shirt, floated out of the canopy in front of me and headed straight towards me. It circled me a couple of times and went off back the way it came. I had great views of both wing surfaces – I was in no doubt what it was as I shouted, ‘Tally Ho!’ and ‘euphranor!’ at the top of my voice. But to no avail. By the time everyone arrived he (I was even able to see what sex it was from the lack of cream spots on the hindwing edge) had long gone, never to return. That’s unusual because they are known for territorial behaviour and often hang around a spot for a long time.

We went a short way along the Fanie Botha Hiking Trail which follows the same forest edge to a high point, hoping to see another one. But no. We saw some nice flowers (the African Hairbells *Dierama galpinii* were very impressive) and a great dragonfly, Stream Hawker, *Pinheyschna subpupillata*. It perched tail downwards on the side of a quartzite boulder and allowed an unusually close approach.

We could see that the clouds had lifted towards Graskop, and the sun was getting warm, so we went back to the lodge area and the Panorama Gorge. Opposite the lodge there are bungee swings, ziplines and a lift that takes people to the bottom of the gorge. When we got there, they were doing a roaring trade, and the air was full of the yells and screams of people enjoying the fairground atmosphere. We saw a few forest butterflies like more Narrow Green-banded and White-banded Swallowtails (*Papilio echerioides*) along the path that leads to the lodge, as well as a Black-based Acraea, *Stephenia natalica*. We were hoping a big Bottle-brush tree, *Greyia sutherlandia*, that was covered in red blooms, would do the trick but the butterflies were ignoring it.



Narrow-banded Widow ♀, *Dingana angusta*



Ian and Nigel playing hide-and-peek with the Widow

We retreated to the quiet of the quartzite rocks on the northern side of the gorge where we were hoping to see some more target species. In this we were successful because a single female Narrow-banded Widow *Dingana angusta* popped out of the rocks and started playing cat-and-mouse with us. The rocks are very rugged with cross-fractures, about 2-3m tall with parallel gullies running between them. The butterfly would fly to the bottom of a rock, open her wings for a second or two then close them, and sit for a while whilst we crept towards her across the difficult ground. As soon as we got close, she would take off and float through a crack to the next gully. Rapid pursuit in such conditions is hazardous if not impossible. She would occasionally settle in the middle of a low grass clump and partially hide whilst she popped eggs into the grass in the normal habit of the Dirini tribe of Satyrinae. That's how we knew she was a lady. But photography in these conditions is almost impossible without a grass stem getting in the way. Satyrines have good hearing, so we needed to creep around on tiptoe to avoid scaring her off.



Natal Silverline ♀, *Cigaritis natalensis*



African Plain Tiger ♀ *Danaus chrysippus orientis*

After nearly 45 minutes of this pussyfooting around (I timed it between the first and last photo I got of her) it looked as though she was getting ready to roost. She kept flying to the base of the rocks and making as if to hide in them. But then she seemed to take pity on us and suddenly settled on a rock with her wings akimbo. We all got great shots of her. These butterflies normally fly in the cool of the morning and go to bed when the sun starts to climb in the sky, so this was unusual behaviour. Not that anyone was grumbling! That was another target butterfly chalked off. We spent another hour or so poking around the rocks. We found a couple of nice butterflies. A female Natal Silverline *Cigaritis natalensis* was soaking up the late afternoon sun. She was evidently too cold to make the lightning exit these butterflies are noted for, so we all got good open-wing shots. Females can be told from males by the white spot inboard of the middle 'bar' in the forewing, just below the costa. A female African Plain Tiger *Danaus chrysippus orientis* was nectaring on a *Senecio* (Ragwort) species, possibly *Senecio microglossus*. She was engrossed in this, so we got good images of her as well.

Day 9 – Saturday 27th September: Mac Mac again and Lone Creek Falls, then airport – 23 butterflies

This was the last morning of the tour and time to pack up and drive back to the airport to fly home. After we'd packed and had breakfast, we set off back to Mac Mac Pools to see if we could fill one of the last gaps. We didn't find the Violescent Cupid, but we did find another Giant Cupid – the Zulu Giant Cupid, *Lepidochrysops ignota*. This is similar to the Sabie Giant Cupid but much more widespread, and smaller with darker underside markings. They were flying slightly lower down on the slopes. We also found a Rayed Blue, *Actizera lucida*.



The spectacular Lone Creek Falls on the escarpment at Sabie

Our last port of call before setting off back to Johannesburg was the impressive Lone Creek Falls near Sabie. This is a well-known Swallowtail spot, so we were hoping to see Bush Kite as well as a couple of species we'd missed so far.



White-banded Swallowtail ♀, *Papilio echerioides echerioides*



Narrow Green-banded Swallowtail ♂, *Papilio nireus lyaeus*

In the mist forest immediately below the falls we found a few White-banded Swallowtails (a female and some males) on the bramble flowers. Callan saw some Marieps Emperor Swallowtails *Papilio ophidicephalus ayresi* from the lookout point above the falls and a Dead-leaf Commadore posed beautifully right in front of us. A Common Mother-of-Pearl was on the lookout point, as was a Pearl Charaxes. We then went to a large bank of Cherry Pie, *Lantana camara*, a South American weed that thrives in our forests, that was growing along the road leading to

the falls. We found more butterflies there that were new to the tour - Mocker Swallowtail *Papilio dardanus cenea*, Yellow-banded Telchinia *Telchinia cabira*, Dusky Telchinia *Telchinia esebria* and Forest Caper White, *Belenois zochalia zochalia*. Marieps Emperor Swallowtails were flying high up – one dived down and flew right over Nigel’s head whilst he was concentrating on the Dusky Telchinia. Ian and Callan saw a Novice, *Amauris ochlea ochlea* flying in the shade near the river.



The ‘Mystery’ Sailer ♂, *Neptis* sp.



Dead-leaf Commodore ♂ *Precis tugela tugela*

We found a Sailer (*Neptis* sp.) that I identified as Common Barred Sailer *Neptis laeta* until I got home and checked the pictures. It was another instance of the ‘mystery Sailer’, close to Kiriakoff’s Sailer *Neptis kiriakoffi* that is of marginal status in South Africa, by virtue of its antennae that are yellow tipped dorsally AND ventrally. We’ve seen this kind of thing on other Greenwings tours, and I even find them near home in KwaZulu-Natal. In Common Barred Sailer they are only yellow tipped dorsally. The white bands at the base of the hindwing underside are closer to *laeta* than *kiriakoffi*, going off the photos in *Pennington’s Butterflies*, so it might be something different again. We don’t have enough evidence yet to say it’s definitely a different species. Someone needs to take some voucher specimens for dissection and DNA analysis.

This was a different kind of tour to those we’ve to date run during late summer, which have taken place in forests and lowveld savanna. Spring in Gauteng and Mpumalanga can be capricious in terms of cloudy weather or veld fires! Despite the challenges we faced, we got most of the ‘Highfliers’ and rarities we were looking for, plus a few ‘bonus butterflies’. As a team we recorded 101 species in total and had a lot of fun doing that, with great company!

Steve Woodhall

ButterflyGear

October 2025

Systematic butterfly list:

Butterflies			19th Sep	20th Sep	21st Sep	22nd Sep	23rd Sep	24th Sep	25th Sep	26th Sep	27th Sep
			Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9
	Family Pieridae										
1	African Migrant	<i>Catopsilia florella</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
2	Broad-bordered Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema brigitta brigitta</i>	✓		✓	✓				✓	
3	African Angled Grass Yellow	<i>Eurema desjardinsii regularis</i>							✓		
4	Pioneer Caper White	<i>Belenois aurota</i>			✓	✓				✓	

Butterflies			19th Sep	20th Sep	21st Sep	22nd Sep	23rd Sep	24th Sep	25th Sep	26th Sep	27th Sep
			Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9
5	African Caper White	<i>Belenois creona severina</i>			✓				✓		
6	Pointed Caper White	<i>Pseudanaphaeis gidica abyssinica</i>							✓		
7	Forest Caper White	<i>Belenois zochalia zochalia</i>									✓
8	Red Tip	<i>Colotis antevippe gavis</i>			✓						
9	African Orange Tip	<i>Colotis evenina evenina</i>			✓						
10	Bushveld Purple Tip	<i>Colotis ione</i>			✓						
11	Bushveld Orange Tip	<i>Colotis pallene</i>			✓						
12	Queen Purple Tip	<i>Colotis regina</i>			✓				✓		
13	Common Dotted Border	<i>Mylothris agathina agathina</i>				✓					
14	Zebra White	<i>Pinacopteryx eriphia eriphia</i>			✓						
15	Common Meadow White	<i>Pontia helice helice</i>	✓				✓	✓			
16	Banded Gold Tip	<i>Teracolus eris eris</i>			✓						
17	Lemon Traveller	<i>Teracolus subfasciatus</i>			✓						
18	Vine-leaf Vagrant	<i>Eronia cleodora</i>							✓		
19	African Wood White	<i>Leptosia alcesta inalcesta</i>							✓		
	Family Papilionidae										
20	Mocker Swallowtail	<i>Papilio dardanus cenea</i>									✓
21	Citrus Swallowtail	<i>Papilio demodocus demodocus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
22	White-banded Swallowtail	<i>Papilio echerioides echerioides</i>								✓	✓
23	Narrow Green-banded Swallowtail	<i>Papilio nireus lyaeus</i>	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
24	Marieps Emperor Swallowtail	<i>Papilio ophidicephalus ayresi</i>									✓
	Family Nymphalidae										
25	Spotted Joker	<i>Byblia ilithyia</i>				✓					
26	Golden Piper	<i>Eurytela dryope angulata</i>							✓		✓
27	Foxy Charaxes	<i>Charaxes saturnus saturnus</i>	✓			✓					
28	Pearl Charaxes	<i>Charaxes varanes varanes</i>							✓	✓	✓
29	Pearl-spotted Charaxes	<i>Eriboea jahlunga rex</i>				✓					
30	Novice	<i>Amauris ochlea ochlea</i>									✓
31	African Plain Tiger	<i>Danaus chrysippus orientis</i>	✓		✓	✓				✓	
32	Wandering Donkey Acraea	<i>Acraea neobule neobule</i>	✓			✓					
33	Light-Red Acraea	<i>Rubraea nohara nohara</i>						✓			
34	Black-based Acraea	<i>Stephenia natalica</i>								✓	✓
35	Window Acraea	<i>Stephenia oncaea</i>			✓						
36	Yellow-banded Telchinia	<i>Telchinia cabira</i>									✓
37	Dusky Telchinia	<i>Telchinia esebria</i>									✓
38	Dancing Telchinia	<i>Telchinia serena</i>				✓					
39	Broad-bordered Acraea	<i>Tildia anemosa</i>			✓						
40	Waterberg Acraea	<i>Tildia barberi</i>	✓			✓					
41	Guineafowl	<i>Hamanumida daedalus</i>	✓		✓	✓					
42	Undescribed Sailer	<i>Neptis sp</i>									✓

Butterflies			19th Sep	20th Sep	21st Sep	22nd Sep	23rd Sep	24th Sep	25th Sep	26th Sep	27th Sep
			Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9
43	Variable Diadem	<i>Hypolimnna anthedon wahlbergi</i>								✓	✓
44	Soldier Pansy	<i>Junonia elgiva</i>							✓		
45	African Yellow Pansy	<i>Junonia hierta cebrene</i>	✓		✓	✓					
46	Dark Blue Pansy	<i>Junonia oenone oenone</i>	✓		✓	✓				✓	
47	Garden Inspector/Commodore	<i>Precis archesia archesia</i>		✓		✓				✓	
48	Southern Gaudy Commodore	<i>Precis octavia sesamus</i>				✓		✓		✓	
49	Dry-leaf Commodore	<i>Precis tugela tugela</i>								✓	✓
50	Common Mother-of-Pearl	<i>Protogoniomorpha parhassus</i>							✓		✓
51	Clouded Mother-of-Pearl	<i>Protogoniomorpha nebulosa</i>							✓		
52	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	
53	Squinting Bush Brown	<i>Bicyclus anynana</i>							✓		
54	Marsh Patroller	<i>Brakefieldia perspicua perspicua</i>							✓		
55	Rainforest Dull Brown	<i>Cassionympha cassius</i>								✓	✓
56	Red-banded Widow	<i>Dingana alticola</i>						✓			
57	Narrow-banded Widow	<i>Dingana angusta</i>								✓	
58	Evening Brown	<i>Melanitis leda leda</i>							✓		
59	Drakensberg Brown	<i>Pseudonympha poetula</i>					✓	✓			
60	African Three-ring	<i>Ypthima asterope asterope</i>	✓			✓					
	Family Lycaenidae										
61	Damara Russet	<i>Aloeides damarensis</i>			✓						
62	Yellow Russet	<i>Aloeides aranda</i>	✓			✓					
63	Cloud Russet	<i>Aloeides nubilus</i>						✓			
64	Mountain Russet	<i>Aloeides titei</i>						✓			
65	Brown Russet	<i>Aloeides trimeni trimeni</i>					✓				
66	Hutchinson's Highflier	<i>Aphnaeus hutchinsonii</i>	✓			✓					
67	Eastern Scarlet	<i>Axiocerses tjoane tjoane</i>	✓		✓						
68	Lydenburg Opal	<i>Chrysothrix aethon</i>					✓				
69	Ella's Silverline	<i>Cigaritis ella</i>	✓		✓	✓					
70	Natal Silverline	<i>Cigaritis natalensis</i>	✓		✓					✓	
71	Silver spotted grey	<i>Crudaria leroma</i>				✓					
72	Rayed Blue	<i>Actizera lucida</i>									✓
73	Pale Ciliate Blue	<i>Anthene livida livida</i>		✓							
74	Topaz Babul Blue	<i>Azonus jesus</i>			✓	✓					
75	Grass Jewel Blue	<i>Chilades trochylus</i>						✓		✓	
76	Common Meadow Blue	<i>Cupidopsis cissus cissus</i>						✓			
77	Cupreous Ash Blue	<i>Eicochrysops messapus mahallakoena</i>			✓				✓		
78	Sabie Smoky Blue	<i>Euchrysops dolorosa</i>				✓					
79	Pea Blue	<i>Lampides boeticus</i>	✓	✓		✓		✓		✓	
80	Zulu Giant Cupid	<i>Lepidochrysops ignota</i>									✓
81	Irving's Giant Cupid	<i>Lepidochrysops irvingi</i>						✓			✓

Butterflies			19th Sep	20th Sep	21st Sep	22nd Sep	23rd Sep	24th Sep	25th Sep	26th Sep	27th Sep
			Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9
82	Patricia Giant Cupid	<i>Lepidochrysops patricia</i>	✓		✓	✓					
83	Twin-spot Giant Cupid	<i>Lepidochrysops plebeia plebeia</i>				✓					
84	Plain Black-eye	<i>Leptomyrina henningi henningi</i>		✓	✓						
85	Common Zebra Blue	<i>Leptotes pirithous pirithous</i>						✓	✓	✓	✓
86	Hintza Pierrot	<i>Zintha hintza hintza</i>			✓	✓					
87	African Grass Blue	<i>Zizeeria knysna knysna</i>		✓	✓	✓					✓
88	Bushveld Plain Buff	<i>Cnodontes penningtoni</i>	✓								
89	Apricot Playboy	<i>Deudorix dinochares</i>	✓		✓	✓					
90	Brown-line Sapphire	<i>Iolaus alienus alienus</i>	✓								
91	Bowker's Marbled Sapphire	<i>Stugeta bowkeri tearei</i>			✓						
	Family Hesperiiidae										
92	Striped Policeman	<i>Coeliades forestan forestan</i>		✓							
93	Two-pip Policeman	<i>Coeliades pisistratus</i>								✓	
94	Long-horned Swift	<i>Borbo fatuellus</i>							✓		
95	Dodger sp	<i>Gegenes sp</i>						✓			✓
96	Morant's Orange	<i>Parosmodes morantii morantii</i>	✓			✓					
97	Peppered Hopper	<i>Platylesches ayresii</i>		✓							
98	Eastern Gold-Spotted Sylph	<i>Metisella metis paris</i>								✓	
99	Green-marbled Skipper	<i>Gomalia elma</i>			✓						
100	Common Sandman	<i>Spialia ferax</i>	✓		✓						
101	Forest Elfin	<i>Sarangesa motozi</i>							✓		