Butterflies of the Balkans - Bulgaria, Macedonia and Greece

Saturday 12th - Saturday 26th July 2015

Trip report by Dr. Mario Langourov

Tour leader: Dr. Mario Langourov

Tour participants: Mrs. Tessa Seda
Mrs. Mary Dadd
Mr. Ron Demey
Mrs. Rita Swinnen
Mr. Robert Godden
Mr. John Austin

Bulgaria, 12th – 14th, 19th and 22nd – 26th July 2015

Macedonia, 15th – 18th July

Greece, 19th – 21st July

Day 1 Saturday 12th July

Bulgaria – Outbound from Sofia; en route to Rila Monastery.

Weather: sunny and hot, still (~28°C-30°C).

In the noon I welcomed the ladies from Guernsey island – Tessa and Mary at the Terminal 1 and together we went to Terminal 2, where are the other participants. After that we headed to our first hotel, located near the Rila Monastery, and when we swerved off the main road, we decided to stop. Quickly we got some idea of the successful tour – we saw our first Krueper’s Small White (Pic. 2), Southern Small White, Anomalous Blue, Meleager’s Blue, Nickerl’s Fritillary, Lulworth Skipper. Here we managed to see and the only for the tour Chequered Blue. But time is pressing upon us and we have no choice, but set off to the hotel.

Day 2 Sunday 13th July

Rila Mts.

Weather: sunny; PM cloudy periods, warm (~25°C).

Our first site for the day was the deep river valle – a site where the highly attractive Purple Emperor and Poplar Admiral are nearly guaranteed. The first butterfly, which we saw is exactly one of our goals - Purple Emperor (Pic. 3)! It sucked salts and described the wide circles around us, returning back to the starting point and gave us the opportunity all to shoot it from different angles. After quarter of an hour we managed to break away and we have concentrated on the nearby flowering meadows to enjoy the numerous of Scarce Copper, Woodland Ringlet, Eastern Dappled White, Niobe Fritillary, Arran Brown, Yellow-banded Skipper and a number of others. Just before we go, we found also White Letter Hairstreak, which posed briefly and retired in the crown of a nearby tree. Taking the road, we saw the typical flight of Poplar Admiral – we stopped and found it. It was perched on the road, where was besieged by cameras. We finished the photo session, adding several species to the list. We had have a quick lunch and headed to higher areas. Among

1 All photos in this report were taken during the holiday by ©Mario Langourov
bushes and flowering plants we managed to find and открним Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Map Butterfly, Large Wall Brown. Eventually here we found one of our target species - Balkan Copper (Pic. 5). Female Lesser Fiery Copper surprised us posing among ferns. Then there was little time for the gorgeous Rila Monastery, listed in UNESCO World Heritage List.

In the yard over our heads weared swifts, and at our feet twinkled several wings of Purple Emperors. It was about time to retire to the comfort of the hotel and enjoy the dinner, after that we took the deserved rest after a successful day.

**Day 3**  
**Monday 14th July**

Rila Mt; Kresna Gorge.

Weather: sunny with cloudy periods and breezy; hot to very hot (28°C-32°C).

We were on the road to a small valley, where despite the darkening sky on the roadside Elders, Sooty Copper greeted us, and on the surrounding vegetation we found also Eastern Wood White, Balkan Marbled White. Our next stop was Kresna Gorge – here we met several Common Gliders, and Southern White Admiral, Scarce Swallowtail and also Rapid Fritillary. Shortly before we reach the bus, a fascinating battle of life and death between small caterpillars and an attacking wasp catches our attention. Although it seems almost defenseless, the caterpillar doesn’t give up easy – caught with its rear for a branch, tossed its head, when its enemy approached angrily. We had a bet, but we didn’t wait for the end of battle, because it passed almost half an hour and time was ticking away ... We enjoyed a pleasant lunch in the shade of centuries old Oriental Plane trees over the foaming Struma river and taken en route to Macedonia. After crossing the border we stopped in a roadside village, just to enjoy the numerous Lesser Kestrels and because we didn’t have much time, we headed to the town of Prilep and our hotel.

**Day 4**  
**Tuesday 15th July**

**Macedonia – Babuna Mt; near Kavadartsi.**

Weather: sunny and very hot (~40°C-42°C).

First we visited the slopes of Babuna mountain, where we met various of Graylings, including Eastern Rock and Great Banded Grayling, and also many Great Sooty Satyrs. Later we saw the first of many Macedonian Grayling (Pic. 8), alongside it flyed Eastern Greenish Black-tip (Pic. 9) and Cardinal. Among the surrounding vegetation and the flowers we saw and Osiris Blue, Blue Argus, Blue-spot Hairstreak. The heat was unbearable and we drove near a small pond with Emerald and Southern Emerald Damselflies, and after that to a cool restaurant nearby. After lunch we headed to the heavily mediterranean area near Kavadarci, where the heat covered the ground… Among the Mediterranean vegetation we found Little Tiger Blue, Hermit, Swallowtail, Adonis Blue, and in the riparian forest - Lattice Brown, Speckled Wood. Here we faced several large, scary-looking dogs, but they weren’t aggressive and didn’t interfere with our activities. Along rocks we found copulate Mountain Small White, and a little later - Krueper's Small White, while over our heads hovered Egyptian Vulture, that nested on the rocks. Before we went in direction of the hotel and we took a look at old Bulgarian church, built in the 14th century.

**Day 5**  
**Wednesday 16th July**

**Macedonia – Pelister Mt; Galichitsa Mt.**

Weather: sunny and hot, still (34°C).
Our first stop was near Bitola, where our attention was drawn to flowering meadows in the north foothills of Pelister (Baba) Mountain. Here on the flowers perched various of Fritillaries (Niobe, Silver-washed, Dark Green, High-brown, Marbled), Purple-shot Copper, Pearly Heath, Reverdin’s Blue. After a light lunch in the hotel, located on the shore of Prespa Lake, we changed the Mediterranean habitat with a mountain one as we drove to Galichitsa mountain. The mountain meadows here were full of life and among many other we found Meleager's Blue, Silver-studded Blue, Amanda's Blue, Knapweed and Nickerl's Fritillary. Clouds of them gathered in damp places and sucked salts eagerly. Here they were joined by more Southern Small White, Mountain Small White, Mountain Argus. This is the only place where during the tour we found Green-underside Blue, and among profusely flowering geraniums - Geranium Argus. Landing next to each other - Grecian and Ripart’s Anomalous Blue, provided us a great opportunity to compare them. At the end of the director of the National Park “Galicica” drewed us with “rakia” and while we drank, we exchanged a few words with him and then we moved on. We took time to admire the panoramic view - from here you can see the lake and then we turned our attention to surrounding trees - this is one of the places where you can see Lesser Lattice Brown (Pic. 10). I found one flew between the crowns of nearby trees and we spent another half hour to chase and shoot it. It was time to take the road back to the hotel, located on the shore of the lake.

Day 6 Thursday 17th July

Macedonia – Galichitsa Mt.

Weather: sunny and hot, still (35ºC).

The panoramic view is really inspiring - from the road you can see both Prespa and Ohrid lakes. After breakfast we headed back to Galichitsa, the whole day was devoted to exploring the mountain. The weather is beautiful and soon among clouds of Esper's Marbled White (Pic. 11) we found Apollo, Illex Hairstreak, Sloe Hairstreak, Swallowtail, Large Tortoiseshell. A beautiful area provided us a great conditions for a picnic lunch, and Beside us the butterflies were abundant - diverse Blues, Nettle-Tree Butterfly, Sandy Grizzled Skipper, Yellow-banded Skipper and Woodland Grayling. Returning to the mountain meadows in the upper site we encountered another group butterflies lovers and a Belgian fan of dragonflies, we managed to talk with everyone. It was time to shift our attention to our main goal and in the vicinity we admired to Eastern Baton Blue, Dusky Meadow Brown, Apollo, Idas Blue, Mazarine Blue, Eros Blue, Zephyr Blue (Pic. 12), Chalk-hill Blue, Turquoise Blue and interesting aberration of Spotted Fritillary. During our pleasant walk we found one of our target species - Freyer's Fritillary (Pic. 13), together with Weaver's Fritillary. We returned to the hotel and after dinner we took the deserved rest.

Day 7 Friday 18th July

Macedonia – Galichitsa Mt; Greece – Kerkini Lake.

Weather: sunny and very hot, still (28ºC÷37ºC).

Before our transfer from South Macedonia to Greece we decided to take a look again to the highest site of Galichitsa. In sheltered decreases the pitch among fresh greenery we saw Twin-spot Fritillary, Chapman’s Blue, Great Banded Grayling, Great Sooty Satyr, Hungarian and Oberthur’s Grizzled Skipper and a number of other. Rapid transition on the highway and we stopped in a crowded roadside restaurant, where we enjoyed a pleasant lunch in the shade of centuries old plane trees, just above the Vardar river. Reaching the Doiran lake, we crossed the Border and moved to the next goal. We stopped near the shores of Kerkini lake and among coastal vegetation we saw a lot of Lang's Short-tailed Blue (Pic. 14), Holly Blue, Mallow Skipper. On the Oriental Plane-trees around we observed the damage caused by invasive species Corythucha ciliata - beautiful but very uncomfortable true bug, first established in Europe from Italy in 1964 and now it can be seen across the continent. We latter accommodate in the hotel, situated near the Kerkini lake with nice panoramic view.
Day 8  Saturday 19th July

Bulgaria – Southern Struma Valley; Greece – Kerkini Lake.

Weather: sunny and very hot (38.5°C).

Because in the group there were two birders before breakfast we headed to spills, where fed a number of waders - - Egrets, Herons, Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, Pigmy Cormorants, Dalmatian and White Pelicans, different Gulls and Terns. Right after we came back and had breakfast, we crossed the Border (it takes no more than five minutes) and started to explore the southern parts of Struma Valley. By one of its tributaries butterflies are everywhere and extremely diverse - Scarce Swallowtail, Eastern Bath White, Large Copper (Pic. 15), Sooty Copper, Southern White Admiral, Red Admiral, Peacock, Map Butterfly, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood. It was too hot and bubbling mountain river lured, me and John spent half an hour in a cool. We gave a special attention to Freyer's Purple Emperor (Pic. 16), that took salts from sandy riverbank in the shade of overhanging bush. Over the river along with the yellow – black Balkan Goldenring swept and Eastern Spectre, and Lesser Emperor described extensive circles. We had lunch at a roadside restaurant, on the walls there lived Kotschy's Gecko and not far away we found several Lesser Fiery Copper (Pic.17), Little Tiger Blue, Oriental Marbled Skipper. Our attention attracted the magnificent Banded Darters, perched near a small stream. We returned at the southern foothills of Belasitsa mountain, where near the old sycamore trees we found Short-tailed Blue, Provençal Short-tailed Blue and rare dragonfly species - Black Pennant. Late afternoon we retired to our hotel.

Day 9  Sunday 20th July

Greece – above Sidirokastro; Vrondous Mt; Bozdag (Falakro) Mt.

Weather: sunny and very hot (35°C).

On the road again and our first stop was the valley north of Sidirocastro, between the mountains of Alibotoush and Vrondous. In the flowering bushes near a fountain and among other species we admired to Freyer's Grayling, Marbled Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary, on the wet sand perched Chapman's Blue, Hungarian Skipper. We continued to Bozdag mountain , crossing the Vrondous mountain. We enjoyed a picnic lunch in the shade of old Alders along the rippling brook and a fountain with cold mountain water. Then we looked around you and that brought us Mazarine Blue, Southern Small White, Ringlet, Nettle-tree Butterfly, Weaver’s Fritillary. In the bed of a small fountain we discovered Yellow-bellied Toad, over our heads flew Sombre Goldenring, Small Pincertail, Broad-bodied Chaser. In the early afternoon we reached the lower site of Bozdag mountain, where was full of life. On the ground and flowers landed different species Blues - Anomalous Blue (Pic. 18), Grecian Anomalous Blue, Ripart’s Anomalous Blue, Turquoise Blue (Pic. 19), Adonis Blue, and in shady bushes we saw Purple Hairstreak, Gatekeeper and Lattice Brown. Time progressed and we turned to our hotel. There We were welcomed by the owners - Maria and Kosta, with a great hospitality and delicious traditional food.

Day 10  Monday 21st July

Greece – Bozdag (Falakro) Mt.

Weather: sunny and warm to hot, some PM clouds (26°C÷30°C).

We decided to start from the top of the Phalakron mountain (above 2000 m. a.s.l.) to take advantage of the good weather. There are here too little and mostly common species - Eastern Large Heath, Turquoise Blue, Mountain Argus and many Painted Ladies. Meadows around are covered by the Balkan endemic Sideritis scardica, famous as a medicine plant and aphrodisiac. In a small mountain valley we found the local endemic Phalakron Blue, alongside Balkan Fritillary. After having our picnic in roadside gazebo
with great panoramic view to the valleys below us we have explored the surroundings which brought us Higgins's and Phalakron Anomalous Blue, Dusky Meadow Brown, Tufted Marbled Skipper. Twice briefly we saw and Dil's Grayling, but quickly lost sight of them. We finished the day in the company of Escher's Blue (Pic. 21), Eastern Baton Blue, Great Sooty Satyr and some friendly cows.

Day 11 Tuesday 22\textsuperscript{nd} July

Bulgaria – South Pirin Mt; Papaztchair.

Weather: sunny with cloudy periods, warm (30\textdegree C).

Crossing the border was very quick again and we found ourselves in the southern foothills of Pirin Mountain in Bulgaria. The weather was favorable again - sunny and warm, so the the activity of the butterflies was high. The flowers of the surrounding plants were laden with butterflies - Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Purple-shot Copper, Woodland Grayling, Weaver's Fritillary, Scarce Copper, Sooty Copper, Provençal Short-tailed Blue, Eastern Baton Blue (Pic. 22), Berger's Clouded Yellow. Then we have noticed ans Brown Hairstreak. After our lunch in a pleasant restaurant we headed to the valley of Mesta river. At the highest point we stopped and also found a number of orchids here - Arran Brown, Large Ringlet, Large Wall Brown, Eros Blue (Pic. 23), Alcon Blue. Especially numerous were Apollo (Pic. 24), even we observed spider Aculepeira ceropegia, that eat mainly those with these large butterflies. We headed north to our next hotel, located in the picturesque village of Dobarsko.

Day 12 Wednesday 23\textsuperscript{rd} July

Pirin Mt.

Weather: sunny and warm to very hot; still (24\textdegree C÷32\textdegree C).

Today we went again at above 2000 meters – our first goal is Vihren hut, where we swooped to Bunderitsa. Our main goals here were different Ringlets and we managed to find Brown, Large Ringlet, Ottoman Brassy Ringlet, also Clouded Apollo, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Northern Wall Brown. Birds were presented by a Nutteracker and a flock of Crossbills. In the coolness of the highest mountain we had lunch and observed a number of mud puddling butterflies. The afternoon we spent at the wet meadows and in the company of Mazarine Blue, Pearly Heath, Eastern Wood White, Knapweed and Heath Fritillaries. In Dobursko we had the opportunity for a short walk in the surroundings, where we saw several Great Sooty Satyr, Idas Blue, Dingy Skipper.

Day 13 Thursday 24\textsuperscript{th} July

Rila Mt.

Weather: sunny with cloudy periods, but dry; warm (16\textdegree C÷20\textdegree C).

We were here again at over 2000 meters a.s.l, the day seems to be very hot despite cloudy periods. The track led us higher and higher and we saw Large Ringlet, Nicholl's Ringlet, Bright-eyed Ringlet, Eastern Large Heath. Reaching the elevation needed for the Bulgarian Ringlet (Pic. 25) and Balkan Fritillary (Pic. 26), we saw also Balkan Copper and Mountain Argus. Right after we decide to climb further and reached elevation above 2400 meters a.s.l. hoping to locate the Shepherd's Fritillary. For our picnic lunch we had a nice spot near a mountain creek. Reaching our goal we came across a herd of cows guarded by extremely unfriendly (and big) bull, that clearly gave us to understand that we are not wanted in the vicinity. However, we saw our goal - Shepherd's Fritillary! We found few more of them, and also the Water Ringlet. Time to move on. In the late afternoon we reached our hotel, located in the e northern slopes of Rila mountain.
Day 14       Friday 25th July

Rila Mt; Iskar Valley.

Weather: sunny with PM clouds; warm, still (18ºC÷26ºC).

The cabin lift brought us to high area of Rila mountain. Another half an hour on the lift and from 1,300 meters above the sea level we have reached over 2,300 m! A wonderful opportunity to enjoy the magnificence of the highest mountain on the Balkans and its nature. Against the backdrop of the Balkan champion (Musala Peak, 2925 m) we made a group photo for memory (Pic. 1). Our main goal here is Cynthia's Fritillary, and the beginning was very promising – we found Eastern Large Heath и Dewy Ringlet. On the meadows flew Nicholl's Ringlet and Small Tortoiseshells. Here we saw and the first Cynthia's Fritillary (Pic. 27) - several males and few females and everybody managed to get very good photos. Interest was also Black Ringlet. A little tired but very happy we went down to Borovets, where we headed to a Iskar river valley. Along the river we found many Common Glider (Pic. 28), Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Dryad, Eastern Short-tail Blue, White-letter Hairstreak, Lattice Brown, White Admiral, Map Butterfly.

Day 15       Saturday 26th July

Iskar Valley.

Weather: sunny and hot, still (~28ºC).

We took the road to Sofia, but we had time to stop again along Iskar river, where we enjoyed the same species as yesterday afternoon, but in addition also Hungarian Glider (Pic. 29), Lesser Purple Emperor, Brown Hairstreak, False Grayling. There was no time and we headed to the airport to meet again in the coming years.

The tour total came to 158 butterfly species within two weeks holiday spent in some of the most interesting sites of the Balkans.
Pic.1. At Rila Mts. Left to right: Mary, Robert, Tessa, John, Rita, Ron, Mario

Pic.2. Krueper's Small White (*Pieris krueperi*)

Pic.3. Purple Emperor (*Apatura iris*)

Pic.4. Poplar Admiral (*Limenitis populi*)

Pic.5. Balkan Copper (*Lycaena candens*)
Pic.6. Freyer’s Grayling (*Hipparchia fatua*)

Pic.7. Little Tiger Blue (*Tarucus balkanicus*)

Pic.8. Macedonian Grayling (*Pseudochazara cingovskii*)

Pic.9. Eastern Greenish Black-tip (*Euchloe penia*)

Pic.10. Lesser Lattice Brown (*Kirinia climene*)

Pic.11. Esper’s Marbled White (*Melanargia russiae*)
Pic.12. Zephyr Blue (*Plebejus sephirus*)

Pic.13. Freyer's Fritillary (*Melitaea arduinna*)

Pic.14. Lang's Short-tailed Blue (*Leptotes piritous*)

Фиг.15. Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*)

Pic.16. Freyer's Purple Emperor (*Apatura metis*)

Pic.17. Lesser Fiery Coppers (*Lycaena thersamon*)
Pic.18. Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus admetus*)

Pic.19. Turquoise Blue (*Polyommatus dorylas*)

Pic.20. Black Ringlet (*Erebia melas*)

Pic.21. Escher's Blue (*Polyommatus escheri*)

Pic.22. Eastern Baton Blue (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*)

Pic.22. Eros Blue (*Polyommatus eros*)
Pic.24. Apollo (*Parnassius apollo*)

Pic.25. Bulgarian Ringlet (*Erebia orientalis*)

Pic.26. Balkan Fritillary (*Boloria graeca*)

Pic.27. Cynthia's Fritillary (*Euphydryas cynthia*)

Pic.28. Common Glider (*Neptis sappho*)

Pic.29. Hungarian Glider (*Neptis rivularis*)