Tour leader: Dr. Mario Langourov

Tour participants: Mrs. Eileen Gould
Mr. Keith Gould
Mr. John Jones
Mr. Colin Matthews
Mr. Leif Gabrielsen
Mr. Bruce Graham

Bulgaria, 12th – 14th, 19th and 22nd – 26th July 2014

Macedonia, 15th – 18th July

Greece, 19th – 21st July

Day 1 Saturday 12th June

Bulgaria: Outbound from Sofia; en route to Rila Monastery; near Stob Village.

Weather: sunny and warm, still (~20°C).

Around noon I welcome and the last of the participants in the tour (the rest have arrived yesterday, and Keith and Eileen are in Bulgaria for already a week) and we head to Govedartsi, where we pick up everyone else. Then together we head to the first hotel, located near the Rila Monastery. After departing from the main road we decide to make our first stop, near the village of Stob, famous for its sandy “pyramids”. Here we get some idea of the successful tour that is lying ahead with our first Lattice Brown, Great Banded Grayling, Comma, Black-veined White, Marbled White, Speckled Wood. However the time is rushing and we have no choice but to turn to the hotel.

Day 2 Sunday 13th June

Rila Mt: Iliyna River Valley; Kirilova Polyana; Sharkov Anduk.

Weather: sunny with cloudy periods, warm (19°C -23°C).
Our first goal for the day is Ilina River Valley - a place where almost always can be seen attractive Purple Emperor and Poplar Admiral. On the meadows around we watch Purple-shot Copper, Scarce Copper, Mazarine Blue, Weaver's Fritillary, Niobe Fritillary, Arran Brown. We continue down the road when from the car I glimpse the typical flight of Poplar Admiral - we stop and we find it perched among the foliage of a tree. After some time it flew and land on the road, where it is surrounded by our cameras. After completing the photo session we add a few more species to our list as High Brown Fritillary, we have a light lunch and we head to Kirilova Meadow. Weather conditions are far from perfect for monitoring butterflies, but in a rare bright intervals we manage to find Large Wall Brown, Black-veined White, Queen of Spain Fritillary. Eventually we find and our target species here - Balkan Copper (Pic. 2) and Clouded Apollo (Pic. 3). We head to a small valley on the road where on the roadside Elders greets us Iolas Blue (Pic. 4), and on the wet sand has perched dozens Zephyr Blue, Osiris Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Anomalous Blue. We manage to shoot also Meleager's and Adonis blues, Sloe and Ilex hairstreaks. It comes time to retire to the comfort of the hotel for a nice dinner, then we sit in front of TV to watch the final of the World Cup.

**Day 3 Monday 14th July**

Kresna Gorge.

Weather: cloudy with sunny periods and some rain; warm (~22ºC).

Our first stop is the Kresna Gorge - here we are welcomed by clouds of Spoonwing Lacewing (Nemoptera sinuata), Balkan Marbled White (Pic. 5), Great Banded Grayling. Along with them we also find and Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Sooty Copper, Wall Brown, Southern White Admiral, Lattice Brown (Pic. 6), Eastern Bath White. Around the rocks fly Krueper's Small White and Eastern Bath White, and between tree crowns - Common Glider. On the flowers of the surrounding plants we see also Long-tailed Blue, Short-tailed Blue, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Mallow Skipper, Oriental Marbled Skipper, Lulworth Skipper. After some time under the shadows of the plane trees we find Freyer's Grayling. We enjoy a pleasant lunch in the shade of ancient Oriental Plane trees above the foaming Struma River and take to Macedonia. After easily crossing the border and just logged in Strumica the clutch pedal "sinks" and we have to stop. Fortunately, ten metre from us I see the auto service and we get the van there so the problem can be found. It turns out that a bearing in the transmission got broken, which must be ordered and replaced, and meanwhile Sabina has reserved us a hotel where to stay. After checking in, we use our time for a short walk and fresh drink and in the evening and we go out and sit in a restaurant in the bustling pedestrian zone, where the entire city passes as in a procession first in one direction and then - back.

**Day 4 Tuesday 15th July**

Macedonia - near Kavadartsi.

Weather: gloomy, late rain; warm (~19ºC).

We have to wait until around noon when the van is ready and we can go on to Prilep. We make a brief stop to admire the many Lesser Kestrels and because we do not have much time we are off to region with strongly Mediterranean climate not far from Kavadarci area where usually the heat presses the parched land ... This year, however, the rains Qe almost daily (even here) and heavy, so at one point we wallow in puddles on a dirt road. Everyone gets out the bus, and Colin and Keith tense forearms and thanks to their efforts we manage to put out the van and to continue. Ultimately among the Mediterranean vegetation we find Little Tiger Blue (Pic. 7), Chapman's Blue, Adonis Blue, The Hermit, Orbed Red Underwing Skipper, and hovering over our heads Egyptian Vulture, nesting on the cliffs. It started to drizzle and we head to Prilep. It starts pouring rain, and under its drops we reach the hotel.
Day 5  Wednesday 16th July  
Macedonia ã Babuna Mt; Pelister Mt.  
Weather: sunny with cloudy periods; warm/hot, still (24°C).  

First we visit Babuna Mountain slopes. We are met by a number of Graylings, including Delattin's Grayling and Great Banded Grayling, and also many Great Sooty satyrs. Among the surrounding vegetation and on the flowers we see also Blue Argus (Pic. 8), Turquoise and Small blues, Niobe Fritillary, Blue-spot Hairstreak and White Letter Hairstreak. A little later we find the first of many Macedonian Grayling (Pic. 9) alongside them fly The Hermit and Berger's Clouded Yellow. After we have enough of looking at them we transfer our attention to Elders and to the perched on them Balkan Marbled White and High Brown Fritillary. Sandy Grizzled Skipper and Dusky Meadow Brown are also interesting for us, and just before our departure briefly appears and Purple Emperor. We take a look at a small pond where we watch Emerald and Southern Emerald Damselflies, and after a meal in a lively roadhouse we head west to Lake Prespa. Not far from Bitolya we stop close to blossoming meadows in the northern foothills of Pelister (Baba) Mountain. Here, we find on the flowers Lang's Short-tailed Blue, Holly Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Marbled Fritillary, Peacock, Ringlet, Pearly Heath, Scarce Copper. Extremely small Large Tortoiseshell proves to be very cooperating by landing on the road. Eventually the time comes to move our way to the hotel, picturesquely situated on the banks of the lake.

Day 6  Thursday 17th July  
Macedonia ã Galichitsa Mt.  
Weather: till midday ã cloudy with sunny periods, dry, still; in the afternoon ã cloudy and cool (~18°C).  

After breakfast we head to Galichitsa to devote the day of careful study of the different areas in the mountain. The weather is not very kind to us but despite the clouds and the relatively low temperatures at flowering Elders we find Brimstone, Ilex Hairstreak, Sloe Hairstreak, Cardinal, Small Tortoiseshell, and on the earth and landed Woodland Grayling. On the mountain meadows in the upper part we admire Balkan Copper, Eastern Baton Blue, Twin-spot Fritillary, Spotted Fritillary, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Heath Fritillary, Great Sooty Satyr (Pic. 10th), Dusky Meadow Brown. On the way we have the time to admire at the beautiful view from here to Ohrid Lake and Prespa Lake and the beautiful area provides us great conditions for picnic lunch. The sky is covered with storm clouds and the afternoon we spend again in the high zone of the mountain and in the company of numerous Esper's Marbled White. It was exactly thanks to the weather that we manage to do multiple shots of Apollo (Pic. 11th), Idas Blue, Mountain Argus, Mazarine Blue, Amanda's Blue, Eros Blue, Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper. After a short and pleasant walk during which we find Freyer's Fritillary (Pic. 12), Marsh Fritillary, Yellow-banded Skipper's it is time to return to the hotel for dinner and well-deserved rest.

Day 7  Friday 18th July  
Macedonia ã Galichitsa Mt; Greece ã Kerkini Lake.  
Weather: cloudy and cool in the morning (15.5°C), than sunny and very hot, still (~32°C).  

Before we head through southern Macedonia to Greece we decide to look at again at the upper part of Galichitsa. It's cloudy and quite cool and there is almost no activity, but we still find roosting Southern White Admiral, Glanville Fritillary, Olive Skipper. Fast transfer on the highway and here we are in a very busy roadside restaurant where we enjoy a pleasant lunch in the shade of century-old plane trees, just above
the River Vardar. On the border comes a bit of confusion, because Colin cannot find his passport and follows long and unsuccessful search ... until Leif intervenes and with acumen of an experienced customs officer he found it instantly! We stop on the coast of Lake Kerkini and among coastal vegetation we see numerous Large Coppers (Pic. 13th), Short-tailed Blue, Holly Blue, Reverdin's Blue, Mallow Skipper. Near a small stream we discover Balkan Goldenring and Skimmers, and while with Keith is getting angry with local shepherd who scared Bladetail Dragonfly, Bruce and Leif manage to shoot Southern Comma. We check-in the hotel, located near the Kirkini Lake and offering, besides a comfortable stay, lovely view of the lake.

Day 8  Saturday 19th July

Bulgaria ï Southern Struma Valley; Greece ï Kerkini Lake & Belasitsa (Kerkini) Mt.

Weather: sunny and hot, dry, still (33°C÷24°C).

Because in the group there are two keen on birdwatchers before breakfast we head to the spills, which feed a number of waders - Egrets, Herons, Spoonbills, Glossy Ibis, Pigmy Cormorants, Dalmatian and White Pelicans, different Gulls and Terns. After that we go back to have breakfast and we cross the border (it takes us no more than five minutes) and we start to explore the southern part of the Struma Valley. Next to one of its tributaries the butterflies are everywhere and extremely diverse - Scarce Swallowtail, Green-veined White, Eastern Bath White, Eastern Wood White, Large Copper, Sooty Copper, Southern White Admiral, Common Glider, Peacock, Map Butterfly, Gatekeeper, Speckled Wood, Oriental Marbled Skipper, etc. We pay particular attention to the Mediterranean Skipper (Pic. 14), who preffers on the little rocks straight on the road. Over the river along with the yellow and black Balkan Goldenring are flying with their colorful bodies Eastern Spectre, and Lesser Emperor describing large circles. We eat at a roadside restaurant where on the walls lives Kotschy's Gecko and return to the southern foot of the Belasitsa Mountain where near old sycamores there's no trace of the numerous spring Nettle-Tree Butterflies and we find only Long-tailed Blue, Mallow Skipper and Meadow Brown. Then again, we head to the lake shore, where we meet with a number of Blues: Lang's Short-tailed Blue, Little Tiger Blue, Provençal Short-tailed Blue. In the late afternoon we retreat to our hotel.

Day 9  Sunday 20th July

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

Weather: sunny with cloudy periods; still & hot (25°C÷32°C).

Again we hit the road, but first we take a look at the valley over Sidirokastro, enclosed between the mountains Alibotoush and Vrondous. In blossoming bushes near a fountain among the other types we enjoy the Swallowtail, Meleager's Blue, Dark Green Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary, on wet sand perch Scarce Swallowtail, Chapman's Blue (Pic. 15th), Long-tailed Blue. Around little spring we see little more Eastern Rock Grayling (Pic. 16), Hermit, Berger's Clouded Yellow. We continue to Bozdag, crossing Vrondous Mountain. We enjoy a picnic lunch under the shade of old Alders around rippling brook and fountain with cold mountain water. Then we look around, which brings us Escher's Blue (Pic. 17), Silver-washed Fritillary, Marbled Fritillary, Red Admiral. In the bed of small fountain we find Yellow-bellied Toad, and over our heads are flying Sombre Goldenring, Southern (Blue) Hawker, Broad-bodied Chaser. In the early afternoon we reach the lower parts of the mountain Bozdag where the life is buzzing. On the ground and on the flowers various Blues are perching - Grecian Anomalous Blue, Turquoise Blue, Adonis Blue, Mountain Argus, Brimstone, Purple-shot Copper, Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper, and among shady bushes we see Gatekeeper and Lattice Brown. Once we saw here 2013 Eastern Festoon in early July(later similar information about the area we found in older publications in the Entomologist's Record and Journal of Variation) and now we are prepared - here's Eastern Festoon! Time is passing and we have to turn to our hotel. The hotel owners - Maria and Kosta, welcome us very warmly and give us rich feast with traditional dishes.
Day 10  Monday 21\textsuperscript{st} July

Greece ð Bozdag (Falakro) Mt.

Weather: cloudy with sunny spells, warm (18°C–28°C).

We decide to start from the highest part of the mountain (over 2000 meters) to use the good weather. In this part there are very few and mostly common species - Eastern Large Heath, Turquoise Blue, Dark Green Fritillary and many Painted Ladies. Meadows in the area are covered with Balkan endemic Sideritis scardica, besides known for its healing properties and also as an aphrodisiac. Descend down the slopes above the roadside rocks we see among others Safflower Skipper, Mazarine Blue. In a small mountain valley we find local endemic Phalakron Blue, alongside Mountain Argus and Tufted Marbled Skipper. After a picnic lunch in a roadside gazebo with panoramic view we proceed to explore the surroundings, which brings us also Higgins’s and Phalakron Anomalous Blue (Pic. 18th), Dusky Meadow Brown, Balkan Grayling, Ilex Hairstreak, Chalk-hill Blue and Large Wall Brown. The last stop for the day is around small church, where on we flowering plants add to our list Mountain Small White, Reverdin’s Blue, Ripart’s Anomalous Blue, Osiris Blue.

Day 11  Tuesday 22\textsuperscript{nd} July

Bulgaria ð South Pirin Mt; near Mesta River.

Weather: in the morning - cloudy and warm; still (28°C); cloudy and rainy, T-storm (16°C).

We cross the border and soon we are in the southern foothills of the Pirin Mountains. The weather today is not at all favorable for the lovers of butterflies ð it’s cloudy and the atmospheric pressure falls, and therefore the activity of butterflies is very low. Usually this is one of the most species-rich places for the whole tour, but not today... However, after a quest we find Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Green-veined White, Eastern Wood White, Woodland Grayling, Weaver’s Fritillary, Scarce Copper, Sooty Copper, Eastern Baton Blue (Pic. 19), Chapman’s White, Mallow Skipper and all species of Golden Skippers. Over mountains peaks and highlands are huddled heavy clouds and fogs creep, so our only option remains low fields. We eat at a roadside restaurant and we head to the valley of the Mesta River. Here we see only fifteen species, including Large Copper, Lang’s Short-tailed Blue, Red Admiral, Gatekeeper. Storm clouds over our heads thicken, not long after the first drops of rain fall, accompanied by strong thunders... Under the heavy rain we head north to our next hotel, situated in the picturesque village Dobursko.

Day 12  Wednesday 23\textsuperscript{rd} July

Pirin Mt ð Chalin Volog; near Dobarsko.

Weather: AM sunny and warm; still (~23°C); cloudy and rainy, T-storm (16°C).

Today again we climb 2000 meters - our first goal is Vihren Hut, but because of extremely adverse weather conditions we are forced to change our plans and go down in wet meadows in the Chalin Volog area. Here is sunny and warm, allowing us to find Black-veined White, Eastern Bath White, Purple-shot Copper, Ripart’s Anomalous Blue, Turquoise Blue, Chalk-hill Blue, Adonis Blue, White Admiral, Knapweed Fritillary, Pearly Heath. But undoubtedly the most attention we pay to the Large Blue (Pic. 20th) and Alcon Blue, several copies of which pursue around the surrounding meadows. We enjoyed a nice lunch in the shade of century-old Norway-spruce trees near the rippling brook (Pic. 1). We head to the village of Dobrinište but rain starts and we drive to the hotel. In Dobarsko the sky is slightly clearing and we take the opportunity to stroll around, where we see several Marbled Skipper.
Day 13  Thursday 24th July

Rila Mt Yadenitsa Gorge; near Sestrimo; Malyovitsa.

Weather: sunny and warm lowlands (20°C), cloudy in the mountain (17°C).

Our plans to visit Belmeken again have failed because of extremely bad weather in the highest parts of the mountains and we are forced to stop at the foot, where around Yadenitsa River we find various types of Whites, Long-tailed Blue, Eastern Short-tailed Blue (Pic. 21), Meleager's Blue, Adonis Blue, Common Glider, Dingy Skipper. Time to move on and we stop next to blossoming Buddlea-bushes near Sestrimo. Among the beautiful blooming vegetation of the nearby meadow we watch Lattice Brown, Cardinal, Silver-washed Fritillary, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Orbed Red Underwing (Hungarian) Skipper, Dingy Skipper. A little later we find mating pair Lesser Fiery Coppers (Pic. 22), but the main attraction are few quite fresh Dryad, including a mating pair (Pic. 23). For lunch we reach the hotel, nestled in the northern foothills of the Rila Mountain and then we climb to the foot of Malyovitsa, where are active only Large Ringlet and Large Wall Brown. We finish the day with a walk along the hotel after dinner and retire to a rest before tomorrow.

Day 14  Friday 25th July

Rila Mt; Iskar Valley.

Weather: sunny and warm, still (17°C÷23°C).

With the cabin lift we take to the high zone of Rila. Within half an hour we cross over 1000 meters displacement - from 1300 meters to over 2300 meters! A great opportunity to enjoy the majesty of the Rila Mountain and its nature. Our main goal here is Cynthia's Fritillary, and the beginning is promising we are just coming down and we find Eastern Large Heath and Dewy Ringlet. Above the meadows are flying Nicholl's Ringlet (Pic. 24th) and Small Tortoiseshells. Yet here we see the first Cynthia's Fritillary (Pic. 25) - very fresh female! On the next meadow we find several males and then - females and everyone manage to make excellent pictures. Interesting is also Dusky Grizzled Skipper. Slightly tired but very happy we descend in Borovets, where among the foliage of a tree is Hungarian Glider. In the valley of Iskar River we stop at two more places where we find Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary, Holly Blue, Lesser Purple Emperor, White Admiral, Map Butterfly.

Day 15  Saturday 26th July

Iskar Valley.

Weather: sunny and warm, still (23°C).

We take off to Sofia, but still have enough time to stop again in the valley of Iskar River, where we enjoy the same species as yesterday afternoon, but in addition also Scarce Swallowtail, Mountain Argus, Common Glider (Pic. 26), Peacock, Red Admiral, Great Banded Grayling. And just like saying Goodbye and come again! few Lesser Purple emperor (Pic. 27) land next to the road and allow a serie of excellent photos.

In total - two weeks spent in the most interesting and picturesque places in the Balkans and 143 species of butterflies! Also 120 species of birds.
Pic.1. The group in Rila Mts. Left to right: Bruce Graham, Leif Gabrielsen, Mario Langourov, John Jones, Colin Matthews, Keith Gould, Eileen Gould

Pic.2. Balkan Coppers (*Lycaena candens*) - pair

Pic.3. Clouded Apollo (*Parnassius mnemosyne*)
Pic. 4. Iolas Blue (*Iolana iolas*)

Pic. 5. Balkan Marbled White (*Melanargia larissa*)

Pic. 6. Lattice Brown (*Kirinia roxelana*)

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

Pic. 8. Blue Argus (*Aricia anteros*)

Pic. 9. Macedonian Grayling (*Pseudochazara cingovskii*)
Pic. 10. Great Sooty Satyr (*Satyrus ferula*)

Pic. 11. Apollo (*Parnassius apollo*)

Pic. 12. Freyer’s Fritillary (*Melitaea arduinna*)

Pic. 13. Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*)

Pic. 14. Mediterranean Skipper (*Gegenes nostrodamus*)

Pic. 15. Chapman’s Blue (*Polyommatus thersites*)
Pic. 16. Eastern Rock Grayling (*Hipparchia syriaca*)

Pic. 17. Escher's Blue (*Polyommatus escheri*)

Pic. 18. Phalakron Anomalous Blue (*Polyommatus eleniae*)

Pic. 19. Eastern Baton Blue (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*)

Pic. 20. Large Blue (*Maculinea arion*)

Pic. 21. Eastern Short-tailed Blue (*Cupido decoloratus*)
Pic. 22. Lesser Fiery Copper \((Lycaena thersamon)\)

Pic. 23. Dryad \((Minois dryas)\)

Pic. 24. Nicholl's Ringlet \((Erebia rhodopensis)\)

Pic. 25. Cynthia's Fritillary \((Euphydryas cynthia)\)

Pic. 26. Common Glider \((Neptis sappho)\)

Pic. 27. Lesser Purple Emperor \((Apatura ilia)\)