

WILD ECHO

Butterflies of the West Balkan - Bulgaria and Serbia

Sunday 18th - Thursday 29th June 2017

Trip report by Dr. Mario Langourov

Tour leader: Dr. Mario Langourov¹

Tour participants: Mr. Richard Belding
Mr. Mark Cadey
Mr. Ian Cadey
Mr. Derek Longhurst

Bulgaria, 18th – 24th June

Serbia, 24th – 28th June

Day 1 Sunday 18th June

Bulgaria – Outbound from Sofia; en route to Dragoman; Ponor Mt.

Weather: overcast, cool to cold (11.5°C÷9.5°C).

Just before noon I picked up Derek (he has arrived the day before) from his hotel in Sofia and together we went to Terminal 2, where the other participants landed. After a nice lunch in our hotel we head for our first butterfly stop. The weather conditions were far from perfect ones, but first we decided to stop in a roadside meadow, where among the lush greenery we got thousands Black-veined Whites! They were everywhere – on the grasses, branches of the bushes, flowers... We found also all their stages – eggs, caterpillars, chrysalids. A single species but so many photography options! Going further we managed to find rusting Freyer's Fritillary - another nice photography object. Very few other species here - Amanda's Blue (Pic. 2), Common Blue, Pearly Heath, Heath Fritillary. Our next goal for the day were secluded limestone hills, cut by some small streams – a place, where the extremely rare and local in Europe Spinose Skipper is in abundance. The temperature was very low but still we found sixteen species, including Osiris Blue, Green-underside Blue, Blue Argus (Pic. 3), Sooty Copper, Russian Heath. Undoubtedly the prize was a Spinose Skipper (Pic. 4), rusting on the flower of the foodplant! We spent another half an hour around but the time was progressing imperceptibly and we set off to the hotel.

Day 2 Monday 19th June

Ponor Mt; Upper Iskar Valley.

Weather: cloudy and rainy; some sunny periods late PM (12°C÷23°C).

¹ All photos in this report were taken during the holiday by ©Mario Langourov

First we visited the slopes of limestone hills, where we met Niobe Fritillary, hiding among the grasses and provided an excellent opportunity for photographers. Some other interesting Fritillary species were represented around - Twin-spot Fritillary, Weaver's Fritillary and Glanville Fritillary. On the flower of fragrant thyme nectaring Sloe Hairstreak and Eros Blue. Four species of Heats occurred together here - Russian Heath (Pic. 5), Pearly Heath, Chestnut Heath and Small Heath. Dark rainy clouds begin to accumulate, covering the entire sky, so we decide to change the place with a distant one and drove to the Iskar River Valley. It seems we just have missed the rain here and discovered rusting around the only one for the entire tour Zephyr Blue (Pic. 6), together with Yellow-banded Skipper, Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Ringlet. Above our heads gliding some Common Gliders. Not far from there, among the fresh greenery, we found numerous White Admirals, Woodland Ringlets, and near the surrounding rocks - Chequered Blues, even a mating pair (Pic. 7). In the late afternoon we visited the shores of a bird paradise - the Dragoman marsh. On the rare bushes we saw Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell, low over the ground flew Weaver's Fritillary, and several Southern Festoon-larvae were looking for a suitable place for pupation. The Blues are represented only by Adonis Blue. Later the weather improves, even the Sun smile through the clouds and on a damp ground we discovered mudpuddling Mountain Small White (Pic. 8). It was about time to retire to the comfort of the hotel and enjoy the dinner.

Day 3 Tuesday 20th June

Mala Mt.

Weather: sunny with occasional clouds PM; warm (22°C).

Our goal for the day were secluded limestone hills, cut by small streams. Near one of the many karst springs we enjoyed Duke of Burgundy Fritillary, Scarce Swallowtail and many of Blues, including Reverdin's Blue, Amanda's Blue and Mazarine Blue. Not far from there numbers of Skippers mudpuddling. Among them were Spinose Skipper, Dingy Skipper, Yellow-banded Skipper (Pic. 9) and numerous of Safflower Skippers. Going further we managed to found Green-underside Blue, Berger's Clouded Yellow, Tufted Marbled Skipper. Among the many Blue Arguses we encounter several mating pairs and we had the wonderful opportunity to compare the similar species Osiris Blue and Small Blue. Near murmurous river we enjoyed our picnic lunch and with new strength we started to explore the beautiful river valley. Not far from there near a small spring we found very fresh Large Copper (Pic. 10) and spent quarter of an hour taking pictures from different positions. During our further walk, around us fly over Almond-eyed Ringlet and Woodland Ringlet. Finally in a blossoming meadow we discovered several stems of Lizard Orchid together with Nickerl's Fritillary, Hungarian Skipper, Alcon Blue eggs and on the branches around us landed and posed Speckled Wood. In humid places there were large gatherings of various Blues, among them it is worth to note Turquoise Blue (Pic. 11) and Eros Blue, but also Southern Small White and Large Wall Brown. It was time to take the deserved rest after a successful day, so we drove back to our hotel.

Day 4 Wednesday 21st June

Yazova Mt.

Weather: sunny with brief cloudy periods late PM; hot (~30°C).

We took to the next base – Chiprovtsi, but before that we stopped in a roadside flowering meadow. In the semi dry habitat we found Great Banded Grayling, Spotted Fritillary, Swallowtail, Silver-studded Blue and in the branches of a nearby tree a movement take our attention – Lattice Brown. It was time to continue and our next stop near the shore of clear mountain river. Immediately our attention was attracted by exclusively local in Europe but too common in these parts of the peninsula Freyer's Fritillary. They were everywhere - congregated along the puddles, nectaring on the flowers of the blackberry bushes, patrolled... The main attraction was an egg-laying female (Pic. 12). Not long after among many Scarce Coppers we found Purple-shot Copper (Pic. 13) in cooperative disposition and roadside patrolled Small Copper. Because of abundance of the foodplant around us in good number were Map Butterfly, Red Admiral and Peacock. On the way back, we noticed Short-tailed Blue and in the branches of the trees near the river Freyer's Purple Emperor. Brief stop in the restaurant

of our magnificent hotel for lunch and we headed to highland of Yazova Mt. Among the folds of the hills and near the small mountain streams we saw our first Large Tortoiseshell and High Brown Fritillary, over us among the lower branches flew Lattice Brown (Pic. 14), which we managed to photograph. The surrounding meadows provided excellent opportunities for different types of Skippers, including the Small and Essex Skipper. Along the river we saw at least two specimens of Poplar Admiral (Pic. 15)! They sucked salts and periodically described wide circles around us, returning back to the starting position and allowing to everyone to shoot them from different angles. In the nearby wet meadow bright glimmers caught our eyes - Large Copper. Under the light wine of the hotel we enjoyed the delicious traditional dinner and chatted with the hospitable owners.

Day 5 Thursday 22nd June

Chiprovtsi Mt.

Weather: sunny, than cloudy with scattered T-storms; warm (20°C÷31°C).

With a Russian military machine, skillfully driven through rough terrain from the son of the local bus-carrier, we reached 1800 m – the zone of recently discovered in Bulgaria Violet Copper. Just get off and we encountered the first of them, and when we walked along a small stream, counted more than twenty of Violet Coppers (Pic. 16) and all managed to make beautiful photographs of butterflies of both sexes. Veni, our driver came with one of them nicely posing on a stick... Besides them here occurred only half of dozen species but in a significant number we saw Chequered Skippers, Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells. On the roadside scarp patrolling Nothern Wall Brown and between the leafs next to the stream – Holly Blue. When finished here we moved down, where, away from human roar, among the quiet of the mountain, fresh air and beautiful views of the valley and surrounding peaks we had picnic lunch. Surrounding mountain meadows are full of life among others here we can highlight the typical mountain species Bulgarian Ringlet (Pic. 17), Eastern Large Heath, Bright-eyed Ringlet. It was time to take the road back to the town, stopping at several places on the way down. Further down in a large flowering meadow we found Mountain Argus and Geranium Argus (Pic. 18), and not far from them patrolled Balkan Copper (Pic. 19), just like ruby in a color string. Some other species around were Sooty Copper, Ilex Hairstreak, Mazarine Blue, Niobe Fritillary, Almond-eyed Ringlet. During the dinner we dipped in an atmosphere of old times with the explanation and demonstration of our hostess for traditional Chiprovski kilim rugs, brought fame to the town and far beyond the borders of the country.

Day 6 Friday 23rd June

St Nikola Mt.

Weather: sunny and hot (30°C÷35°C).

The day was dedicated to exploring the surroundings and visiting different areas in the mountain. The weather is wonderful and roadside meadows was crawling with butterflies – among them Eastern Bath White and all four species of Golden Skippers - Lulworth Skipper, Essex Skipper, Small Skipper, Large Skipper. We spent considerable time on a wonderful posing Cardinal and Brimstone and to photograph them from different angles. It is worth to note Twin-spot Fritillary (Pic. 20), but it seems that the greatest interest got the magnificent glows of at least three Purple Emperors. There were many mudpuddling butterflies - different Blues, Mountain Argus, Map Butterfly, Large Tortoiseshell. On the scarps posing Wall Brown, and Common Glider fly over our heads. The biggest surprise still to come – on the way back I spotted on the road elusive False Comma (Pic. 22)! So, we spent half an hour around trying to take the perfect shot. Nicely shaded area with gazebo provided us a great opportunity for picnic lunch. In the semi dry river valley we found Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Great Banded Grayling, White Admiral, Comma and Blue-spot Hairstreaks nectaring on Elder flowers. It was time to shift our attention to our main target and soon around us flew Freyer's Purple Emperor (Pic. 21), it described several rounds and landed on the roadside tree. After that we were on a pleasant walk along the banks of clear mountain river, where mudpuddling Eastern Baton Blue (Pic. 23), Meleager's Blue, False Heath Fritillary, Marbled Skipper (Pic. 24), Dingy Skipper. On the branches of the surrounding trees we saw Common Glider and Delattin's Grayling, they periodically went down to the river banks. Among the branches of a bush we found

Lattice Brown and our next False Comma. What a magnificent day! It was time for returning to the hotel and after dinner we took the deserved rest.

Day 7 Saturday 24th June

Bulgaria – St Nikola Mt, Belogradchik Rocks; **Serbia** – Babin Zub.

Weather: sunny and warm (30°C÷22°C).

Before we take over the folds of the Balkan Mountains to the Western Outlands (occupied by Serbia) we decided to take a look at the several river valleys. The very first butterfly today is again False Comma, even represented with at least two specimens! Not far from there we observed Lesser Purple Emperor. Near the flowers flew large number of big butterflies as Swallowtail, Cardinal (Pic. 25), Silver-washed Fritillary, High Brown Fritillary. In the meadows around Glanville Fritillaries and Heath Fritillaries chased each other and on the cartroad landed Purple Emperors (Pic. 26). Climbing higher we found a number of species, among them it is worth to note False Heath Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Amanda's Blue, Mazarine Blue, Scarce Copper, Chequered Skipper and Balkan Gorldenring, nicely posing on a stick. After our picnic lunch we made a brief stop near the majestic forms of Belogradchik Rocks, where nature has created thousands of shapes, associated from locals with fairy tale characters: The Horsemen, The School girl, mushrooms and various animals. Here we encountered Scarce relatively numerous Chequered Blue, which were great material for the photographers. Next was transition on the winding road and through isolated villages, than crossing the border, some more winding road and eventually we reached the region of Babin Zub. We accommodated at the hotel, located at the footslopes of the mountain and offered comfortable stay and delicious home-made food.

Day 8 Sunday 25th June

Serbia – Babin Zub.

Weather: sunny and warm (25°C).

We started from the highest part of the mountain (about 2000 meters) to take advantage of the good weather. In this area, the meadows are covered with a variety of flowering plants and are home to a number of interesting species. Large number of Balkan Copper, Northern Wall Brown and a few Ringlets - Bulgarian Ringlet, Almond-eyed Ringlet (Pic. 27), Bright-eyed Ringlet met us. Not long after we found the first one of many Bog Fritillary (Pic. 28) and paid its appropriate attention. Exemplars of both sexes posed on the flowers of Bistort, offering a wealth of material for photographers. Imperceptibly time progressed and we had a lunch among the fresh mountain air and the panoramic view. We spent the afternoon in the company of the above mentioned species, but also Russian Heath, Eros Blue (Pic. 29), Eastern Large Heath, Brimstone and even Lesser Spotted Fritillary. In the late afternoon we moved lower down on the mountain slopes and in a sheltered glade we found several False Heath Fritillaries and Chequered Skippers (Pic. 30), followed by Tufted Marbled Skipper, Freyer's Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary, Chestnut Heath. Above our heads flew Poplar Admiral, together with White Admiral and on the flowers was Duke of Burgundy Fritillary. And again, we enjoyed the local rarity False Comma! In the late afternoon slightly tired but extremely satisfied we took a beer or wine in our family-run hotel.

Day 9 Monday 26th June

Serbia – Golema Reka & Bigar Waterfall.

Weather: sunny and hot (30°C÷35°C).

The day started with perfect weather, again. One of the first objects we enjoyed was the spectacular glow of wings of Purple Emperor, which was extremely photogenic. On the surrounding vegetation we found masses of butterflies - among them the most numerous were Freyer's Fritillaries, Marbled Fritillary, Glanville

Fritillary, together with Purple-shot Copper and Scarce Copper. In a sheltered meadow, full of flowers, we found several Nickerl's Fritillaries and Green Hairstreaks, followed by Eastern Bath White. At midday the sun smiled and butterflies were very active - Mountain Argus, Amanda's Blue, Mazarine Blue, Mallow Skipper. Above our heads flew Common Gliders (Pic. 31) and White Admirals, together with Silver-washed Fritillary and on the flowers were a number of other large Fritillaries and Large Grizzled Skipper. After pleasant lunch in a roadside restaurant we moved to the Bigar Waterfall. There we found more than forty species of butterflies! Undoubtedly the biggest attraction here were Lesser Purple Emperor. We spent some time to enjoy the species patrolling on the branches of an alder, than flying again and again and coming back to the same place, little later mudpuddling next to our feet. On the river shores there were many other mudpuddling butterflies - Short-tailed Blue, Eastern Short-tailed Blue, Small Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Knapweed Fritillary. On humid places roadside perched Lulworth Skipper and Spotted Fritillary. At the end of the day in a small meadow we found a number of Large Blues (Pic. 32), so we spent twenty minutes more, chasing them around. The time was passing by fast and we have had no choice, but starting back to the hotel.

Day 10 Tuesday 27th June

Serbia – Bigar Waterfall & Chiprovtsi Mt: Zavoj.

Weather: sunny and hot (30°C).

Today we started with brief early vits to Bigar Waterfall and here to our yesterday's friend Lesser Purple Emperor (Pic. 33) joins Purple Emperor. On the damp sand nicely posing some Blues, Swallowtail and High Brown Fritillary. Continue further along the road, at a place brief movement attracts my eye, so decided to stop. It was Large Tortoiseshell, so after years of attempts Derek finally has his perfect shot! Soon comes another specimen plus some other species – Chequered Blue, Delattin's Grayling, Scarce Swallowtail, Marbled Skipper. The weather was very favorable - sunny and warm, so the butterfly activity is very high. We had picnic lunch in a nice gazebo just above a whispering river. The flowers of the surrounding plants were covered with butterflies and the first we met were numerous of Apollo (Pic. 34), landing two or three together at the same flower. We scattered ourselves across the meadow, each searched the desired shot and when we were satisfied, moved on. A little bit further we paid attention to Woodland Grayling, seeking for the shadows of the trees. In the early afternoon we encountered Hungarian Glider (Pic. 35), many Meleager's Blues (Pic. 36) and Southern Small White, which escaped us so far. By the end of the day it is worth to note several Blues, including Idas Blue, Reverdin's Blue, and Ilex Hairstreak, Yellow-banded Skipper. Shortly before retiring to the hotel for the farewell dinner we saw patrolled Mountain Argus and several Large Blue – an excellent finish for this saturated day, so we headed to our last base, situated near Pirot.

Day 11 Wednesday 28th June

Serbia – Rudina Mt.

Weather: sunny, humid and warm (29°C).

The weather is excellent - sunny and warm, the butterflies activity is high, so will have another fantastic day! After breakfast we headed to the lowest limestone slopes of the mountain and here we were really lucky - Delattin's Grayling, Berger's Clouded Yellow, Safflower Skipper, Pearly Heath met us and the joint meeting with Nickerl's Fritillary and Heath Fritillary was a great opportunity for comparison. The walk for exploring the surrounding area brought more Osiris Blue, Hungarian Skipper and Reverdin's Blue. On blooming thyme particularly active were Blue-spot Hairstreak and Sloe Hairstreak, on the leaves of Cross Gentian were eggs of Alcon Blue. We payed some attention of Alcon Blues (Pic. 37), Chequered Blue, Turquoise Blue and some of the orchids around. Southern White Admiral (Pic. 38) posing perfectly on the leaves exactly at the eye level, so we grab the chance. A little bit further we fell in the kingdom of the Great Sooty Satyr (Pic. 39) – at least six fluttering around, together with Weaver's Fritillary (Pic. 40), Niobe Fritillary, Dark Green Fritillary, Twin-spot Fritillary, Speckled Wood. On the way back, we discovered very interesting aberration of Spotted Fritillary (Pic. 41)! After our last picnic lunch in the mountain freshness, we started to explore the surroundings. The

flowers around were covered with butterflies and the first we met were Yellow-banded Skipper and Large Copper. By the end of the day it is worth to note nearly all large and attractive Emperors and Admirals - Purple Emperor, Lesser Purple Emperor, Poplar Admiral, White Admiral, Common Glider, Hungarian Glider. What a great finish for this saturated day, and for the tour in general!

Day 12 Thursday 29th June

Transfer to Sofia Airport.

We took the road to Sofia, but unfortunately we had no time to stop again, so we headed to the airport to meet again in the forthcoming years.

The tour total came to the impressive 122 butterfly species (plus one as a caterpillar only)!



Pic.1. The group at Belogradchik Rocks. Left to right: Mark, Richard, Mario, Derek, Ian



Pic.2. Amanda's Blue (*Polyommatus amandus*)



Pic.3. Blue Argus (*Plebejus anteros*)



Pic.4. Spinose Skipper (*Muschampia cribrellum*)



Фиг.5. Russian Heath (*Coenonympha leander*)



Pic.6. Zephyr Blue (*Plebejus sephirus*)



Pic.7. Chequered Blue (*Scolitantides orion*)



Pic.8. Mountain Small White (*Pieris ergane*)



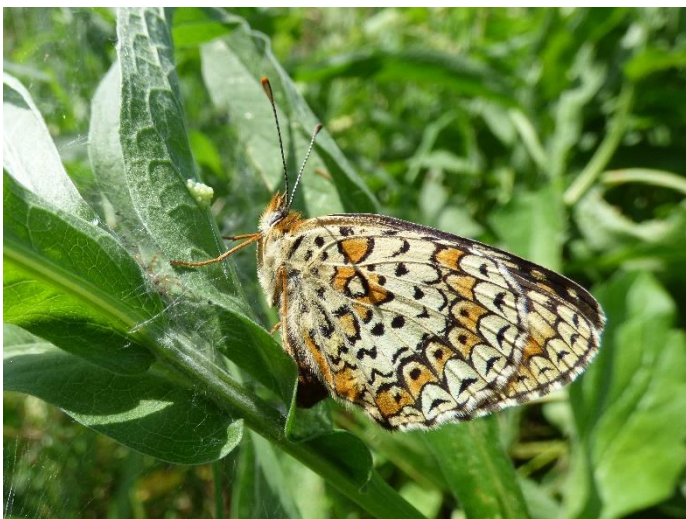
Pic.9. Yellow-banded Skipper (*Pyrgus sidae*)



Pic.10. Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*)



Фиг.11. Turquoise Blue (*Polyommatus dorylas*)



Pic.12. Freyer's Fritillary (*Melitaea arduinna*) , egg-laying



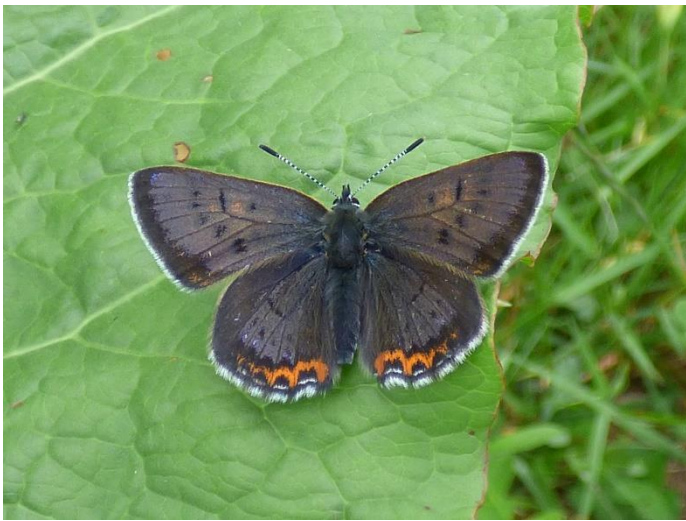
Pic.13. Purple-shot Copper (*Lycaena alciphron*)



Pic.14. Lattice Brown (*Kirinia roxelana*)



Pic.15. Poplar Admiral (*Limenitis populi*)



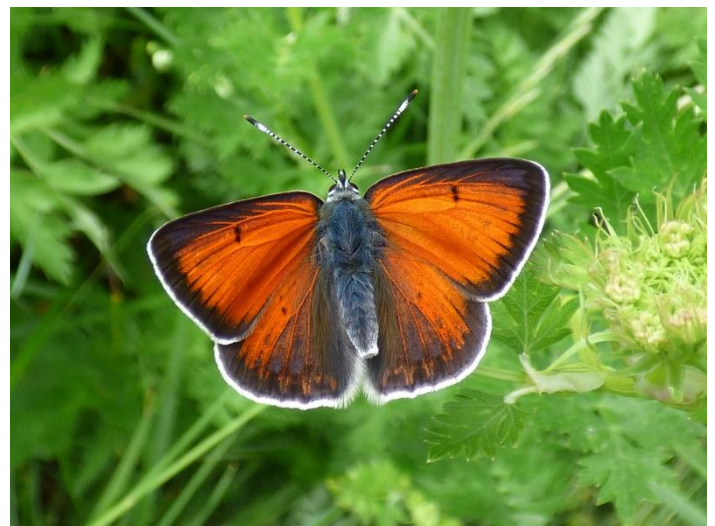
Pic.16. Violet Copper (*Lycaena helle*)



Фиг.17. Bulgarian Ringlet (*Erebia orientalis*)



Pic.18. Geranium Argus (*Eumedonia eumedon*)



Pic.19. Balkan Copper (*Lycaena candens*)



Pic.20. Twin-spot Fritillary (*Lycaena candens*)



Pic.21. Freyer's Purple Emperor (*Plebejus sephirus*)



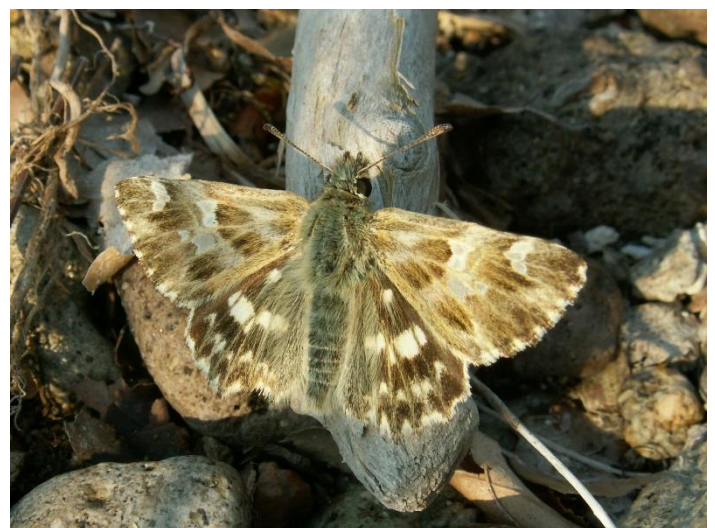
Pic.22. False Comma (*Nymphalis vaualbum*)



Фиг.22. False Comma (*Nymphalis vaualbum*),
underside



Pic.23. Eastern Baton Blue (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*)



Pic.24. Marbled Skipper (*Carcharodus lavatherae*)



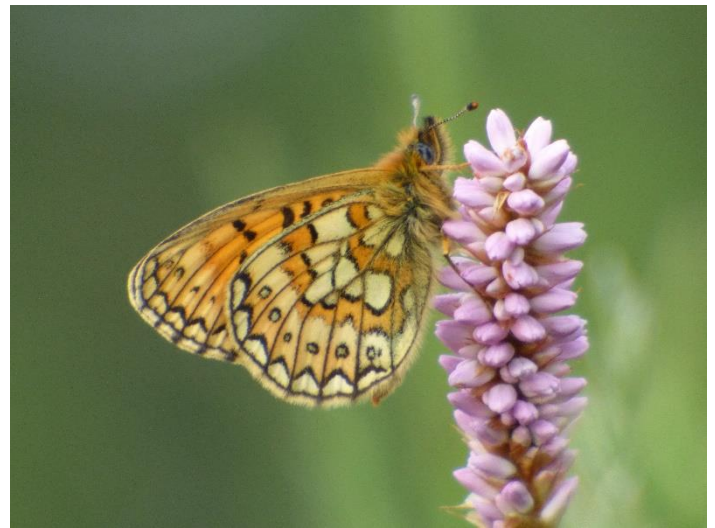
Pic.25. Cardinal (*Argynnis pandora*)



Pic.26. Purple Emperor (*Apatura iris*)



Pic.27. Almond-eyed Ringlet (*Erebia alberganus*)



Фиг.28. Bog Fritillary (*Clossiana eunomia*)



Pic.29. Eros Blue (*Polyommatus eros*)



Pic.30. Chequered Skipper (*Carterocephalus palaemon*)



Pic.31. Common Glider (*Neptis sappho*)



Pic.32. Large Blue (*Maculinea arion*)



Pic.33. Lesser Purple Emperor (*Apatura ilia*)



Pic.34. Apollo (*Parnassius apollo*)



Pic.35. Hungarian Glider (*Neptis rivularis*)



Pic.36. Meleager's Blue (*Polyommatus daphnis*)



Pic.37. Alcon Blue (*Maculinea alcon*), egg-laying



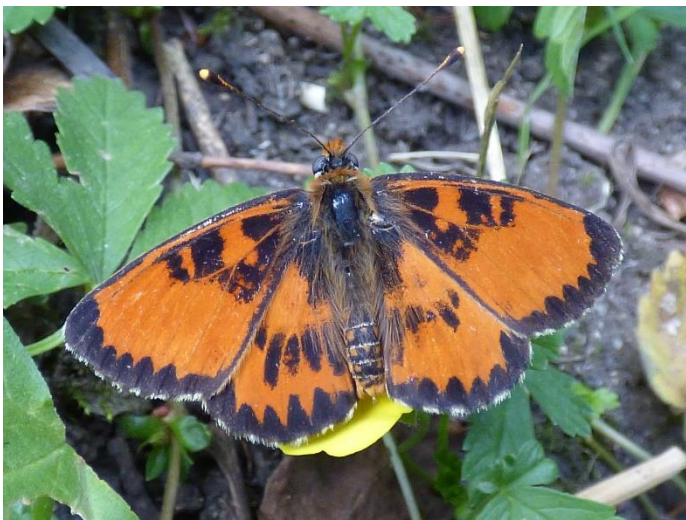
Pic.38. Southern White Admiral (*Limenitis reducta*)



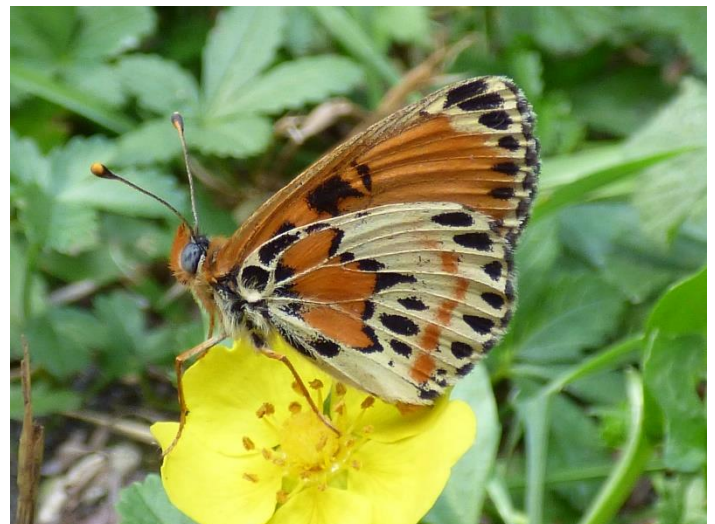
Pic.39. Great Sooty Satyr (*Satyrus ferula*)



Pic.40. Weaver's Fritillary (*Clossiana dia*)



Pic.41. Spotted Fritillary aberration (*Melitaea didyma*)



Pic.41. Spotted Fritillary aberration (*Melitaea didyma*), underside

