

WILD ECHO

Scarce Butterflies

Bulgaria

Tuesday 30th May - Sunday 11th June 2017

Trip report by Dr. Mario Langourov

Tour leader: Dr. Mario Langourov¹
Tour participants: Mr. Maurice Pugh
Mr. Samuel Keith Beswick
Mr. Ian McLean
Mr. Ian Lawson
Mrs. Sally Irlen
Mr. David Irlen
Mrs. Rosie Powell
Mr. Dan Powell
Mrs. Denise Qualtrough
Mr. Andy Qualtrough

Day 1 Tuesday 30th May

Outbound from Sofia via Danube Plain.

After we all gathered at Sofia Airport, we headed to our first base - Ostrovche SPA complex, pleasantly nestled among the huge trees of an old Lime forest and away from the noise of civilization. Before we arrived we made a brief stop near Veliko Tarnovo, where we can refresh, relax and enjoy the sunny weather. Have a nice dinner in the open-air restaurant with the noise of the tree leaves and the song of the Nightingales. Rosie surprised me with a nice gift - a gorgeous Gunner's Orange Tips' picture - a species we observed with them the previous year during the Early Butterfly Tour.

Day 2 Wednesday 31st May

N of Razgrad; Sveshtari Thracian Tombs.

Weather: AM cloudy with sunny spells, light rain; PM sunny and warm (~ 26°C).

After breakfast we set off to our first target – Razgrad surroundings. It wasn't long before we stopped to take a look at the roadside meadows. Here several Large Coppers (Pic. 2) met us, so everyone is rushing to take a dreamed picture – first fifteen minutes imperceptibly fly away. Not far from there we found our first Chestnut Heaths, followed by Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper and Silver-studded Blue. Besides the ubiquitous Eastern Bath White, Small White, Green-veined White, Brown Argus, Common Blue, Meadow Brown and Small Heath most numerous are Eastern Festoons (Pic. 3) and Ilex Hairstreaks. At one moment a mass of people run chaotic,

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

chasing their perfect Eastern Festoon picture. After that we were on a pleasant walk along the banks of a small stream, where we saw several Orange Tips, Berger's Clouded Yellows, Lesser Spotted Fritillaries. After our nice lunch in Ispirih town we headed to the nearby situated riverbank wood and small meadows. The main attraction here were numerous Scarce Fritillaries (Pic. 4), so we spent nearly an hour there, enjoying their company. Meanwhile, on a nearby bush we observed egg-laying Black Hairstreak (Pic. 5). In addition to patrolling Scarce Fritillaries, Common Gliders and Speckled Woods is flying over our heads. Going further we managed to found Eastern Short-tailed Blue, Reverdin's Blue, Holly Blue, Small Blue and Scarce Swallowtail. Our next impressive finding is a very cooperative Freyer's Purple Emperor. Initially it was mudpuddling on the ground, then described several rounds and landed on the roadside tree and finally back again on the track. In the meantime, Andy caught an Aesculapian Snake, so we spent another several minutes taking pictures of it. We finished the day, making some pictures of our latest discovery – a fresh Clouded Apollo.

Day 3 Thursday 01st June

Ostrovche Wood; Sveshtari Thracian Tombs; Voynovo Reservoir.

Weather: sunny & warm; some clouds PM (26°C-28°C).

Before we set off northeast to Tervel we decided to pay attention to the forest close to the hotel. It proved to be a good move – we were able to make comparisons between yesterday's Eastern Short-tailed Blue and Provencal Short-tailed Blue. Here we also saw the first of many Pearly Heaths and also an egg-laying Green-underside Blue. We headed to the meadows and hoped to find Freyer's Fritillary. Here besides Glanville and Knapweed Fritillaries most numerous were Adonis Blues and Queen of Spain Fritillaries. On a profusely blooming bush by the roadside nectaring Cardinal, and on the road mudpuddling Eastern Baton Blue (Pic. 6). Shortly after that we stopped at the cultural attraction scheduled for the day - the unique Thracian tomb in Sveshtari village, enlisted on the UNESCO World Heritage List! We viewed it, we listening the fascinating talk which turned as back thousands of years ago to the zenith of the Thracian culture. After it we spent some time at its surroundings and amongst the usual swarms of butterflies we have to mention the longhorn beetle *Morimus asper funereus* (Pic. 7). We continued our way and it wasn't long before we stopped to take a look at the meadows near Voynovo village. It is worth to note Idas Blues and Lesser Spotted Fritillary, but it seems that the greatest interest got several Chequered Blues (Pic. 8). In the late afternoon slightly tired but extremely satisfied we took a beer or wine in our family-run hotel, situated in a magnificent old forest. Due to the group size and varied orders, preparing the dinner takes a little more time, but eventually everything is ready and consumed with appetite.

Day 4 Friday 02nd June

Suha Reka Valley.

Weather: sunny & hot (31°C).

Our main goal for the day was the valley of Suha reka, and we first headed to the Scarce Fritillaries site, they were everywhere around – nectaring on the blossoms of the elder and many males patrolling on the leaves of the surrounding trees. We found also several mating pairs! Because the bus was too big and couldn't enter the valley, I had to carry the products for the lunch and store them under the thick shadows of the light forest. In the side valleys we found Dingy Skipper, Mallow Skipper, Brimstone, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Comma. Another nice species to add to our list was Lesser Fiery Copper (Pic. 9). Here we had the wonderful opportunity to compare the similar species Oriental Marbled Skipper and Tufted Marbled Skipper. After we enjoyed a picnic lunch under the shadows a few big trees we started to explore the surrounding slopes where besides the above species we also found Black and Green Hairstreaks, Large Copper, Pearly and Chestnut Heaths. In the semi dry river valley we found nectaring on Elder flowers several large Fritillaries - Silver-washed Fritillary, Cardinal, Niobe Fritillary. On the roadside scarp patrolling Wall Brown and at the more humid places – Eastern Festoon and Clouded Apollo (Pic. 10). There's a lot of Clouded Yellows flying in a migratory mode, which after careful inspection, prove to be Pale Clouded Yellow (Pic. 11). In the late afternoon slightly tired but

extremely satisfied we took a beer or wine under the deep oak shade of the terrace of our hotel. Tonight the hotel staff are already trained, so the dishes comes even faster than expected!

Day 5 Saturday 03rd June

N of Kotel.

Weather: rain with T-storms; cloudy PM (20°C).

Today our goal is the area just north of Kotel, where among other species occurs Spinose Skipper. Rain clouds quickly gathered above us and it wasn't long before the first deafening thunders were heard. Wellaway, the weather was not favorable to us, and wherever we went in the area heavy rain poured over us... The sky was blackened and stooped and there were no prospects of improvement, for that reason we headed to a culture sign – The Madara Rider. The Madara Rider is a unique relief, an exceptional work of art, created during the first years of the formation of the Bulgarian Empire, at the beginning of the 8th century. It is the only relief of its kind, having no parallel in Europe and is enlisted on the UNESCO World Heritage List. At the footslopes of the rocky massif we had a nice lunch and then continued south to the chain of Stara planina mountain. Just south of Turgovishte rain stoped and the weather brighten up, so in a roadside meadow we made a butterfly try. Here we met our first Marsh and Nickerl's Fritillaries and Black-veined Whites, together with Mazarine Blue, Amanda's Blue. Not long after among some Purple-shot Coppers we found Twin-spot Fritillary (Pic. 12) in cooperative disposition and roadside patrolled Large Grizzled Skipper and Hungarian Skipper. When finished we continued to the picturesque Renaissance Zheravna village. After a short refreshment in the hotel, despite the gloomy sky, some of the group went for a walk along the cobblestone streets among old wooden houses of the village, that together with its surroundings is proclaimed for an architectural reserve.

Day 6 Sunday 04th June

Stara Planina Mt – Razboina Ridge & Sinite Kamani (The Blue Stones) Nature Park.

Weather: cloudy; late PM sunny; still, warm (18°C÷23°C).

After the breakfast we headed to the Balkan Mountains and Nature Park “Sinite Kamani” – The Blue Stones to look for some mountain species. Even at the footslopes of the park we stopped at some meadows, where particularly numerous were Marsh Fritillaries (Pic. 13), Large Coppers and Purple-shot Coppers. Alongside them we found Eastern Dappled White, Tufted Marbled and Mallow Skippers. Of special interest is simultaneously finding both species Eastern Festoon and Southern Festoon (Pic. 14), which typically have different flight periods. This turns out to be the only place during the tour where we found Marbled Fritillary. Andy's catch here was a Smooth Snake (Pic. 15), followed by another brief photosession... After a picnic lunch in a pavilion with panoramic view we started our walk around. Most of the species here roosting on the stems of grasses around and were pretty cooperative. We saw our first Woodland Ringlets, Russian Heaths and Pearl-bordered Fritillary. Several species of orchids were also seen around - Violet Limodore, Fragrant Orchid, White Helleborine, Monkey Orchid, Bird's-nest Orchid. In a roadside meadow near the rocks we encountered very numerous Blue Arguses (Pic. 16) and Geranium Arguses, which were great material for the photographers, not far from there were also Yellow-banded Skipper and at least two Duke of Burgundy Fritillaries (Pic. 17). Little further we encountered Clouded Apollos, Niobe Fritillary, Small Tortoiseshell, Mazarine Blue, Green-underside Blue (Pic. 18) and Scarce Chaser. It was time for returning to the hotel and after dinner we took the deserved rest.

Day 7 Monday 05th June

Near Zheravna Village; Kotel Pass.

Weather: sunny and warm to hot, still (23°C÷30°C).

In search of Tessellated Skipper we turn our attention to the flowering meadows of Stara Planina mountain. On flowers here shimmering various Fritillaries, including Spotted, Lesser Spotted and Niobe Fritillaries, we saw also Russian Heath (Pic. 19), Hungarian Skipper, Scarce Swallowtail, Wall Brown. Not long after, the scream of the mountain calm - the first Tessellated Skipper (Pic. 20)! It is relatively well represented here and everyone has the chance to find a personal specimen and make the desired pictures. As we crawl around, we manage to disturb few Eros Blues (Pic. 21) and Twin-spot Fritillaries. Particularly numerous on the blooming Geraniums were Geranium Argus (Pic. 22), which became one of the main attractions. Among others, it is worth to mention a mating pair of Yellow-banded Skipper (Pic. 23). After the light lunch in the hotel, we decided to go to one of the habitats of another very rare species - Spinose Skipper. Alas, in this zone grazing is significant and all the surrounding meadows were overgrazed... Still, during our walk we found Amanda's Blue, Mazarine Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Eastern Dappled White, Silver-studded Blue. Before we headed to the hotel, we had time for a brief stop in Kotel Pass. The search of known from previous years Lizard Orchid gave no result, but we saw around Nickerl's Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary, Sloe Hairstreak. It was about time to retire to the comfort of the hotel and enjoy the dinner.

Day 8 Tuesday 06th June

Stara Planina Mt - Sinite Kamani Nature Park; Black Sea Coast - Poda Reserve.

Weather: sunny & warm (~ 27°C).

Before we take on the road (in front of us is to transfer our Southern Black Sea Coast), we decided to pay some attention to the lower parts of the National Park "Sinite Kamani"/The Blue Stones, where we can find a number of southern species. At our first stop we found Krueper's Small White, Chequered Blue, Common Glider (Pic. 24), Ilex Hairstreak. David desperately wants to see Iolas Blue (Pic. 25), so I tried to find and after half an hour found it! It was a prize for all of the group and we spent another half an hour around, chasing the perfect picture. After a leisurely lunch at a small restaurant with terrace we continued our exploration around. Our expectations to find a number of southern species were justified here and we saw Nettle-Tree Butterflies (Pic. 26), Marbled Skipper, Delattin's Grayling (Pic. 27), Mountain Argus. The biggest surprise still to come – on the way back we spotted near the road male Cleopatra (Pic. 28), which definitely is a migratory specimen! We continued our journey to the southeast, steeply descending on the forested mountain slopes. While crossing the traffic of Burgas in the late afternoon we stopped at the Poda protected area - paradise for waterfowl birds, located only on a stone's throw from the big city. This has greatly increased our list of birds -pelicans, various herons, ibises, spoonbills, gulls and terns, but certainly the biggest interest was caused by the cormorants nesting at abandoned electric poles. Another reason to stop here is the possibility to find Blotched Snake, but unfortunately not today... The flowering Elders had some butterflies, including Spotted Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary, Eastern Bath White, Small Heath, Mallow Skipper, and on the Birthwort leaves are abundant Southern Festoon caterpillars. We reported strong growth in our list of dragonflies, which was the harbinger of what to expect in the next few days. We barely managed to break away from this beautiful nook and we passed fast on the scenic coastal road the kilometers to Primorsko, where is situated our hotel.

Day 9 Wednesday 07th June

South Black Sea Coast; Veleka River.

Weather: sunny and hot (~ 31°C).

The day started with two short stops near a small sea bay, which produced Great Banded Grayling, Marbled White, Eastern Festoon, Cardinal, Silver-washed Fritillary, Essex Skipper and some others. We managed to find our elusive Freyer's Fritillary (Pic. 29), even Dan found a mating pair! Another interesting finding was Southern Small White, but still no sign of Grecian Copper... One of the relatively common species around here is the largest European lizard - European Glass Lizard and we managed to take a picture of it. It was definitely the happiest day for Andy - he found so dreamed Blotched Snake (Pic. 30), numerous around was also Caspian Whip Snakes. When the heat became unbearable we went to Veleka River, where under the shade of the

riverside gazebo we had our picnic and set off to the river mouth. Our targets here were two –at one side at this place you can find Large Chequered Skipper, and on the other side Freyer's Purple Emperor. Not long after we found our target - Large Chequered Skipper (Pic. 31), posing wonderfully in front of the cameras. Meanwhile on a Christ's Thorn we discovered beautiful male Grecian Copper, so another quarter of hour flew away. A little later female was discovered too. In the late afternoon among the branches of the trees around we found Peacock, Red Admiral, Painted Lady, Speckled Wood, Comma too. After some beers at night with Andy, Dan, Rosie and Denise, we take a stroll through the sand dunes, hoping to find Eastern (Syrian) Spadefoot Toad (Pic. 32). And indeed - in about half an hour we find one of them!

Day 10 Thursday 08th June

Near Stomopolu Marsh; Strandzha Mt – Popovi Skali & Silkosia Reserve.

Weather: AM sunny and warm; PM rain, cool (23°C÷19°C).

We set off towards Stradzha mountain and first decided to check the nearby Stomopolu swamp, situated right next to Primorsko. Among the trees flyed and landed on the trunks Lattice Browns (Pic. 33), and on the flowers we saw Ilex Hairstreak, Pearly Heath, Large Skipper and several Grecian Coppers (Pic. 34). On the herpetological front there were at least three Montpellier Snakes. We spent some time relishing the footprints in the mud, among which were Wild Cat, Golden Jackal, Common Muskrat. Then we moved to the core of the mountain and in the area Popovi skali we stop for a longer walk which brought us both Swallowtails – Common and Scarce, another Eastern Festoon, Large Chequered Skipper, Silver-washed Fritillary, and first for the trip Lulworth Skipper. Along the river we saw at least two specimens of Freyer's Purple Emperor (Pic. 35)! They took salts from the ground and periodically described wide circles around us, returning back to the starting position and allowing to everyone to shoot them from different angles. Under the shade of riparian poplars we enjoyed our picnic lunch. Rain clouds quickly gathered above us and it wasn't long before the first deafening thunders were heard, followed by the first big drops of rain. We hurried to the bus and there was nothing we could do but set off to hotel surroundings. When we reach the region, the rain was already passed, and all the butterflies were roosting and cooperative. Here are found three species of Fritillaries with relatively limited distribution, but undoubtedly the prize was the extremely local Assmann's Fritillary (Pic. 36). So, we spent about an hour, taking pictures from different angles and positions. Of course, we paid some attention on the orchids around us, sometimes combining both objects. We had no choice but to head to our hotel, located in a pristine nature and with fish ponds and attractive for the dragonflies reservoir.

Day 11 Friday 09th June

Strandzha Mt – Bosna, Mladezhka & Veleka Rivers.

Weather: cloudy and cool (~ 18°C).

The whole day was dedicated to the inland of Strandzha mountain. Wellaway, the weather was not favorable to us, and wherever we went in the area the sky was completely covered with clouds and there were no prospects of improvement... We decided to start with Bosna ridge and then to move south. In this part we found Spotted Fritillary, Assmann's Fritillary, Sloe Hairstreak, Silver-studded Blue. At a small meadow we found a number of Marbled Fritillaries (Pic. 37), so we spent twenty minutes more, chasing the perfect picture. Not far from there Dan found several specimens of Scarce Emerald Damselflies (Robust Spreadwing). Our next aim was the valley of Mladezhka river where we had a picnic lunch and then started our exploration of the surroundings. In a large flowering meadow, we found together Spotted and Lesser Spotted Fritillaries (Pic. 38), Glanville Fritillary, and not far from them patrolled Purple-shot Copper (Pic. 39), just like ruby in a color string. In the late afternoon we headed to the largest river in Strandzha – Veleka River. Our hope to find local and interesting dragonflies was ruined because of the weather conditions and Dan was really sad... Here we observed only few species and the highlights were Twin-spot Fritillary and some mating pairs Spotted Fritillary. We didn't forget the traditional now group photo (Pic. 1). We drove back to the hotel, situated in the core of the mountain and we had dinner and a rest before the relatively long transfer on the next day.

Day 12 Saturday 10th June

Besaparian Hills.

Weather: sunny and warm, still (~ 28°C).

We headed west to our last base before the end of the tour – Karabunar. Finally, the weather is with us and today is a wonderful day - the sun smiles merrily and portend high butterfly activity! We stopped at a roadside restaurant for our lunch and in the early afternoon we reached Besaparian limestone hills. Here we had time to thoroughly look almost the bare ground, whose monotony is broken only by rare Christ's Thorn-bushes and flowering plants around them. On the blossoms and on the surrounding stones we found set of colorful butterflies - Eastern Baton Blue, Blue-spot Hairstreak (Pic. 40), Chapman's Blue, Hungarian Skipper. Near the bushes there were Great Banded Graylings and Delattin's Graylings, hiding among the branches and provided an excellent opportunity for photographers. Around us flying Swallowtail, Eastern Bath White, Eastern Dappled White (Pic. 41), Brimstone, Queen of Spain Fritillary and from time to time stoped for 'refueling' on the surrounding flowers. All's well that ends well and we found two of our targets here - Hermit (Pic. 42) and several specimens of the beautiful Little Tiger Blue (Pic. 43)! We have not to miss Andy's catch – Sand Boa, an extremely rare Bulgarian snake (Pic. 44)! After we checked in at the hotel we had time for refreshing drinks before the farewell dinner, and even degustated the excellent local wines!

Day 13 Sunday 11th June

Karabunar to Sofia

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

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.

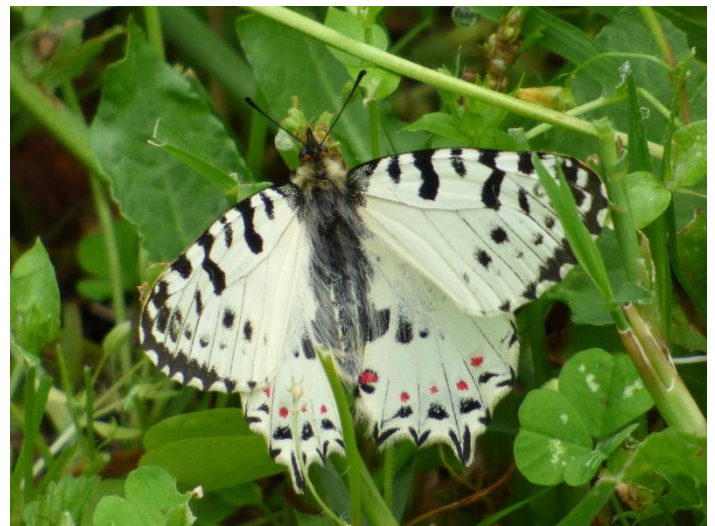
The tour total came to the impressive 107 butterfly species, many species of orchids and dragonflies, good number of birds, many wild flowers!



Pic.1. At Veleka River. Left to right: Mario, Maurice, Ian Lawson, Hristo (our driver), Sally, David, Ian McLean, Rosie, Dan, Andy, Denise, Samuel Keith



Pic.2. Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar*)



Pic.3. Eastern Festoon (*Zerynthia cerisy*)



Pic.4. Scarce Fritillary (*Euphydryas maturna*)



Pic.4. Scarce Fritillary (*Euphydryas maturna*)



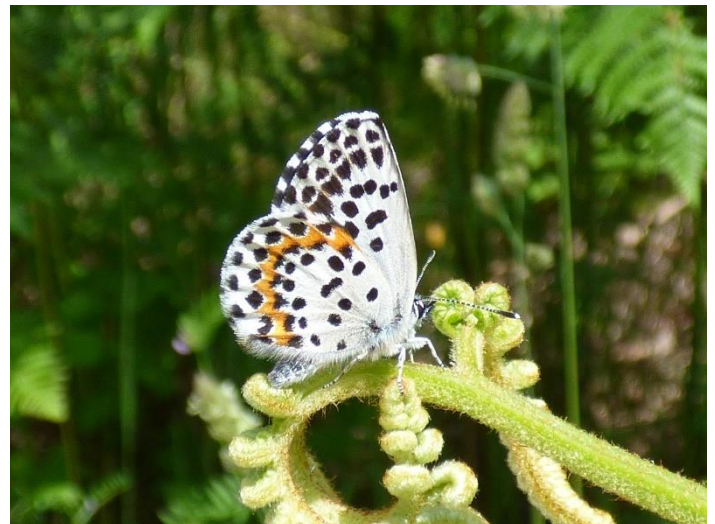
Pic.5. Black Hairstreak (*Satyrium pruni*)



Pic.6. Eastern Baton Blue (*Pseudophilotes vicrama*)



Pic.7. Longhorn beetle *Morimus asper funereus*



Pic.8. Chequered Blue (*Scolitantides orion*)



Pic.9. Lesser Fiery Copper (*Lycaena thersamon*)



Pic.10. Clouded Apollo (*Parnassius mnemosyne*)



Pic.11. Pale Clouded Yellow (*Colias hyale*)



Pic.12. Twin-spot Fritillary (*Brenthis hecate*)



Pic.13. Marsh Fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*)



Pic.14. Southern Festoon (*Zerynthia polyxena*)



Pic.15. Smooth Snake (*Coronella austriaca*)



Pic.16. Blue Argus (*Plebejus anteros*)



Pic.17. Duke of Burgundy (*Hamearis lucina*)



Pic.18. Green-underside Blue (*Glaucopsyche alexis*)



Pic.19. Russian Heath (*Coenonympha leander*)



Pic.20. Tessellated Skipper (*Muschampia tessellum*)



Pic.21. Eros Blue (*Polyommatus eros*)



Pic.22. Geranium Argus (*Plebejus eumedon*)



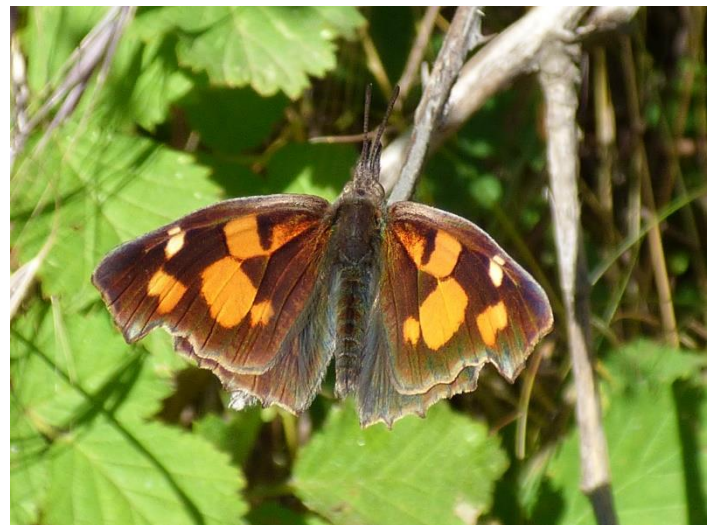
Pic.23. Yellow-banded Skipper (*Pyrgus sidae*)



Pic.24. Common Glider (*Neptis sappho*)



Pic.25. Iolas Blue (*Iolana iolas*)



Pic.26. Nettle-Tree Butterfly (*Libythea celtis*)



Pic.27. Delattin's Grayling (*Hipparchia volgensis*)



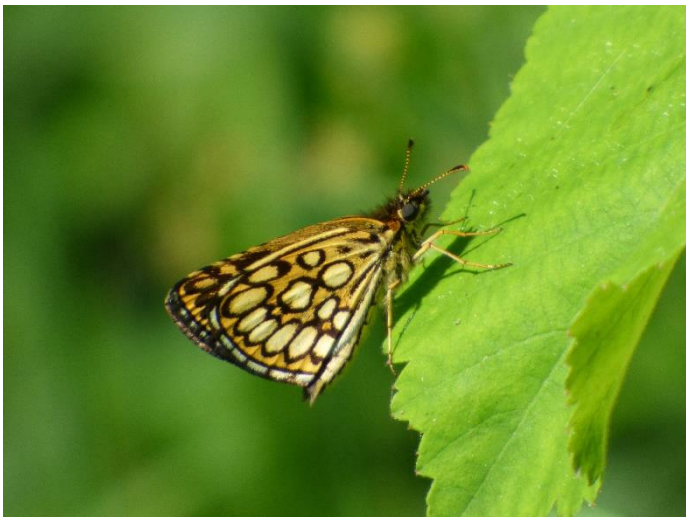
Pic.28. Cleopatra (*Gonepteryx cleopatra*)



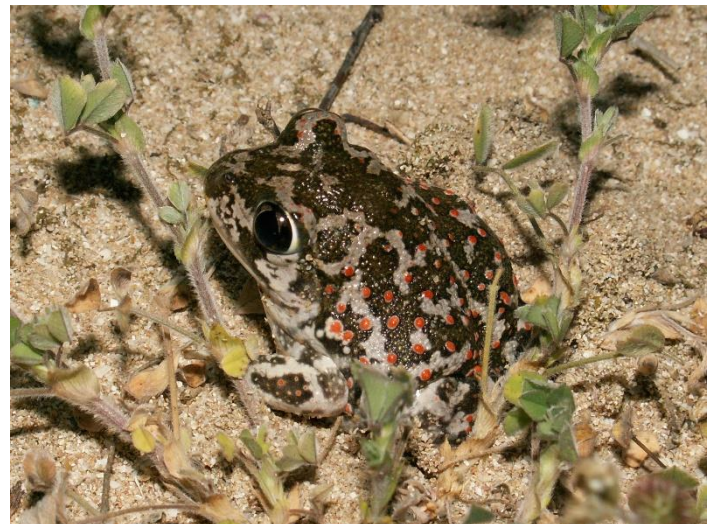
Pic.29. Freyer's Fritillary (*Melitaea arduinna*)



Pic.30. Blotched Snake (*Elaphe sauromates*)



Pic.31. Large Chequered Skipper (*Heteropterus morpheus*)



Pic.32. Syrian Spadefoot Toad (*Pelobates syriacus*)



Pic.33. Lattice Brown (*Kirinia roxelana*)



Pic.34. Grecian Copper (*Lycaena ottomana*)



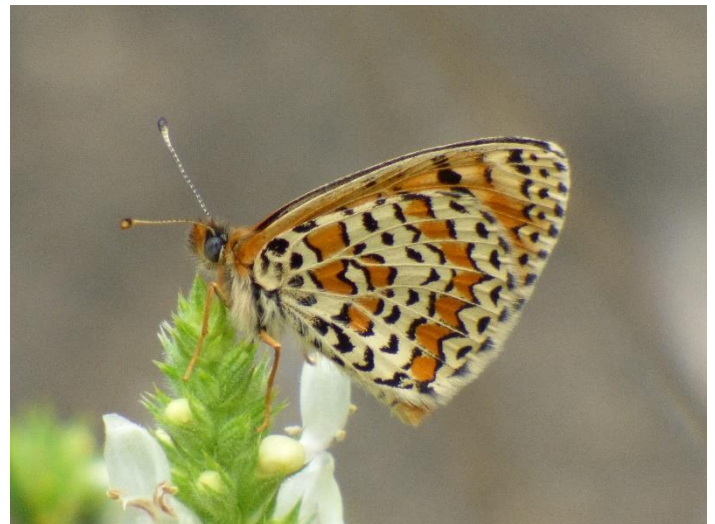
Pic.35. Freyer's Purple Emperor (*Apatura metis*)



Pic.36. Assmann's Fritillary (*Melitaea britomartis*)



Pic.37. Marbled Fritillary (*Brenthis daphne*)



Pic.38. Lesser Spotted Fritillary (*Melitaea trivia*)



Pic.39. Purple-shot Copper (*Lycaena alciphron*)



Pic.40. Blue-spot Hairstreak (*Satyrium spini*)



Pic.41. Eastern Dappled White (*Euchloe ausonia*)



Pic.42. Hermit (*Chazara briseis*)



Pic.43. Little Tiger Blue (*Tarucus balkanicus*)



Pic.44. Sand Boa (*Eryx jaculus*)

