

WILD ECHO

Butterflies of Morocco Morocco

Wednesday 10th – Monday 22nd May 2017

Trip report by Dr. Mario Langourov

Tour leader: Dr. Mario Langourov¹

Tour participants: Mrs. Rita Swinnen
Mr. Ron Demey
Mr. Nick Freeman

Day 1 **Wednesday 10th May**

outbound from Tangier; en route to Chefchaouen via Tetouan; Oued/river Laou.

Weather: partly sunny but windy; warm (20°C).

After we all gathered at the airport café, we went outside the building where our local guide Abdellah and our driver Sallah were waiting for us. We head to Chefchaouen via Tetouan, then to the south along Laou River valley. Not so long after that, we take a short stop in the wide river valley. Weather conditions are not good enough for butterfly lovers - cloudy and wind blowing. Here we come across six of the most widespread and common species - Bath White, Clouded Yellow, Small Copper, Painted Lady, and the most numerous during the tour - Small White. Greatest attention we pay to the local Speckled Wood, which is very brightly colored. As time goes on, we continue our journey south along the river valley to the hotel, picturesquely situated not far from Chefchaouen Medina. Having enjoyed traditional homemade food, we are retiring for the cherished rest.

Day 2 **Thursday 11th May**

Near Ain Defali; Volubilis roman city.

Weather: mostly cloudy; breezy to windy; warm (20°C).

Our plans to explore the slopes of Djebel El Kelaa in Talassemtane National Park are failing because of the continuous rain that started at night and continues without any prospects for improvement... After a brief thought, we are counting on one of the few possibilities - to head south in the hope of better conditions and at

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

least a little sun. At our first planned stop we are able to get the first opportunity, but it just goes out and it's started to drizzle... Run off towards the car, we decide to wait for a short time, which was the right solution - after 15 minutes the rain stops and the sun is shining through the clouds. We are heading to the foothills of a nearby hill, and one of the first species that we are able to distinguish among the ocean of the ubiquitous Small White is Green-striped White (Picture 2), with which we have some chase. In a cultivated garden with some leguminous plant, we spotted many Long-tailed Blue. We take a look at one of the many jujube shrubs which are a food plant for Tiger Blue species and fall into a few Lang's Short-tailed Blues that look pretty fresh. A closer look at the wonderfully posing with wings open reveals one of our targets - Common Tiger Blue! Soon it is clear that the species is strictly affectionate to the plant, but it is numerous and willingly pose with open and closed wings so that everyone can make the desired pictures. After a light traditional lunch with Moroccan salad, Harira soup and Tajine we head to the Volubilis Roman city - a unique frontier post of the ancient Roman Empire listed in the UNESCO World Heritage List. I just crossed the entrance when my attention is grabbed by the many Pelargonium-plants near the alley and I almost instantly find the associated invasive species - Geranium Bronze. And a new locality for the species in continental Morocco! In the next couple of hours, we share our attention among the impressive remains of the ancient city and its recent butterfly inhabitants. During our walk here we see Southern Blue, the local subspecies of the Red-underwing Skipper (Pic. 3), Southern Gatekeeper (Pic. 4), so finally we are very pleased to head to the hotel.

Day 3 Friday 12th May

Near Mouley Idriss.

Weather: heavy rain AM, than cloudy with sunny spells; windy; warm (20°C-21°C).

After breakfast due to the continuing rainfall of the Chefchaouen area and the low slopes of the Djebel El Kelaa fog, we have no choice but to drive to our next base - Ifrane and on the way if improve the weather conditions to stop in some places. Soon, heavy rain flows start to flood and just near Moulay Idriss the rain gradually decreases and stops to allow the sun to glance through the clouds. Here we are spotting the first Cleopatra, Large White, Swallowtail, Red Admiral and Brown Argus, and exotic flavor give Moroccan Small Skipper and False Ilex Hairstreak. Despite the amazing carpet of colorful flowers among the olive trees, here is relatively "quiet" and the variety of insects is not very large. We stop for a panoramic picture of its surroundings, and before we go on, we get one or two of the traditional Berber hats from the local merchants. We are immersed in the traditional atmosphere in the central part of a typical Moroccan city - a varied crowd of shops, restaurants and cafés. It is time to continue to the hotel, located in the purest, neat and tidy Moroccan city of Ifrane.

Day 4 Saturday 13th May

Tizi n'Zad; near Timahdite; Sidi Ali Lake; Tizi n'Tagzheft.

Weather: mostly sunny and still; warm (20°).

Today, we first turn our attention to the Tizi n'Zad Pass, a stony, overgrown with cedars and tussocks of purple flowering prickly shrubs. The day begins with a promising Aetherie Fritillary, which is quickly overshadowed by our first Moroccan endemic - Atlas Blue (Pic. 5)! Here at every step we encounter pleasant surprises - either Lorquin's Blue, or Spotted Adonis Blue (Pic. 6). Among fragrant grasses are not rare and False Baton Blue, which readily pose in front of the cameras. Around there are Green-striped White, Painted Lady and Algerian Fritillary. Two or three hours have gone unnoticed, and it is time to head for lunch to the nearby town. At its heart we find a nice restaurant, where we immerse in the temptations of traditional Moroccan cuisine. In the early afternoon we head to its outskirts, amidst a colorful carpet on the banks of a small creek. We just got off the car and immediately fall on Martin's Blue (Pic. 7) - an extremely local species, also a Moroccan endemic! Along with it, more common species are found, and the shores of the creek host a number of damselflies, among which many are the Mediterranean Bluets. After moving to Sidi Ali Lake, we take a short stroll where the first one we encounter is the Comma of the typical Moroccan subspecies *imperfecta* resembling Southern Comma. In the late afternoon we head to Tizi n'Tagzheft, where it is rather windy and the activity is low, so we make a unanimous decision that a fresh mint tea (because of the lack of beer ☹️) will have a beneficial effect on us and we drive back to the hotel.

Day 5 Sunday 14th May

Ifrane National Park.

Weather: mostly sunny; still to breezy; warm (up to 25°).

We are in the kingdom of the cedars, so we head to Route of the Cedres and the sheltered meadows in the forests. We cross one of the popular places here, famous for its Barbary Macaques (Pic. 8), and certainly we do not miss the chance to take some pictures. Moving away from the more crowded places, we fall into a large field bordering with the forest edge and sandy slopes. This is where we come across the first Western Dappled White (Pic. 9), and a lot of Cleopatra are worn around us. The Red-underwing Skipper posing nicely with wings open, absorbing the sunshine, and Lorquin's Blue (Pic. 10) demonstrates his preference for the semishady patches right on the edge of the forest. At the small sandy meadows amidst the forest giants are fairly common Algerian Fritillary, and Speckled Wood, which together with Red Admiral, Green Hairstreak, Small Copper, Brown Argus remind us of the close relationship between North Africa and Europe. Heading back to more civilized places, we stop at the bottom of impressive cedars, and then we head towards the damper slopes that are hidden among them. Our expectations are justified and we come across few fresh Spanish Fritillaries (Pic. 11), among which we spend half an hour chasing the perfect picture. Among the shrubs we also find Swallowtail, Cardinal, Chapman's Blue, Green-striped White, Southern Blue. Shortly before we head for lunch,

we also face the Eastern Marbled Skipper, and pretty happy we can indulge in lunch and deserved siesta. In a cool restaurant with a wonderful view in the center of Azrou we enjoy local food and refreshing drinks. Late in the afternoon, slightly relaxed, we head to higher parts of the Ifrane National Park. Alas, in the ski zone grazing is significant and all the surrounding meadows are overgrazed... Still, the walk meets with a number of Whites, including Western Dappled White, Bath White and the ubiquitous Large and Small Whites. Exotics give some Spotted Adonis Blue, blinking near the little flowering plants. In the evening, over the table with local food, we give in to talks and plans for the next day.

Day 6 Monday 15th May

Ifrane National Park.

Weather: sunny; still to breezy; hot (30°C).

The day is dedicated to Ifrane and its surroundings, so we are changing the landscape and today we are surrounded by lush herbage and twisting streams. The Copper Demoiselle (Pic. 12) is on their shores and the Mediterranean and Azure Bluets in the surrounding vegetation. Among the more common Southern Blue, Spotted Adonis Blue, Lang's Short-tailed Blue, Algerian Fritillary, we soon notice the first Fatma's Bavius Blue (Pic. 13). There are a couple of them and eventually everyone can see it and shoot it. In addition, Swallowtails flying around, and Nick also spotted a Desert Orange-tip, species which rarely reaches so far north. Here comes true the dream of the participants for Spanish Festoon (Pic. 14), with which we spend a quarter an hour. Timelessly, we are going to cool off while we enjoy the typical Moroccan tajines. In the early afternoon we turn our attention to the meadows with blooming prickly shrubs bordering with young cedar wood. Unfortunately, we are unable to find Silver-lines, but the Spanish Fritillary are numerous and very cooperative. Lorquin's Blue and False Baton Blue (Pic. 15) overflow the flowers and basking on the grasses, and the ubiquitous Cleoptara and Painted Lady flying everywhere. In the late afternoon along the banks of a small stream we add to the list of dragonflies Large Pincertail (Pic. 16), and among the dozen butterflies are Aetherie Fritillary and a very fresh Spanish Festoon.

Day 7 Tuesday 16th May

Bzou – Tembda Spring.

Weather: sunny and very hot (45°C).

Today is the time for the longest transfer to the tour, so right after breakfast we head to its next base, located on the northern foothills of the High Atlas (Toubkal Massif). We move through semi-desert landscape with alternating here and there deep river valleys and olive groves. After a short stop for "recharging" the car and our bodies, we continue to the south-west, and for lunch we stop at a roadside restaurant with a nice cool garden. Here's what we really need because the thermometer reaches incredible for mid-May 45 degree Celsius! As we wait for our sandwiches in the garden, we find Epaulet Skimmer (Pic. 17) and in the pool - Sahara Frog.

In a nearby karst valley, where we are looking for coolness, Red-veined Dropwing patrolling and on surrounding hills *Zizyphus* shrubs grow, holding number of Common Tiger Blues (Pic. 18). We are immersed in the hectic atmosphere of Marrakech surrounded by endless palm plantations and shortly afterwards we reach the small family hotel, which is today's target. As we wait for our dinner, we enjoy the views from the lovely hotel terrace, surrounded by the curious peeks of the Common Wall Geckos.

Day 8 Wednesday 17th May

Oukaimeden & Tizi n'Addi.

Weather: sunny and warm, PM breezy (25°C-28°C).

Our day is dedicated to the extraordinary High Atlas (Toubkal Massif) and especially to the Oukaimeden area, starting with a small lateral valley. On the rocks very active are the endemic to Morocco Atlas Day Geckos (Pic. 19), and on the damp sand Eastern Marbled Skipper and a lot of Lorquin's Blue take salts. Just next to the stream, we discover a local subspecies of Amanda's Blue, followed by Rosy Grizzled Skipper and Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper. We are detected by experienced "vulture" eyes of a few local merchants. There is an immediate siege and begins the typical Arabic bargain, which continues with prominent supremacy, but eventually we succeed (not without sacrifices for our wallets) to unlock and continue our pursuits. In addition, there are hurriedly flying Western Dappled White, followed by Spanish Festoon. The time is advanced and we retreat to the ski zone where we can eat and relax. Here we come to our acquaintances in the morning, who feel that we are going to slip away from them, and suddenly everyone of our group gets something... There is even a serious danger for some of us to have to pay Excess Baggage 😊... We head to one of the nearby situated mountain passes, where we fall in the midst of clouds from the ubiquitous Small White. Not long after, the scream of the mountain calm - the first Vaucher's Heath (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 a few Dark Giant Graylings, but with the gust of wind they are swept over the slopes, and after a rapid and sudden descent they are lost in the high grass. Once we get back out of the car, we managed to see the first Sooty Orange tip (Pic. 21). By jumping out of the car, we are surely able to improve the time of a group of experienced military landing troops and besiege our target, which turns out to be a female. Subsequently, we find also a male, and among other species - a mating pair of Bath Whites, Red Admiral and even Glanville Fritillary. Satisfied and very pleased, we head back to the hotel, and from the terrace we enjoy the view of the snow-covered Toubkal massif.

Day 9 Thursday 18th May

Oued/river Nfis; Tizi n'Tamatert; near Imlil.

Weather: sunny and warm (30°C to 25°C).

We head to the valley of the Nfis River and the lush greenery along its banks. Our main target here is African

Grass Blue, but at first we find only the numerous Lang's Short-tailed Blue and Long-tailed Blue. Clouded Yellows are also abundant, and Speckled Wood camouflage is measured in the shaded areas between the plots. Among the lucerne thickets on one of the plots we find the first African Grass Blue (Pic. 22) and soon we have a rich material of both sexes along with the False Mallow Skipper. Surrounding landscape become the landscape of the desert oases and tall palm trees and *Zizyphus* bushes cover the hills. In the latter, alongside the common Common Tiger Blue, we also come across the first Mediterranean Tiger Blue and we add them to our growing list. On the way back to Imlil, we stop by a reserve designed to protect Barbary Sheep (Aoudad) and not long after starting the scan of the steep slopes results and we observe at least 6 animals (Pic. 23). Getting through the busy traffic in the narrow streets of Imlil we reach a nice restaurant with a terrace where, in a traditional setting, we enjoy the delicious food and the wonderful views of the High Atlas. After a short rest, we head to one of our surrounding mountain passes, where the species are relatively few, but what a type! The first Dark Giant Graylings fly through and after some chasing and creeping we can take pictures of one of them (Pic. 24). The other rarity we encounter is Black-Eyed Blue (Pic. 25), which we also manage to find into the gullies near the city, but the time is passing so we retreat to the hotel.

Day 10 Friday 19th May

Near Merigha; Tinmalt mosque; Tizi n'Test.

Weather: sunny and still; warm (max 30°C).

We head back to its last base - Tafraoute, crossing the picturesque High Atlas massif. Even at the footslopes of the massif beside the road, I notice the Desert Orange-tip foodplant - Caper bush. We stop for a view and the result is not late - we see the first of a dozen Desert Orange-tips (Pic. 26). In the surroundings, we also find False Ilex Hairstreak, Southern Blue, Meadow Brown. On the bramble flowers nectaring Southern Scarce Swallowtail (Pic. 27), which is held for a long time and everyone can shoot it. Our next stop is near the medieval mosque Tinmalt, which is one of the two mosques in Morocco open to non-Muslims. In addition to its impressive architecture, there is a pair of Tawny Owls and their little ones. In the vicinity we observe Southern Gatekeeper, Southern Scarce Swallowtail and near *Zizyphus* bushes - Mediterranean Tiger Blue. Not far from Tizi n'Test we stop for a picnic lunch. Immediately our eyes are attracted to Bladder-senna bushes, which is Iolas Blue foodplant. Indeed, Iolas Blue, considered by some authors as a different species (*Iolana debilitata*), flew past them. The place is extremely rich and meets us with the first Spanish Marbled White (Pic. 28) and Moroccan Orange-tip. In a short time, our list grows up to 20 species, but time is going and we have to continue on our way, making a group picture at the highest point of the mountain pass (Pic. 1). Later in a few places we stop to admire stunning sceneries, but do not observe other worth mentioning species. In the late afternoon we arrive at the hotel, located in the folds of Anti Atlas, and after a short break we gather for dinner.

Day 11 Saturday 20th May

Oued/river Massa; surroundings of Aguelz, Tirtut and Tafraoute.

Weather: sunny and very hot (up to 43°C).

Under the fiery rays of the semi-desert sun we head towards the banks of the Massa River, which, besides the butterflies, is also extremely rich in interesting species of dragonflies. Among them, it is worth mentioning Desert Bluet, Sahara Bluetail, Green Hooktail (Pic. 29), Yellow-veined Skimmer, Orange-winged Dropwing (Pic. 30). There are two of our target species here - African Babul Blue (Pic. 31) and Desert Babul Blue (Pic. 32). It is noteworthy that while the first one represented in numbers, the second one is only by single specimens. The occurrence together of Desert Fritillary and Spotted Fritillary, on one hand, confuses us, but it gives us the opportunity to compare them and notice the differences. Under the shadows of palms of one of the surrounding oases, we enjoy the coolness of the channels and our picnic lunch, then head to a dry valley, where the symbol of this part of Morocco - Argan tree grows abundantly. The butterflies are not many, but it's worth it, because we're getting an Aden Skipper (Pic. 33). At the northern end of the Ameln Valley, we turn into a side valley, amidst the impressive rock formations, covered with palms and bushes. Among others, we find African Babul Blue, African Grass Blue and Wall Brown. On the bird's front Ron and Rita observe the extremely rare Double-spurred Francolin. The day is extremely hot, so we enjoy relaxing in the cool shadows of the local mini market and refresh ourselves with soft drinks and later retreat to the hotel.

Day 12 Sunday 21st May

Sidi M'Zal; Ait Mansour; near Tafraoute.

Weather: sunny and very hot (up to 40°C).

After a bit of misunderstanding of locally moving the time because of Bairam, we still manage to make a bit early breakfast to start as early as possible. First we exploring a nearby dry river valley, where Southern Scarce Swallowtail, Bath White and Cleopatra are relatively numerous. Among a dozen species here are the common and ubiquitous Clouded Yellow, Small White, Brown Argus, Small Copper, but also a few Red-underwing Skipper We worked hard, and in the end, we achieved our goal - we find two specimens of the Moroccan Copper (Pic. 34) so desired by all Moroccan endemic species! With a sense of satisfaction, we head for the picnic lunch to the coolness of the notorious Oasis of Ait Mansour. While we eat with pleasure, we are cooling our legs in one of the many natural pools, and we accidentally witness the distant life drama. A medium-sized Algerian Whip Snake cleverly slides down the sheer rocks to a bird's nest and, despite the desperate attempts of the parents, swallow a few of the newly-hatched chicks. After the picnic lunch, relaxing and recharging with energy, we are committed to exploring the surrounding area. A fast-paced chameleon crosses our way and clears up the roadside shrub, giving us the opportunity to take some pictures. Caper bushes grow abundantly around the rocks, which is a prerequisite for the Desert Orange-tip of both sexes. In addition, we find Desert Fritillary (Pic. 35) and African Babul Blue, and then we decide to retire near Tafraoute, where we can briefly

stop among the famous rock formations. Here, Mediterranean Tiger Blue (Pic. 36) is extremely numerous, while the Common Tiger Blue is significantly lower. As if to put a point on our rather long lists of species around us, Barbary Ground Squirrel ran away, then we retreated to the hotel for the thirsty shower and a short rest before the farewell dinner.

Day 13 Monday 22nd May

Tafraoute to Agadir Airport.

Our flights are pretty early, so we head to Agadir very early in the morning, where we leave Ron and Rita, and with Nick take the plane to Casablanka, from where everyone goes to their home.

Finally the results are 68 species of butterflies, which represent more than half of the country's fauna; over 100 species of birds, 16 species of dragonflies (most of them exotic) and number of interesting other animals and plants.



Pic.1. The group at Tizi n'Test (High Atlas). Left to right: standing Mario, Sallah (driver), Rita, Ron, Abdellah (interpreter); down Nick



Pic. 2. Green-striped White (*Euchloe belemia*)



Pic. 3. Red-underwing Skipper (*Spialia sertorius ali*)



Pic. 4. Southern Gatekeeper (*Pyronia cecilia*)



Pic. 5. Atlas Blue (*Plebejus atlantica*)



Pic. 6. Spotted Adonis Blue (*Polyommatus punctiferus*)



Pic. 7. Martin's Blue (*Plebejus martini*)



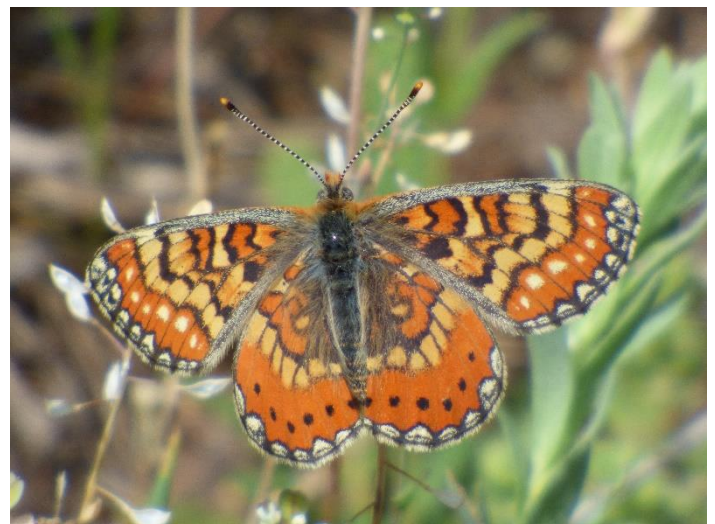
Pic. 8. Barbary Macaques (*Macaca sylvanus*)



Pic. 9. Western Dappled White (*Euchloe crameri*)



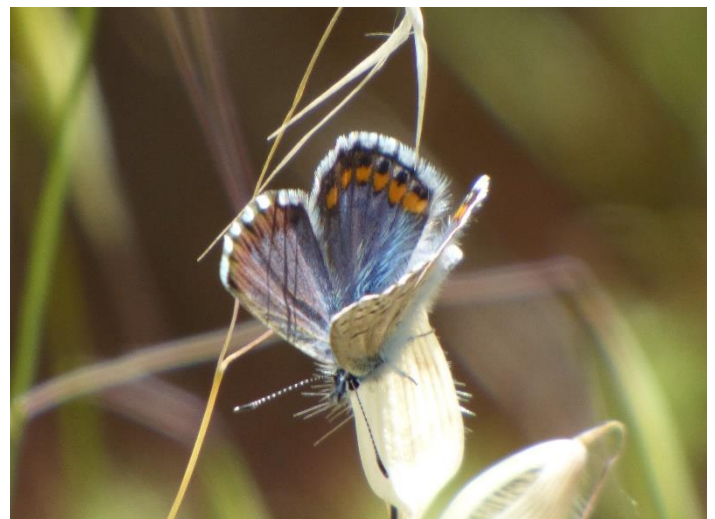
Pic. 10. Lorquin's Blue (*Cupido lorquini*)



Pic. 11. Spanish Fritillary (*Euphydryas desfontainii*)



Pic. 12. Copper Demoiselle (*Calopteryx haemorrhoidalis*)



Pic. 13. Fatma's Bavius Blue (*Scolitantides fatma*)



Pic. 14. Spanish Festoon (*Zerynthia rumina*)



Pic. 15. False Baton Blue (*Scolitantides abencerragus*)



Pic. 16. Large Pincertail (*Onychogomphus uncatus*)



Pic. 17. Epaulet Skimmer (*Orthetrum chrysostigma*)



Pic. 18. Common Tiger Blue (*Tarucus theophrastus*)



Pic. 19. Atlas Day Gecko (*Quedenfeldtia trachyblepharus*)



Pic. 20. Vaucher's Heath (*Coenonympha vaucheri*)



Pic. 21. Sooty Orange tip (*Zegris eupheme*)



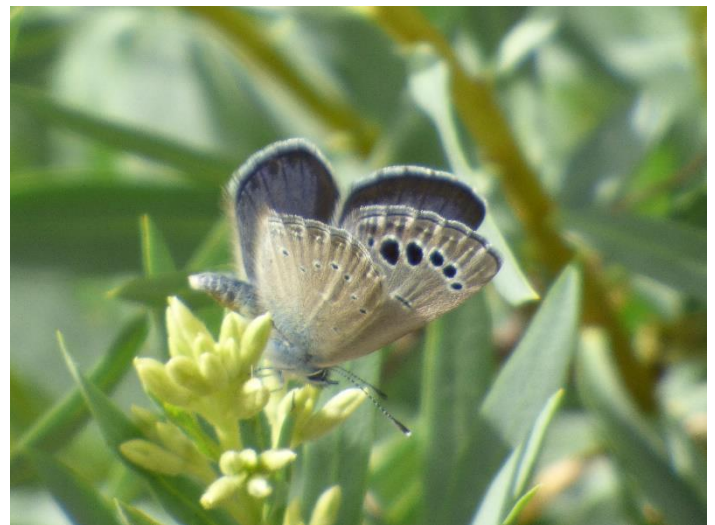
Pic. 22. African Grass Blue (*Zizeeria knysna*)



Pic. 23. Barbary Sheep (Aoudad) (*Ammotragus lervia*)



Pic. 24. Dark Giant Grayling (*Berberia lambessanus*)



Pic. 25. Black-Eyed Blue (*Glaucopsyche melanops*)



Pic. 26a. Desert Orange-tip ♂ (*Colotis evagore*)



Pic. 26b. Desert Orange-tip ♀ (*Colotis evagore*)



Pic. 27. Southern Scarce Swallowtail (*Iphiiclides feisthamelii*)



Pic. 28. Spanish Marbled White (*Melanargia ines*)



Pic. 29. Green Hooktail (*Paragomphus genei*)



Pic. 30. Orange-winged Dropwing (*Trithemis kirbyi*)



Pic. 31. African Babul Blue (*Azanus jesus*)



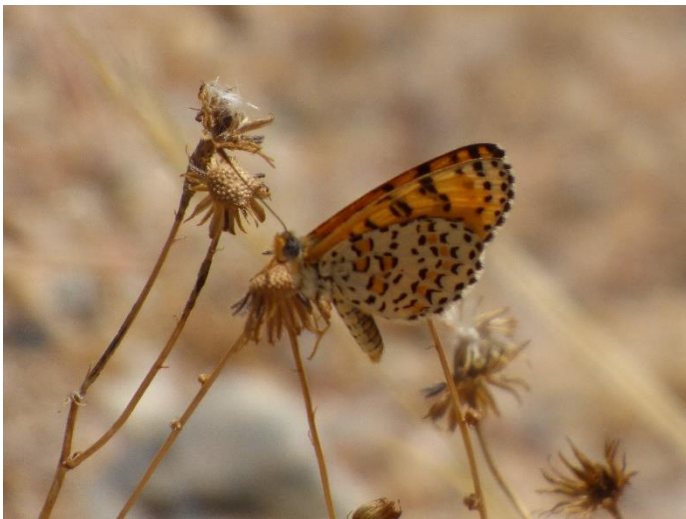
Pic. 32. Desert Babul Blue (*Azanus ubaldus*)



Pic. 33. Aden Skipper (*Spialia doris*)



Pic. 34. Moroccan Copper (*Lycaena phoebus*)



Pic. 35. Desert Fritillary (*Melitaea deserticola*)



Pic. 36. Mediterranean Tiger Blue (*Tarucus rosaceus*)

