

BUTTERFLY TOUR 17 - 26 July 2010

(Tour Code: BT)

Leaders: Nick Greatorex-Davies and Zdravko Kolev

Price: £1,195 (Based on a group of 10 or more. A smaller group will incur a supplement).

This ten day tour will particularly suit the butterfly enthusiast. It will be based in the mountains of southwest Bulgaria where a range of alpine and sub-alpine species can be found above and below the tree-line and where the views are stunning. We start in the south Pirin Mountains and move on to the Rila Mountains for the second part of the tour. Weather permitting we shall walk quite a lot in the mountains, sometimes over fairly rough terrain. To fully participate you will need to be reasonably fit, however gentler options will be available. If the weather is poor in the mountains there are plenty of options to see butterflies at lower altitudes, though the weather here may be hot on some days – in excess of 36°C.

Nick Greatorex-Davies has led the tour most years since 2003. From 1995 to 2006 Nick was co-ordinator of the Butterfly Monitoring Scheme based at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology at Monks Wood, Cambridgeshire, where he has worked since 1974. From a young age his main natural history interest has been British Lepidoptera (including more recently microlepidoptera), and in recent decades European butterflies, supplemented by a strong interest in botany.

Zdravko Kolev is one of Bulgaria's top butterfly experts. He comes from Smolyan in the Rhodope Mountains, but is currently living in Finland. He frequently visits Bulgaria to study butterflies and moths. His main research interest is the taxonomy, ecology and conservation of Palaearctic Lycaenidae.

Since 2003 we have seen over 170 of the approximately 220 butterfly species recorded in Bulgaria (over 150 in 2008). Bulgaria also has a huge amount to offer in terms of its other wildlife, especially birds and flowers.

Some may find the treks of several kilometres at high altitude too difficult, but provision is made for shorter walks near where the bus is parked. Good walking boots, with waterproofs and warm clothing to hand, are essential for those going up high, and we advise them to bring a whistle and a mobile phone (set to work in Bulgaria!) just in case they get separated from the main party and need to contact the tour leaders. Butterfly nets and 'pots' for the temporary retention of butterflies are highly recommended (butterflies are released on site). There will be numerous opportunities for photographing butterflies. Hopes and expectations are based on previous visits but are not guaranteed. We shall have at least one moth trap with us providing an extra dimension to the tour for those prepared to get up a little earlier! All confirmed records of butterflies and moths will be passed on to the Institute of Zoology in Sofia.

Bulgaria's magnificent scenery, friendly people and excellent wine and food are additional highlights. The BBFS offers you the benefits of **over thirty years' experience** of organising tours to Bulgaria, well-known leaders and excellent value. For your **financial protection** our tour operators, **Balkania Travel Ltd.** are **ATOL bonded**. Hotels are comfortable, but not luxurious, and in out of the way places we have chosen the best available. The holiday is on a Half-Board basis. Our tour price includes a donation to a Bulgarian conservation organisation.

Projected Itinerary (which may be subject to adjustment, particularly if weather conditions have made certain visits unrewarding)

Saturday 17 July Travel by direct scheduled flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Drive south to Gotse Delchev for a three night stay. This is the longest drive of the tour, but we shall have a few short stops on the way to look for butterflies, including Kresna Gorge. Species we hope to see include Scarce Swallowtail, Purple-shot Copper, Little Tiger Blue, Nettle-tree Butterfly, Large Tortoiseshell, Common Glider, Lattice Brown and Balkan Marbled White.

Sunday 18 July Day in the Slavyanka mountains, an exceptionally rich butterfly area. Among many others we expect to see Sandy Grizzled Skipper, Mountain Small White, False Eros Blue, Anomalous Blue, Grecian Anomalous Blue, Escher's Blue, Meleager's Blue, Southern and Dil's Graylings.

Monday 19 July Day above Popovi Livadi in the southern Pirin mountains. Here we hope to see Apollo, Clouded Apollo, Balkan

Copper, Higgin's Anomalous Blue, Balkan Gavarnie Blue (if we reach Orelek), False Eros Blue, Cardinal and several ringlets including Bright-eyed Ringlet and Ottoman's Brassy Ringlet.

Tuesday 20 July Travel to Dobursko for a four night stay in the foothills of the Rila mountains stopping at several places in the Mesta river valley on the way. We expect to see many species today including Black-veined White, Large Copper, Eastern Baton Blue, Map Butterfly, Freyer's Purple Emperor, Nickerl's Fritillary, Twin-spot Fritillary (and many other fritillaries), Eastern Rock Grayling and Great Banded Grayling.

Wednesday 21 July Day in the Pirin mountains above Bansko under the shadow of Vihren Peak (2914m). Here we expect to see a range of alpine and sub-alpine species including Clouded Apollo, False Eros Blue, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Balkan Fritillary, Northern Wall Brown, Eastern Large Heath, and several ringlets including Ottoman's Brassy Ringlet, Silky Ringlet and Black Ringlet.

Thursday 22 July Day spent in the area around our hotel, where there are plenty of excellent butterfly habitats. Species we hope to see, among many others, include Tufted Marbled Skipper, Black-veined White, Purple-shot and Scarce Coppers, Large Blue, Large Ringlet, Great Sooty Satyr, Dusky Meadow Brown and Russian Heath.

Friday 23 July Day spent above the Belmeken dam starting at about 2000m by the sports complex. There are plenty of options here, but those going up high can expect to see Dusky Grizzled Skipper, Cynthia's Fritillary, Balkan and Shepherd's Fritillaries, and several ringlets, including the Dewy Ringlet and the endemic Bulgarian and Nichol's Ringlets.

Saturday 24 July Drive to Kartala in the southwestern Rila Mountains for a one night stay, with observation stops along the way at moderate altitudes. We expect to see Camberwell Beauty, Large Tortoiseshell and many fritillaries.

Sunday 25 July We take the cable car to the top of the mountain for another opportunity to see alpine species and others including Cynthia's Fritillary, Shepherd's Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and several species of ringlet including Bright-eyed, Bulgarian, Nichol's and Dewy Ringlets. Late afternoon, travel back to Sofia for a one night stay.

Monday 26 July Return flight to UK.

OUR PRICES INCLUDE:

- Return scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia. (Connecting flights from other airports and/or overnight accommodation near airports can also be arranged for you at a supplement).
- Airport taxes.
- Half Board in small (often family-run) hotels with en suite facilities on a twin bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Coach for transfers and excursions.
- Specialist British and Bulgarian leaders.
- All reserve entrance fees.

NOT INCLUDED:

- Lunches (about £4 or less).
- Travel Insurance (Compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Drinks and personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement (£90).

NOTES: Tour participants and the leader may use butterfly nets in order to help identify butterflies, all of which are subsequently released where found.

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