

EARLY SUMMER BUTTERFLY TOUR 23 June - 3 July 2012 (Tour code: EBT)

Leaders: Nick Greatorex-Davies and Mario Langourov

Price: £1,020 (Based on a group of 10 or more. A smaller group will incur a supplement).

This 11-day tour will begin in the east of Bulgaria near the Black Sea coast visiting sites in the Strandzha Nature Park. We will then move west to the beautiful eastern Rhodope Mountains, initially staying in the Madzharovo area to explore some of the many unspoilt and butterfly and flower-rich habitats in the Arda River valley. Finally we shall be based near Assenovgrad to explore butterfly-rich habitats associated with the Chepelarska River valley and adjoining mountains. In Bulgaria a wide range of species can be seen almost anywhere one stops and 40-60 species are expected on most days and well over 100 species in total.

The tour is designed for those who want to see a wide range of European butterfly species not found in Britain as well as many that are. The more spectacular species include Eastern Festoon, Apollo, Swallowtail and Scarce Swallowtail, Cardinal, Camberwell Beauty, Southern White Admiral and Freyer's Purple Emperor, as well as a range of eastern European species such as Krueper's Small White, Grecian Copper, Little Tiger Blue, Lattice Brown, Sandy Grizzled Skipper and Yellow-banded Skipper among others. Also many blues, fritillaries and others.

The tour should be suitable for young and old and it is not envisaged that there will be any long walks. On most days there will be plenty of time for leisurely observation of butterflies in their natural habitats. However participants need to be aware that the weather can be hot (36 C or more) on some days.

Since 2003 we have seen over 180 of the 214 butterfly species that occur in Bulgaria (over 150 in 2008), a list will be sent with your tickets, or in advance on request.

Nick Greatorex-Davies has led the tour most years since 2003. From 1995 to 2006 Nick was co-ordinator of the UK's Butterfly Monitoring Scheme based at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology

at Monks Wood, Cambridgeshire, where he worked as an entomologist from 1974 to 2009. 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.

Mario has co-lead butterfly tours with Nick since 2008. As a professional entomologist Mario is Associate Professor at the Institute of Zoology, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in Sofia where he has been involved in a variety of research projects since obtaining his PhD on scuttle flies in 2002. Mario has an excellent all-round knowledge of Bulgaria's natural history including a broad knowledge of other insect groups, reptiles, birds and plants.

Butterfly nets and several 'pots' for the temporary retention of butterflies are highly recommended (butterflies are released on site). The tour provides numerous opportunities for photographing butterflies.

Predicted species are based on previous visits but are not guaranteed. Annual fluctuations in butterfly populations, the timing of the season due to weather factors, different tour dates each year, and the adventure of visiting new sites, make it difficult to predict exactly what we are likely to see. Sometimes we don't see what was expected but do see unexpected species.

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 beautiful scenery, friendly people and excellent wine and food are additional highlights. The BBFS offers you the benefits of its over thirty-five years' experience of organising tours to Bulgaria. For your financial protection our tour operators, Balkania Travel Ltd. are licensed by the UK Civil Aviation Authority and bonded both by the CAA, ATOL 4465, and IATA, number 91-2 7839. Hotels are comfortable (and conveniently situated!) but not luxurious. Final details and butterfly lists will be sent to participants with their tickets approximately two weeks before departure. Our tour price includes a donation to a Bulgarian conservation organisation.

Projected itinerary (which will be flexible to make the best of good opportunities presented at the time, and according to the type of season, and if weather conditions make certain visits likely to be unrewarding).

Saturday 23 June Travel by scheduled flight from Gatwick to Burgas via Budapest. Drive south to Brashlyan in the Strandzha Nature Park for a 3-night stay. There should be time for one or two short stops to look for butterflies. Species might include Oriental Marbled Skipper, Grecian Copper, Eastern Baton Blue, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Twin-spot Fritillary and Lattice Brown.

Sunday 24 June Day in the wetlands and woodlands near Primorsko (near the Black Sea coast). We expect to see a good range of butterfly species, but will particularly look out for the Large Chequered Skipper and the Grecian Copper.

Monday 25 June Day in the hills and valleys of the Strandzha Nature Park. Species might include Hungarian Skipper, Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper, Blue Argus, Southern White Admiral, Camberwell Beauty, Large Tortoiseshell, Cardinal, Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Twin-spot Fritillary, Assmann's Fritillary and Eastern Rock Grayling.

Tuesday 26 June Drive to the Arda valley west of Madzharovo in the eastern Rhodope Mountains for a three night stay. We will have a few stops on the way to look for butterflies. Possibilities are Yellow-banded Skipper, Eastern Festoon, Swallowtail, Black-veined White and Purple-shot Copper among many others.

Wednesday 27 June Day in the Arda River valley near our hotel. This is an excellent location where we should see many species, including Hungarian Skipper, Eastern Festoon, Small Bath White, Little Tiger Blue, Southern White Admiral, Freyer's Purple Emperor and Large Tortoiseshell.

Thursday 28 June Day in the Arda valley. In the morning near Madzharovo and in the afternoon near Studen Kladenets. Species we expect to see include Eastern Festoon, Krueper's Small White, Grecian Copper, Eastern Baton Blue, Cardinal, Lesser-spotted Fritillary, Lattice Brown and many others.

Friday 29 June Drive NW to Assenovgrad with a few short stops to look for butterflies on the way. Species may include Eastern Festoon, Southern Small White, Eastern Wood White, Little Tiger Blue, Meleager's Blue, Amanda's Blue, Marbled Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary and many others.

Saturday 30 June Day at Dobrostan and near Assenovgrad. This beautiful limestone area hosts a wide range of species including Chequered Skipper, Apollo, Mountain Small White, Osiris Blue, Blue Argus, Turquoise Blue, Large Blue, False Eros Blue, Northern Wall Brown, Woodland Ringlet, Chestnut Heath and many others.

Sunday 1 July Day in the Chepelarska river valley area. There are many interesting rocky limestone sites where we may see Apollo, Clouded Apollo, Balkan Copper, Zephyr Blue, Marsh Fritillary, Nickerl's Fritillary, Woodland Ringlet and Eastern Large Heath among many others.

Monday 2 July Return to Burgas with butterfly stops on the way. The return route is largely new to the tour and poorly recorded for butterflies but we expect to see a good range of species.

Tuesday 3 July As our return flight is not until the afternoon we will have time to visit the wetlands as well as dryer areas near Burgas including the Poda Nature reserve.

OUR PRICE INCLUDES:

- Return scheduled flights from Gatwick to Burgas via Budapest.
- Airport taxes.
- Full Board (picnic lunches).
- Accommodation in small friendly (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.

NOT INCLUDED:

- Travel Insurance (Compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Drinks and personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement (£80).

NOTE: 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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Please note that from 1st September 2011, Balkania Travel Ltd. will have a new address: Office 3.08 Avanta Harrow, 79 College Road, Harrow, Middlesex. HA1 1BD. The phone numbers will remain the same.