

**SPRING BUTTERFLY and MOTH TOUR**

**22 April - 1 May 2023 (Tour code: BT)**

**Leaders: Martin White and Dimitar (Mitko) Petrakiev**

**Price: £1,800**

(Based on a group of 8, a smaller group may incur a supplement).



We shall be looking for a range of spring or first generation butterfly species such as Southern Festoon, Gruner's Orange-tip, Eastern Greenish Black-tip, Krueper's Small White, Eastern Wood White, Grecian Copper, Little Tiger Blue, Chequered Blue, Iolas Blue, Southern Comma, Eastern Knapweed Fritillary, Russian Heath, Inky Skipper and Mediterranean Skipper.

We can expect to see a wide range of other butterflies already on the wing, with around 100 species possible, such as Common and Scarce Swallowtails, Clouded Apollo, Eastern Festoon, Black-veined White, Small Bath White, Eastern Dappled White, Mountain and Southern Small White, Large Copper, Geranium Argus, Blue Argus, Osiris Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Green Underside Blue, Eastern Zephyr Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Nettle-tree Butterfly, Southern White Admiral, Large Tortoiseshell, Camberwell Beauty, Common and Hungarian Gliders, Cardinal, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Weaver's Fritillary, Yellow-banded Skipper, Tufted Marbled Skipper and Hungarian Skipper.

SW Bulgaria is the richest part of Bulgaria for butterflies and is in one of Europe's top butterfly hotspots. In the Struma and Mesta valleys several butterfly species reach the northernmost limit of their European range. Some species can emerge as early as March and April, but should still be on the wing in early May, depending on the earliness or lateness of the season.

Although the primary focus of the tour will be butterflies we shall also look out for day-flying moths and run at least one moth trap. We shall take note of other wildlife and at Kerkini Lake in northern Greece we shall be able to see Glossy Ibis, Dalmatian and White Pelican, Spoonbill, Squacco and Night Heron, terns and other birds.

The tour will be based in two main areas: Mount Falakro (Phalakron) in northern Greece, and then in SW Bulgaria. The tour should be suitable for all adults, with no long walks to reach any sites, though participants should be aware that the weather can get very hot even in spring.

Martin White has been passionate about butterflies and moths since an early age. He is actively involved in the South Wales Branch of Butterfly Conservation, of which he has been a committee member since 1995. He spends part of each summer in Europe looking at butterflies, usually in the company of botanists, birders and wildlife photographers as well as other butterfly enthusiasts. Apart from Bulgaria, Martin has also spent time in adjacent countries such as Greece and Turkey. As a result, in addition to the butterflies, he has developed an extensive familiarity with the moths, micro-moths, flowers and birds of the region.

Dimitar (Mitko) Petrakiev is a tour leader and mountain guide with over ten years' experience of birdwatching, butterfly and other natural history tours. He is also qualified as a climbing instructor and for cave rescue and first aid. He has also led archaeological and cultural tours for the B-BS.

The tour provides ample opportunity for photographing butterflies. The use of butterfly nets and 'pots' for the temporary retention of butterflies is highly recommended (butterflies will be released on site).

All confirmed records of butterflies and moths will be passed on to the National Museum of Natural History in Sofia.

Bulgaria's beautiful scenery, friendly people and excellent wine and food are additional highlights. The B-BS offers you the benefits of over 40 years' experience of organizing tours to Bulgaria. For your financial protection our tour operators for over twenty-five years, Balkania Travel Ltd. are licensed by the UK Civil Aviation Authority, ATOL 4465 and bonded by the International Air Transport Association, IATA, number 91-2 7839. Hotels are comfortable (and conveniently situated!) but not luxurious. Final details and butterfly and moth lists will be sent to participants approximately two weeks before departure. Our tour price includes a donation to a Bulgarian conservation organization.

### **Projected Itinerary**

(We shall be visiting some excellent sites and expect to see a wide range of butterfly species in very beautiful and largely unspoilt habitat. If weather conditions on certain days make planned visits likely to be unrewarding, the itinerary may vary from the following outline).

**Saturday 22 April** Travel by scheduled flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Drive south to Gotse Delchev, less than 20km north of the Greek border, for a one night stay. Short stops to see butterflies on the way.

**Sunday 23 April** Day spent exploring the rocky slopes of the south Pirin mountains and Slavyanka in the area of Paril and Nova Lovcha close to the Greek border. Later travel over the Greek border to Volakas in the foothills of Mount Falakro for a four night stay.

**Monday 24 April** Day spent around Potamoi in the Mesta valley, NE of Volakas and later Pagoneri.

**Tuesday 25 April** Day spent in some of the valleys and foothills of Mt. Falakro south and SW of Volakas, especially Petroussa and Pyrgi.

**Wednesday 26 April** Day spent in mountains and lowlands further west including Panorama.

**Thursday 27 April** Travel via Serres in northern Greece to Melnik in SW Bulgaria for a three night stay. Some stops on the way.

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**Friday 28 April** Day in the area of the Kozhuh volcanic ridge and hot springs at Rupite.

**Saturday 29 April** Day spent by Lake Kerkini, in northern Greece.

**Sunday 30 April** Day in the region of Kresna Gorge in the Struma valley. Return to Sofia late afternoon.

**Monday 1 May** Return flights to the UK. Depending on flight times, we expect to have the morning at a site near Sofia in the Iskar river valley.

## OUR PRICE INCLUDES:

- Return scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia with all government, airport and other taxes and charges.
- Half board.
- 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.
- Lunches (picnics bought locally) about £4 - £5).
- Drinks and personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement (£130)

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Further information from Dr Annie Kay, B-BS Tours Organiser.

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