

MIDSUMMER BUTTERFLIES and MOTHS

2 - 14 JULY 2023 (Tour Code: BM)

Leaders: Nick Greatorex-Davies and Dimitar (Mitko) Petrakiev

Price: £1,830

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



Poplar Admiral, Kokalyane near Sofia, June 2019

Cynthia's Fritillary, Belmeken, Rila Mountains, July 2008



Bosnian Blue, Central Pirin Mountains, July 2011

Balkan Clouded Yellow, Osogovska Planina, July 2012

July is the peak of the butterfly season in Bulgaria and when most of the alpine species can be found along with many species at lower altitudes. The itinerary of the tour will be primarily in the mountainous regions of SW Bulgaria and is designed to cover a wide range of habitats over a wide range of altitudes from lowlands to alpine meadows and rocky scree in order for us to see a large number of different species.

We expect to see over 130 species of butterfly during the tour. As well as butterflies we will note day-flying moths and run at least one moth trap on most nights during the tour.

During this 13 day (12 night) tour we will be visiting four main regions with a three-night stay in each region. The first part of the tour will be in SW Bulgaria and we will be visiting sites in the Struma valley and south and central Pirin mountains, including the marble limestone at Orelek, a good site to see the rare Bosnian Blue, and the famous Kresna Gorge, another top site for butterflies. Other species we will be targeting on this first leg include Apollo, Krueper's Small White, Little Tiger Blue, Escher's Blue, Higgin's Anomalous Blue, Southern Comma, Balkan Fritillary, Black Ringlet, White-banded Grayling, Freyer's Grayling, Oriental Marbled Skipper, Sandy Grizzled Skipper and Mediterranean and Pigmy Skippers. Grass Jewel is also possible.

The second part of the tour will be based in the foothills of southern Rila Mountains from where we will explore sites in the northern Pirin Mountains and in the eastern Rila mountains. Among the species we will be looking for here include Alcon Blue, Cynthia's, Shepherd's and Balkan Fritillaries, Bulgarian, Nicholl's, Ottoman's Brassy and Dewy Ringlets (among others), Great Sooty Satyr, Dusky Meadow Brown, and Dusky Grizzled Skipper.

For the third part of the tour we will be based at Kyustendil from where we will visit the butterfly-rich limestone hills of Zemen Gorge and the Osogovska Planina, a mountain range on the border with Macedonia. Particular target species here include Balkan Clouded Yellow, Iolas Blue, Ripart's Anomalous Blue and Lesser Lattice Brown.

For the final part of the tour we will be based in the foothills of the north side of the Rila Mountains and from here we will go high into the Rila Mountains by gondola below Musala Peak which will give us a further opportunity to see high mountain species mentioned for the second part of the tour. In addition we will visit sites in the foothills of the Rila Mountains where we will be particularly targeting the spectacular Poplar Admiral as well as many other species including Geranium Argus.

During the tour, apart from those mentioned above, we expect to see a whole host of other species including, depending on season, at least most of the following: Scarce and Common Swallowtails, Clouded Apollo, Mountain Small White, Eastern Bath White, Eastern Wood White, Blue-spot Hairstreak, Balkan, Scarce, Large, Purple-shot and Lesser Fiery Coppers, Provencal, Eastern and Lang's Short-tailed Blues, Geranium, Mountain and Blue Argus, Osiris Blue, Chequered Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Large Blue, Amanda's Blue, Meleager's Blue, Idas and Reverdin's Blue, Turquoise Blue, Chapman's Blue, Anomalous Blue, Purple Emperor, both Freyer's and Lesser Purple Emperors, White Admiral and Southern White Admiral, Common and Hungarian Gliders, the elusive Camberwell Beauty (hopefully), Large and Scarce Tortoiseshells, many fritillaries including Cardinal, Twin-spot Fritillary, Lesser Spotted and Nickerl's Fritillary, Balkan Marbled White, Northern Wall Brown, Lattice Brown, Large, Woodland and Bright-eyed Ringlets, Russian Heath, Chequered Skipper, Tufted Marbled Skipper and Yellow-banded Skipper.

Since 2003 we have seen 203 of the 212 butterfly species that are currently known to occur in Bulgaria (over 150 in 2008), a list will be sent approximately two weeks before departure, or in advance on request.

Most of the sites will be easy to access and walk to from the bus, but a few walks may be several kilometres long. To do these participants will need to be reasonably fit. Those who think any walk might be beyond them (e.g. at Belmeken in the Rila Mountains), can either come part of the way (walks will normally be linear rather than circular) or remain near to where the bus is parked (where they should still be able to see many butterflies and enjoy the scenery). Good walking boots, with waterproofs and warm clothing to hand, are essential for those going on longer walks, and participants are strongly advised to bring a whistle and a mobile phone just in case they get separated from the main party and need to contact the tour leaders.

Nick Greatorex-Davies has been leading butterfly and moth tours for B-BS 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 worked as an ecologist and an entomologist for 36 years (specialising in Lepidoptera (including micro-lepidoptera), and the identification of plants).

Dimiter (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.

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

We shall have at least one moth trap with us providing an extra dimension for those prepared to get up a little earlier! All confirmed records of butterflies and moths will be passed on to the National Museum of Natural History, Sofia in due course.

Bulgaria's beautiful scenery, friendly people and excellent wine and food are additional highlights. The B-BS offers you the benefits of over forty years' experience of organizing tours to Bulgaria. Our tour price includes a donation to a Bulgarian conservation organization. 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.

Projected Itinerary

(which may be subject to adjustment if weather conditions make certain visits likely to be unrewarding, or to make the best of good opportunities presented at the time).

Sunday 2 July Travel by scheduled flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Drive south to Melnik for a 3 night stay. One or two butterfly stops on the way.

Monday 3 July Day spent near the Greek border visiting the area known as the 'Marble Quarry' near Petrovo and the hills and valleys near Chuchuligovo.

Tuesday 4 July Day spent on Orelek, above Popovi Livadi, in the central Pirin Mountains. A number of target species today, including the Bosnian Blue.

Wednesday 5 July Travel to Dobursko in the southern foothills of the Rila Mountains for a 3 night stay, with stops on the way, notably in Kresna Gorge.

Thursday 6 July Day spent in the meadows and ski runs above Bansko and higher up near the Bunderitsa hut in the shadow of Vihren Peak, the highest mountain in the Pirin Mountains (2914m).

Friday 7 July Day spent at Belmeken in the eastern Rila Mountains looking for high altitude species.

Saturday 8 July Travel to Kyustendil for a 3 night stay. Good options for stops on the way.

Sunday 9 July Day spent in the butterfly-rich limestone hills and valleys in the Zemen Gorge area.

Monday 10 July Visit to the Osogovska Planina (mountains) near the border of Bulgaria with Macedonia where our prime target butterfly will be the Balkan Clouded Yellow.

Tuesday 11 July Travel to Borovets in the foothills of the north side of the Rila Mountains for a 3 night stay. Stops on the way.

Wednesday 12 July Take gondola to Yastrebets hut near Musala (2925m, the highest mountain peak in the Balkans) providing another opportunity for high altitude species.

Thursday 13 July Day spent in the Iskar Valley where one of the main target species will be Poplar Admiral.

Friday 14 July Morning travel back to Sofia Airport for our return flight to the UK. There should be time for one short stop on the way.



OUR PRICE INCLUDES:

- Return scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia.
- Airport taxes, baggage, seat reservation.
- Accommodation in small (often family-run) hotels with en suite facilities on a twin bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Half board.
- 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.
- Lunches (picnics purchased locally at start of the day) £4 -£5.
- Single room supplement (£150).

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

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Bookings forms and deposits by bank transfer or cards over the phone to Balkania Travel Ltd.,

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