

**SPRING BUTTERFLY and MOTH TOUR**

12 - 22 May 2024 (Tour code: SBT)

Leaders: Nick Greatorex-Davies and Tihomir Stefanov

Price: £1,990 (Based on a group of 7 or more, a smaller group may incur a supplement, see NOTE on Page 4)

***Early booking discount of £50 per person on bookings received by 30 September***



Southern Festoon, Strandzha, May 2019



Eastern Greenish Black-tip, N. Greece, May 2015



Gruner's Orange-tip, SW Bulgaria, May 2014



Inky Skipper, Kresna Gorge, May 2015 (Photo by Tihomir Stefanov)

This 11-day tour will take place in the stunning mountain scenery of SW Bulgaria and northern Greece, where the springtime is particularly beautiful with the fresh growth of wild flowers, trees in blossom, and the air filled with birdsong.

We shall be looking for a range of spring or first generation butterfly species such as Southern Festoon, Clouded Apollo, Gruner's Orange-tip, Eastern Greenish Black-tip, Krueper's Small White, Eastern Wood White, Grecian Copper, Little Tiger Blue, Grass Jewel, Chequered Blue, Iolas Blue, Eastern Knapweed Fritillary and Inky, Oriental Marbled & Mediterranean Skippers.

We also expect to see a wide range of other butterfly species already on the wing, between 80 and 100 species during the tour (depending on season), such as Common and Scarce Swallowtails, Eastern Festoon, Black-veined White, Eastern Dappled White, Large Copper, Osiris Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Green Underside Blue, Eastern Zephyr Blue, Southern White Admiral, Large Tortoiseshell, Camberwell Beauty, Southern Comma, Common Glider, Cardinal, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Russian Heath, and Yellow-banded, Tufted Marbled and Hungarian Skippers.

SW Bulgaria is the richest part of Bulgaria for butterflies and is in the midst of one of the top European butterfly hotspots. In the Struma and Mesta valleys several butterfly species reach the northernmost limit of their range in Europe. Some species emerge as early as March and April but we expect to still find many of these in 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 dayflying moths, run at least one moth trap and take note of other wildlife that we see, for example we will be visiting Kerkini Lake in northern Greece where we expect to see many birds.

The tour will be based in two main areas: Mount Falakron in northern Greece, from where we shall also explore the foothills of Slavyanka Mountain; the second stage of the tour will be based in SW Bulgaria, from where we shall explore areas in and adjacent to the Struma river valley and also over the border again into Greece.

The tour should be suitable for all ages (18+), 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 even in the spring.

Nick Greatorex-Davies has led these tours 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 microlepidoptera), and in recent decades European butterflies, supplemented by a strong interest in botany.

Tihomir (Tisho) is currently working at the National Museum of Natural History in Sofia ([www.nmnh.com](http://www.nmnh.com)) as head of the department of Recent and Fossil Fish. His main research topic is taxonomy and phylogeny of the freshwater fish of Bulgaria, and he has recently been promoted as an Associate Professor in Zoology. He took part as a researcher in the last two Bulgarian Antarctic Expeditions. He is an enthusiastic all round naturalist and a very keen birdwatcher.

The tour provides numerous opportunities for photographing butterflies. Butterfly nets and 'pots' for the temporary retention of butterflies are highly recommended (butterflies 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 nearly 40 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, 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 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 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 12 May** 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 on the way.

**Monday 13 May** Day spent exploring the rocky slopes of the south Pirin mountains and Slavyanka in the area of Paril and Nova Lovtcha close to the Greek border. Later travel over the Greek border to Volakas in the foothills of Mount Falakro for a four-night stay.

**Tuesday 14 May** Day spent in the area around Potamoi in the Mesta valley, NE of Volakas, and later Pagoneri.

**Wednesday 15 May** Day spent in some of the valleys and foothills of Mt. Falakro south and SW of Volakas, especially Petroussa.

**Thursday 16 May** Day spent in some of the foothills of Mt Falakro west of Volakas, including Panorama.

**Friday 17 May** Travel via Serres in northern Greece to Melnik in SW Bulgaria for a five-night stay. Some stops on the way.

**Saturday 18 May** Day in the area of the Kozhukh volcanic ridge.

**Sunday 19 May** Day spent over the Greek border by, and on, Lake Kerkini and the southern foothills of Belasitsa Mountain.

**Monday 20 May** Day spent round the Kresna Gorge in the Struma valley.

**Tuesday 21 May** Day spent near the Greek border in areas adjacent to the river Struma.

**Wednesday 22 May** Return to Sofia for the return flights to the UK. Time for a short stop on the way.



NOTE: The price has been calculated for 7 participants using a minibus. If fewer participants or if using a larger vehicle, price may be increased. If over 10 participants, price will be reduced for all booked.

#### 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).

NOTE: Butterfly nets may be used to help identify butterflies, all of which are released where found.

Published June 2023.



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

Email: [annie.kaym1@gmail.com](mailto:annie.kaym1@gmail.com). [www.b-bs.org.uk](http://www.b-bs.org.uk)

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

c/o Ognian Avgarski, 63 Alphabet Square, London E3 3RT. Phone: 0207 536 9400,

Email: [ognian@balkaniatravel.com](mailto:ognian@balkaniatravel.com), visit our website [www.balkaniatravel.com](http://www.balkaniatravel.com)

(Registered office Conex House, 148 Field End Road, Eastcote, HA5 1RJ)

