

# HIGH SUMMER BUTTERFLY & DRAGONFLY TOUR

**26 July - 6 August 2017** (Tour Code: BT4)

**Leaders: Nick Greatorex-Davies and Tihomir Stefanov**

**Price: £1,400** (Based on a group of 10 or more. A smaller group will incur a supplement).

**Early Booking Discount: £50 per person if booked by the end of August 2016.**

This 12 day tour will take place in the beautiful Rila and Pirin mountains and adjacent valleys at a time when most of the mountain butterflies will be on the wing. At lower altitudes many other butterflies will be flying, including several grayling species. We expect to see over 130 butterfly species during the tour.

The second main focus of the tour will be dragonflies and we shall be looking for a range of species that are found at both high and lower altitudes.



Among the mountain butterfly specialities we hope to see are Balkan Clouded Yellow, Cynthia's, Balkan and Shepherd's Fritillaries, many ringlets including Bulgarian, Nicholl's, Common Brassy, Ottoman's Brassy, Water, Black, Bright-eyed and Dewy Ringlets, and Dusky Grizzled Skipper.

At lower levels we shall be visiting sites to look for a few 'special' species. These are Powdered Brimstone, Dusky Large Blue and Freyer's Grayling and possibly the White-banded Grayling.

Among the many other butterfly species we hope to see are: Krueper's Small White, Large, Scarce and Balkan Coppers, many blues including: Little Tiger Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Blue Argus, Iolas Blue (2<sup>nd</sup> gen.), Alcon Blue, Idas Blue, Geranium Argus, Eros Blue, Turquoise Blue, Meleager's Blue, and Ripart's Anomalous Blue; Purple, Lesser and Freyer's Purple Emperors, Southern White Admiral, Common and Hungarian Gliders, Large Tortoiseshell, Southern Comma, many fritillaries including Cardinal, Twin-spot, Lesser Spotted and Nickerl's Fritillaries, Lattice Brown, Northern Wall Brown, Eastern Rock Grayling, Tree Grayling, False Grayling, Great Sooty Satyr, Hermit, Chestnut Heath, Eastern Large Heath, Sandy Grizzled Skipper, Olive Skipper and Oriental Marbled Skipper.

Among the many dragonfly species we hope to see that are absent or rare in the UK are: Blue-eyed Hawker, Green-eyed Hawker, Bog Hawker, Vagrant Emperor, Eastern Spectre, Large Pincertail, Bladetail, Balkan Goldenring, Sombre Goldenring, White-tailed Skimmer, Southern Skimmer, Broad Scarlet and Black Pennant.

Since 2003 we have seen nearly 200 of the 216 butterfly species that occur in Bulgaria (over 150 in 2008), a list will be sent with your tickets, or in advance on request.

Some of the walks at higher altitudes may be of several kms so participants need to be reasonably fit (we shall also use gondolas where available). Those who think these walks might be beyond them can either come part of the way (mountain 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 dragonflies and enjoy the mountain scenery). Good walking boots, with waterproofs and warm clothing to hand, are essential for those going up high, and participants are strongly advised 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.

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 for 36

years. 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.

Tihomir (Tisho) works 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, but he also has a good knowledge of dragonflies. He is an enthusiastic all round naturalist and a keen birdwatcher.

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

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, dragonflies and moths will be passed on to the National Museum of Natural History, Sofia.

Bulgaria's beautiful scenery, friendly people and excellent wine and food are additional highlights. The B-BS offers you the benefits of its nearly 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 twenty 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. There may also be fewer high altitude visits if we have already seen the target species at previous sites*).

**Wednesday 26 July** Travel by scheduled flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Drive south to Borovets in the northern Rila mountains for a two night stay. (Short stops on the way).

**Thursday 27 July** Take the cable car to Yastrobets at the top of the mountain to look for high altitude butterfly species.

**Friday 28 July** Morning in ski run meadows near Borovets. Later in the day travel to Dobarsko in southern Rila Mountains stopping at Boboshevo (butterflies) and the Kocherino quarries (dragonflies). Four night stay.

**Saturday 29 July** Day in the Rila Mountains at Belmeken for a wide range of high altitude butterflies and some dragonflies.

**Sunday 30 July** Day exploring the calcareous slopes of Vihren Peak in the Pirin Mountains.

**Monday 31 July** Cable car to Bezbog in SE Pirin and later in the day at lower altitudes looking for different butterflies and dragonflies.

**Tuesday 1 August** A day exploring limestone areas in the area of our hotel. Later in the day travel to Melnik for 3 night stay.

**Wednesday 2 August** Travel south to Lake Kerkini in northern Greece. Here we shall see a range of dragonfly species. Later in the day we shall visit a limestone area (mainly for butterflies) in the foothills of Mount Orvilos before returning to Melnik.

**Thursday 3 August** Day spent in the area of Rupite, Kozhuh Hill and Novo Hodzhovo in the Struma valley for butterflies and dragonflies.

**Friday 4 August** Day in Kresna Gorge and area for butterflies and dragonflies. Return to Sofia late afternoon for a 2-night stay.

**Saturday 5 August** Day at Dragoman Marsh for dragonflies and butterflies on the adjacent karst hills. Late afternoon visit to the Lyulin Planina near Sofia, mainly for butterflies.

**Sunday 6 August** Morning visit to a site in the Iskar valley south of Sofia. Afternoon return flight to the UK.

#### **OUR PRICE INCLUDES:**

- Return scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia.
- Airport taxes.
- 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) £3 -£4.
- Single room supplement (£100).

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