

# SUMMER BUTTERFLY TOUR

**24 June - 5 July 2017** (Tour Code: BT2)

**Leaders: Nick Greatorex-Davies and Mitko Petrakiev**

**Price: £1,500** (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 follows the same general itinerary as in June 2016, but will be three weeks later. Firstly we shall visit NW Bulgaria, a relatively poor and largely unexplored region of Bulgaria. There are many extensively wooded valleys and unimproved meadows to the north towards the Danube, and to the south an area of fascinating rock formations covering almost 100 sq km. and further south a long limestone ridge of hills that proved very productive on previous visits (e.g. almost 70 butterfly species in one valley on one day in July 2015).



Spinose Skipper, W Bulgaria, June 2016

The second part of the tour will be spent in the Stara Planina in Serbia, a very species-rich area (166 species known). Finally we shall travel to the region of Kyustendil, SW of Sofia near the border with Serbia and

Macedonia, where there are particularly species-rich limestone areas in the region of Zemen gorge.

The tour is designed to take in a variety of habitats from low to high altitudes in order to see a wide range of species, we expect 120-140 different butterfly species during the tour.

We shall be looking for a few 'special' species: False Comma, Bog Fritillary, Freyer's Fritillary (which is widespread in NW Bulgaria and this part of Serbia), and Spinose and Persian Skippers, both of which occur in some of the limestone areas we explore. It is just possible that in some areas we visit the Woodland Brown still occurs.

Other species seen on the tour should include many of the following: Eastern Festoon, Apollo, Clouded Apollo, Mountain Small White, Krueper's Small White, Eastern Wood White, Blue-spot Hairstreak, Osiris Blue, Eastern Baton Blue, Balkan Copper, Alcon Blue, Eastern Zephyr Blue, Chequered Blue, Revedin's Blue, Blue Argus, Turquoise Blue, Iolas Blue, Lesser & Freyer's Purple Emperors, Southern White Admiral, Common & Hungarian Gliders, False Comma, Cardinal, Niobe Fritillary, Marsh Fritillary, False Heath Fritillary, Lesser Spotted Fritillary, Assmann's Fritillary, Nickerl's Fritillary, Balkan Marbled White, Hermit, Great Sooty Satyr, Lattice Brown, Lesser Lattice Brown, Ottoman's Brassy Ringlet, Almond-eyed Ringlet, Woodland Ringlet, Russian Heath, Yellow-banded Skipper, Orbed Red Underwing Skipper, Marbled Skipper and Tufted Marbled Skipper, among many others.

Since 2003 we have seen nearly 200 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.

Some of the walks at higher altitudes may be of several kms so participants need to be reasonably fit. 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 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.

Mitko Petrakiev is a tour leader and mountain guide with over ten years' experience. He is also qualified as a climbing instructor and for cave rescue and first aid. He is also a good birder.

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.

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** *(This will be the second time we have visited Serbia on one of our tours and we shall also include some new sites in NW Bulgaria. Further research to find sites where we are most likely to find rarer species will continue over the winter months).*

**Saturday 24 June** Travel by scheduled flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Drive north to Belogradchik for a four night stay. We expect there will be time for a couple of short stops on the way.

**Sunday 25 June** Day in the wooded valleys and meadows north of Belogradchik towards the River Danube.

**Monday 26 June** Day in the limestone area south of Belogradchik.

**Tuesday 27 June** Day high on the lower slopes and valleys of Kom in the Western Stara Planina.

**Wednesday 28 June** Travel south crossing into Serbia for a four night stay within the Stara Planina Nature Park. Short stops on the way.

**Thursday 29 June** Day exploring damp unimproved meadows in the vicinity of our hotel and, depending on time, further afield.

**Friday 30 June** Day exploring some of the limestone areas to the south of the Serbian Stara Planina.

**Saturday 1 July** Another day exploring limestone areas in the region.

**Sunday 2 July** Travel back to Bulgaria and south to Kyustendil for a two night stay. Stops on the way.

**Monday 3 July** Day in a limestone valley adjacent to Zemen gorge (Zemen gorge itself is only accessible on foot or by train), this has proved to be exceptionally rich for butterflies on July visits.

**Tuesday 4 July** Return to Sofia for a one-night stay. Stops on the way.

**Wednesday 5 July** Return flights to the UK. Depending on flight times, we may have time in the morning to visit sites near Sofia in the Iskar river valley.

#### **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 (£130).

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