

Butterflies of France (Alpes-Maritimes)

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In a landscape of limestone crags, impressive gorges and flower-rich meadows, this one-week butterfly extravaganza in July 2015 visited Mercantour National Park in southern France, focussing on altitudes of up to 2350 metres. With excellent weather, temperatures reaching 35 C, the trip was both enjoyable and highly successful - in total, no less than 104 species of butterflies were seen, plus additional bonuses such as Alpine Marmot and Alpine Chamois, both new species of mammal for me.

As little information is currently available to assist in the planning of a butterfly trip to this area, this report firstly details the localities visited, then provides a day-to-day account of key species seen and finally concludes with a full systematic list of all species seen. It should be noted, however, that at this relatively late stage of the season, few butterflies were seen below about 1200 meters, the landscapes in these lower areas tending to be parched and devoid of flowers. A similar trip two to three weeks earlier, though differing in species mix, could produce a trip list a little higher. **KEY LOCALITIES** 1. RIMPLAS Coordinates: 44° 3' 49.18" N, 7° 7' 50.53" E Altitude: 900 meters.

A quaint mountaintop village with superb butterfly sites on the doorstep, this would be a very good base if staying in the region. A good variety of butterflies can be seen along the grassy roadsides around the fort above the village and by simply walking from the village in any direction, but the best sites are two broad tracks that meander down the eastern side of the mountain from the village - butterfly totals in the earlier part of the season can exceed 60 species and the simple profusion of butterflies is a sight indeed. Notable species here included Sloe Hairstreak, Long-tailed Blue, Meleager's Blue, numerous Scarce Swallowtails, Mallow Skipper and both Obethur's and Foulquier's Grizzled Skippers. To access the first of these tracks, follow the single road running through the village for about 50 meters beyond the small hotel in the village centre. Where the road ends, the track begins and is marked by a no vehicles sign. Butterflies are abundant along the entire length of the track. The start of the second track is about 50 metres or so before the hotel and runs adjacent to the small road to the fort (for road climbs, track descends). 2. COL DE LA LOMBARDE.

Coordinates: 44° 12' 9.24" N, 7° 9' 0.43" E Altitude: 1845-2350 metres. This site offered some of the very best butterfly experiences of the trip. Easily accessed by driving to the Isolo 2000 ski centre, the road then follows a series of hairpins to the top at the Col de la Lombarde (which is also the Italian border). The slopes between the ski centre and Col de la Lombarde were a carpet of flowers and absolutely buzzing with butterflies - amongst the many species seen, Mountain and Shepherd's Fritillaries, the very localized Balkan Fritillary, both Mountain and Moorland Clouded Yellows, plus both Apollo and Small Apollo. Interestingly, the Italian side of the mountain pass was relatively devoid of flowers and consequently lacking in butterflies.

Nutcrackers, Alpine Choughs and Water Pipits were also seen here, along with several Alpine Marmots. 3. VALLEE DE LA GORDOLASQUE. Coordinates: 44° 4' 26.86" N, 7° 24' 4.19" E Altitude: 1720-1950 meters.

Picturesque, but not as productive as other sites. The valley bottom is shaded until about 9 a.m., then rapidly becomes very hot. Probably better earlier in the season, but still provided assorted ringlets (including my only Almond-eyed Ringlet of the trip), Weaver's Fritillary, plentiful Apollos and Cleopatra. Accessed by driving through Belvedere village and following the small road to its end at a car park. Midway along this road, two sections were lined with buddleia bushes in full flower - predictably, these were excellent, masses of butterflies present, including several Dryads, a Southern White Admiral, at least 40 Painted Ladies and quite a few very fresh Gatekeepers.

Two Alpine Chamois were seen on the crags in the higher sections of the Vallee de la Gordolasque. Also Nutcracker, Water Pipits, Crag Martins, Northern Wheatears and Black Redstarts. 4. COL DE COUILLOLE. Coordinates: 44° 6' 0.77" N, 7° 1' 22.93" E Altitude: 1678 meters.

Not especially productive, but worth a look in passing. From the car park at the mountain pass (on the road between Beuil and St. Sauveur-s-Tinee), meadows can be explored in any direction. Good for orchids earlier in the season. On my brief visit, I saw 17 species of butterfly, including Mountain Argus, Niobe Fritillary and Knapweed Fritillary. 5. BEUIL. GPS coordinates: 44° 6' 11.52" N, 6° 59' 12.39" E Altitude: 1450 meters.

This nice little site is located adjacent to a small bridge about one kilometre north of the village of Beale. From the bridge, tracks lead up the hill through open woodland and meadow, but even better is a small meadow about 150 metres back towards the village. Marked by assorted farm junk and old trailers, this unassuming patch of land was surprisingly rich in butterflies. Best of all was a large manure pile that is easily visible from the road and has been present for some years.

The small pools that formed around its base were a magnet for assorted blues and skippers - at the height of afternoon, there were at least 400 butterflies massing, mostly Damon Blues, Chalkhill Blues, Silver-spotted Skippers and Safflower Skippers, but several other skipper species also present.

6. COL DE CAYOLLE. Coordinates: 44° 15' 33.18" N, 6° 44' 38.37" E Altitude: 1800-2326 meters. This superb Alpine area was very productive. A large grassland bowl just north of the mountain pass held a good variety of butterflies, including many Apollos, four Small Apollos, a good number of Mountain Clouded Yellows, Shepherd's, Mountain and Titania's Fritillaries and several Marbled Fritillaries. Alpine Choughs, Water Pipits and Northern Wheatears were also seen here. Meadows about 6 km beyond the pass held Gandon Blues, Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and various skippers.

At the village of Estenc, ten kilometers back down the mountain (44° 14' 7.74" N, 6° 45' 6.02" E, altitude 1800 m), a superb damp meadow is located. From the small hotel by the bridge, the meadow is on the steep slope immediately adjacent on the west side, a flower patch near the top was particularly good. Butterflies here included Bluespot Hairstreak, Adonis Blue, Grissons Fritillary, Knapweed Fritillary and Red Underwing Fritillary. 7. COL DE CHAMPS. Coordinates: 44° 10' 29.50" N, 6° 41' 52.42" E Altitude: 2045 meters. Only visited in the late afternoon, by which time it was quite windy, this site almost certainly better deserved more attention than I gave it. 17 species of butterfly seen, including Safflower Skippers and Niobe Fritillary. A flowering tree outside a hotel in Val Pelens attracted at least 40 Silver-washed Fritillaries and adjacent lavender bushes a Long-tailed Blue.

Many Alpine Marmots seen here, plus one Red Squirrel in the forests on the lower slopes. DAY LOG.

22 July.

Arrived in the area by car late in the evening, staying this first evening in Menton on the Mediterranean coast.

23 July. Rimplas. The quest was on! Having zigzagged up the meandering roads from the coast, I started my trip at the superb village of Rimplas. Sitting atop an imposing ridge with views down into the deep valleys below, the butterfly action began at 8.00 a.m. with a sleepy Wood White on a wall in the village. As the main butterfly track would remain shaded until about 10 a.m., I began by exploring random paths on the southern side of the village. An excellent start - Chalkhill Blues on flowers, Dryads fluttering past, Berger's Clouded Yellows on the wing, a smart Long-tailed Blue on a grass stalk, quite a number of Black Satyrs on the paths, all nice stuff. Time went whizzing by, a dozen species quickly racked up, the sun soaring up towards 30 C. Wandering back to the village centre, my eyes almost popped out - absolutely heaving with butterflies, a large clump of fragrant lavender bushes decorated a garden edge adjacent to the main village junction. Truly an impressive sight, the colourful cocktail included at least 30 Scarce Swallowtails fluttering across the blue tops, dozens of Heath and Spotted Fritillaries, a few Berger's Clouded Yellows, occasional Small Whites and a pleasing array of blues and skippers, the best being a Mallow Skipper. Also saw here my only Southern Commas of the trip, at least five present. It was easy to spend half an hour at this single spot! It was now however 10.15 a.m., the sun was already burning down and ahead the main butterfly track awaited. And a wonderful track it was, completely abuzz with butterflies from the start. Amazing numbers of Marbled Whites on flowers either side of the track, abundant Black and Great Sooty Satyrs, plentiful Woodland Graylings resting on the ground. Spotted and Heath Fritillaries everywhere, one Provincial Fritillary picked out. Wandering along, the tally continued to rise, Sooty Copper, Small Copper, another Long-tailed Blue, a stunning Meleager's Blue, a few Dusky Meadow Browns. A dizzying confusion of skippers also present, identification in many cases a bit of a headache requiring good views of both the uppers and, more challenging, the underwing. Large Skippers easy enough, so too Lulworth Skipper, Mallow Skipper and Dingy Skipper, but the grizzled species were a challenge indeed! Many ended up without conclusive identifications, but did manage both Obethur's and Foulquier's Grizzled Skippers. The lower stretches of the track, hot and withered, proved relatively unproductive with a Turquoise Blue the main attraction, so I soon returned to the upper section near the village. And here, one of the main prizes of the day - feeding on flowers just above the track, a smart little Sloe Hairstreak, happily posing quite nicely for photographs. Now early afternoon and a heady 35 C, I returned to the village for another quick look at the lavender bushes, then drove up to the small fort towering above the village. To the east, deep rumbles of thunder and deep black clouds gathered on the horizon. The roadside verges at this site were yet again a treat - Chalkhill, Amanda and Common Blues, plus Heath, Spotted and High Brown Fritillaries, Large Grizzled Skippers and more. Perhaps the most pleasing sight however was the sharing of flowers by both Swallowtails and Scarce Swallowtails, colour galore. Nearby, a Marbled Fritillary became the unlucky victim of a sider! The skies were darkening, great black clouds rolling into the upper valley, butterflies continued to feed unconcerned. Claps of thunder echoed across the mountains, flashes of lightening flicked ever closer. At 14.00, the skies opened, butterflies rapidly vanished and within minutes I was in the depths of a humongous thunderstorm, rain lashing down, then turning to hail, great lumps ice battering my car. The temperature dropped from 35 C to 13 C!

Sitting it out a while, it soon became apparent things were not about to change, so I decided to descend and explore the Mediterranean coastline. No rain down there, but with the landscape long parched and lacking in greenery or flowers, there were also no butterflies! Driving around for quite a while, I saw a grand total of two butterflies - one Scarce Swallowtail and a Gatekeeper. I called it a day and returned to Menton.

24 July. Vallee de la Gordolasque. Messed up my strategy a little here. Arriving at 8.00 a.m., the valley was still in still deep shadow, so I decided to hike to the high slopes way above, the scree and flower meadows there already bathed in sun. A rather exhausting climb, I got to the high meadows totally puffed out and then discovered it was almost impossible to follow the abundant butterflies already drifting by - as gorgeous Apollos floated past and Common Brassy Ringlets sunned themselves, the very steep slopes meant the butterflies could invariably flit just a few meters and be beyond access! And just to emphasize my wasted effort, by the time I had reached the top, the valley bottom was beginning to flood with sunlight! Still, two very nice Alpine Chamois were seen on the crags at this high altitude and birds included a very showy Nutcracker and several Crag Martins flying low over the slopes. Eventually stumbling back down the slope, I then took the much easier option of following the gentle path up the middle of the valley - not bad at all, Apollos were still flying, so too several Berger's Clouded Yellows, many Common Brassy Ringlets, a single Almond-eyed Ringlet and a Weaver's Fritillary. Now however, barely 10.30 a.m., cloud was already hanging over the peaks and shading these upper parts of the valley. Butterflies were becoming inactive. Descending a little, the meadows were still nice and sunny and I had a good couple of hours with butterflies including ever-present Marbled Whites, abundant Scarce Coppers, several

Arran Browns and Large Ringlets, a couple of Large Grizzled Skippers and one of the only Pearly Heaths of the trip. At about 13.00 however, the thunderstorms of the day before returned. It began to rain and soon I returned to the warm sunny coast. Fortunately this would be the last rain on the trip, the remainder of the days would be unbroken sunshine from dawn till dusk.

25 July. Beuil, Col de Couillole & Col de Champs. An excellent day starting at the small village of Beuil. A kilometre north of the village, a small bridge straddles a stream and here I parked. Initially wandering tracks to the north of the bridge, numerous Marbled Whites, Chalkhill Blues and dark-phase Spotted Fritillaries warmed themselves in the dappled early morning sunshine, Damon Blues and Woodland Graylings also common. In the mixed meadow and woodland edge, Chestnut Heath, Obethur's Grizzled Skipper and Large Grizzled Skipper were added to the list, along with Wood White, Great Sooty Satyr and Meadow Brown. Missing however was a large manure pile that was legendary for the leagues of butterflies that would gather at its edges come the heat of the day. With only hazy references to its location, I surmised that it must be south of the bridge, so I backtracked and wandered along the road towards Beuil. A mere 100 metres or so and there it was, a great heap in a roadside meadow surrounded by assorted pieces of farmyard junk, trailers and the like. And magnificent it was! Even at 10 a.m., blues and skippers were massing at the side of small pools at the base of the pile, yet more on the manure heap itself. Damon Blues by the dozen, Silver-spotted Skippers two-a-penny, a most impressive sight. Also a couple of Painted Ladies drifting around, a dozen or so Large Skippers and, in meadows yonder, some rather nice fritillaries fluttering past. A half an hour or so on my knees in the manure, some stunning Silver-spotted Skippers posing for photographs, then off I went to explore those meadows. Queen of Spain Fritillaries on flower tops, Dark Green Fritillaries and Knapweed Fritillary on thistles and, amongst the rest, one Marbled Fritillary, several Silver-washed Fritillaries and an occasional High Brown Fritillary. Come midday, I moved to the nearby Col de la Couillole (1678 metres). Not the richest of butterfly locations, it was nonetheless a pleasant place. Large thistle clumps attracted Niobe and High Brown Fritillaries, as well as Red Admirals and Commas, while at the same time Clouded Yellows and Berger's Clouded Yellows drifted over the grasslands and, amongst the Damon and Chalkhill Blues, I managed to find two Escher's Blues. I also found a couple of Mountain Argus and a pair of mating Knapweed Fritillaries. In total, 18 species seen here. In the heat of the afternoon, a brief return to the manure pile at Beuil was rewarded with a truly amazing sight ...settling on the damp soils, a mass of proboscis gently probing the delights of the manure, there were now at least 400 blues and skippers settled around the puddles, spectacular indeed! Heaven, quite a time I spent crawling around amongst the butterflies, still the great bulk of individuals being Damon and Chalkhill Blues. Amongst the skippers however, an impressive seven species were present - as well as numerous Silver-spotted and Large Skippers, an abundance of grizzled skippers of assorted ilk made for some fun time. Not all so easy to use identify, largely due to variabilities amongst individuals and the difficulty of seeing the underwings, the most frequent appeared to be Safflower Skippers, but there were additionally at least a few Olive Skippers present, plus singletons of Large Grizzled Skipper, Obethur's Grizzled Skipper and Dingy Skipper. My plans for the next day were to explore a couple of high mountain passes a little further east, both offering easy access to Alpine meadows at over 2000 meadows altitude. With glorious sunshine still prevailing, I became my journey in that direction, travelling through the small settlements of Valberg and Guillaumes to arrive in St Martin-d'Entraunes in the late afternoon. Equidistant between the two mountain passes, this would make a good overnight base, but I continued to the lower of the two passes, namely the Col de Champs. Stopping at the high point of the road, an altitude of 2045 metres, the scenery was magnificent - rolling Alpine meadows to a backdrop of jagged limestone peaks and forested lower slopes. Alpine Marmots chirped from burrow entrances, Red-billed Choughs tumbled through the skies overhead. In sheltered gullies, quite a range of butterflies too - Common Brassy Ringlets, ever-present Marbled Whites and Chalkhill Blues, a couple of Niobe Fritillaries, plus Eros Blue and Pearl-spotted Fritillaries, both the first of the trip. Unfortunately, I did not find Cynthia's Fritillary, a rare species that sometimes occurs at this location. Dark Green Fritillaries offered a little compensation. As evening drew in, I descended to the lower valleys to spent the night, it can get a touch cool at night on the high tops! Meandering down the hairpin bends, quite a number of Alpine Marmots scuttled off the verge, one dark-morph Red Squirrel scampered across the road as I entered the forest belt. Finding a nice spot near a river, I made camp for the night.

26 July. Col de Cayolle. A superb day on the road up and over the Col de Cayolle, stopping at various altitudes from 1800 metres to 2326 metres. A mere 8.5 C at dawn, but already 13 C at 9.00 a.m. and 23 C at 10 a.m. Stop one was at the little village of Estenc, a large marshy area aside the road the initial reason. Didn't see much in the marsh, but a meadow on a steep slope adjacent proved absolutely fantastic. Now just after 9.00 a.m. and warming up a treat, this damp meadow was already abuzz with butterflies, Marbled Whites, Large Ringlets and Arran Browns all adorning flower tops, Damon Blues taking in the morning sunshine, plus many more. At the top of the slope, a flower patch was particularly good, a splendid cocktail of many dozens of butterflies proving a real treat. Almost immediately, I bumped into my first Bluespot Hairstreak, then a couple of Knapweed Fritillaries, a Pearl-bordered Fritillary, then yet more Bluespot Hairstreaks, at least six present. In this amazing little patch, I also saw my first Shepherd's Fritillaries of the day, plus Grisons Fritillaries, several Adonis Blues, both Chestnut and Small Heaths and assorted skippers including Large Grizzled Skipper and Carline Skipper. An excellent start to the day, this one-hour stop resulted in no less than 22 species, including a couple that I saw nowhere on the trip. Continuing north, crossing the Col de Cayolle at an altitude of 2326 metres, my next stop was in a grassland bowl a few hundred metres beyond the mountain pass. Full of flowers, cut by small streams and most picturesque, this looked most promising! It did not disappoint me ... superb Apollos almost non-stop, Mountain Clouded Yellows following in their wake, Shepherd's and Mountain Fritillaries widespread. Other excellent butterflies too, Marbled Ringlets (only ones seen on the trip), rather many Titania's Fritillaries (only location where common) and one Dusky Grizzled Skipper (only one seen). Top of the lot however was a butterfly almost missed - having chased umpteen Apollos in a quest to get a photograph, the one that finally landed on a thistle top turned out to

be a Small Apollo, very nice indeed! it transpired there were actually four Small Apollos in this small gully! Also seen, many Queen of Spain Fritillaries, abundant Common Brassy Ringlets, quite a few Silver-studded Blues and, rather less expected at this altitude, a Large Tortoiseshell that settled briefly. From the Col, I continued another 5.5 km to some grassy verges at a slightly lower altitude. Choosing a patch just below a small bridge (44° 17' 05.8" N, 6° 44' 31.4" E) at an altitude of 2020 metres, the selection was perhaps even richer than that at the summit - only spent an hour here, but butterflies of note did include Glandon Blues, Pearl-spotted Fritillaries and Mountain Argus, along with Apollos still commonplace, quite a few Titania's and High Brown Fritillaries and a number of Large Grizzled Skippers. Damon Blues also common, so too Scarce Coppers, Common Brassy Ringlets and Large Ringlets. Finally departing the Col de Cayolle, I was feeling quite happy - over 40 species I'd seen, some real classics among them. With quite some hours still to play with, I decided I would pay another visit to the Col de Champs, maybe I would get lucky with Cynthia's Fritillary! Well, in short, it was not to be - saw a lot of Alpine Marmots, found one Long-tailed Blue and had an impressive 40 or more Silver-washed Fritillaries at the Van Pelens hotel, but not a sniff of Cynthia's Fritillary. After a couple of hours of wandering around the top, I called it a day and drove all the way back to the Mediterranean coast. On the beachfront, one Mediterranean Gull amongst the more abundant Yellow-legged Gulls.

27 July. Isolo 2000 & Col de la Lombardi. 9.00 a.m., Isolo 2000 ski resort, altitude 1845 metres. High clouds were already edging over the high peaks and a cool wind knocked the temperatures, things were not looking too promising! Expecting the sun to soon disappear, I found a sheltered gully leading down from one of the main ski lifts ...a few Dark Green Fritillaries decorated the grassland flowers, a couple of Berger's Clouded Yellows settled briefly. Miraculously, a half hour later, the clouds evaporated away into nothing, leaving picture perfect blue skies from horizon to horizon, the wind also dropping to a mere breeze. And as the temperatures rose, so the gully transformed into a butterfly haven - Clouded Yellows, Arran Browns and Large Ringlets abundant, plentiful Scarce Coppers, Queen of Spain Fritillaries, a few Large Grizzled Skippers, a scatter of other species including Small Copper, Amanda's Blue and Small Tortoiseshell. Little did it prepare me however for the next leg of the journey, the short drive from the Isolo ski resort to the Col de la Lombarde. The slopes were an absolute riot of butterflies - what would be a 10 minute drive via a series of steep hairpins took me closer to five hours! Magnificent numbers of butterflies, a superb range of species. Apollos zigzagging the slopes, flights of both Shepherd's and Mountain Fritillaries, plentiful Clouded and Berger's Clouded Yellows, Common Brassy Ringlets by the dozen, the list went on and on. In all, over 30 species were seen on these productive slopes, and amongst them some real classic species - including at least four Small Apollos (undoubtedly more, Apollos were very common), two Tufted Marbled Skippers and quite a number of Silver-spotted Skippers. The rarest finds however were both species that could easily have slipped by unnoticed - a Moorland Clouded Yellow amongst the more frequent Mountain Clouded Yellows and a couple of Balkan Fritillaries amongst the Shepherd's and Mountain Fritillaries. Both localized, it was a special moment indeed to find the two of them flying together on one particularly rich flower patch near the top of the pass. Also my only Grayling of the trip, abundant Arran Browns and Large Ringlets, quite a few Queen of Spain Fritillaries and a trio of coppers (Scarce, Purple-shot and Small Coppers). The Col de la Lombardi, as well as marking the highest point on the road, also delineates the French-Italian border. On the Italian side, a plateau studded by a few pools looked most inviting, butterflies galore I was expecting. However, a feature that seemed characteristic of many of these high mountain passes, the two sides were effectively chalk and cheese - the French side in this case awash with flowers and butterflies, the Italian side almost totally devoid of both. My ventures into Italy as a result were not very prolonged! Back on the French side, I descended to some of the lower altitude habitats. Mostly dry, withered and lacking in flowers, my random stops between Isolo 2000 and Isolo town rarely proved productive, the occasional butterflies mostly limited to Chalkhill Blues and Marbled Whites. Midway along this road however, roadside clumps of buddleia were choc-a-bloc with butterflies. An easy half an hour passed at these, the species present including a lot of Scarce Coppers, a good dozen or so Silver-washed Fritillaries, four Marbled Fritillaries quite a few Dryads and the first Holly Blue of the trip. From here, I paid a return trip to Rimplas - excellent again, but clearly numbers were much depleted in comparison to a few days earlier, especially in regard to Spotted Fritillaries and Scarce Swallowtails. Perhaps the hailstorm of the first afternoon? Still, a rich assortment of butterflies were noted again, Mallow Skippers, Great Banded Grayling and Meleager's Blue amongst the more notable. Returned to Menton on the Mediterranean coast for the evening. 28 July. Vallee de la Gordolasque Having now visited all the main sites that I had in my planned, I had two basic options - revisit a site from earlier in the week or travel a little further to the north to the very tempting Col d'Izoard. Though the latter was only about 120 km or so and would almost certainly have offered a few additional species, the twisting nature of the roads would have meant at least four hours of travel time, so I decided instead on a return to the Vallee of Gordolasque. So it was, I left Menton not long after dawn and snaked up the foothills through Sospel to the relatively low altitude Col de Turini (1604 metres). Here, I took a little detour to explore a hill fortress site just to the east. A World War II battle zone, an old tank remains as a marker of the troubled times, along with tumbled down barracks and battle stations, but today it is simply a peaceful hill top, expanses of grassland swaying in the gentle wind, all bathed in the pleasant morning sunshine. On an impressive patch of flowering thistle, heaps and heaps of fresh Painted Ladies had emerged, a good 60 or so hogging the purple tops, the colour spectacle further enhanced by a good smattering of Red Admirals, Commas, Berger's Clouded Yellows and Marbled Whites. Across the grasslands however, relatively few butterflies were seen, tops being a bunch of Dark Green Fritillaries, a couple of Dusky Heaths and the ever-present Marbled Whites. More interesting, at woodland edge, I spotted my only Speckled Wood of the trip (species number 100), along with a Great Banded Grayling. An hour or so later, I was rolling into the upper reaches of the Vallee de la Gordolasque. No sign of clouds on this day, a glorious sunny day painting the valley a treat. Still however, the butterflies didn't seem all that abundant, almost certainly the numbers were lower than a few days earlier ...I guess the rain had knocked them here too! Still, a nice wander with a variety of butterflies including several Apollos, a bunch of Large Grizzled Skippers and, most plump, a fresh emergence of Turquoise Blues, about six congregating on a path. Butterfly of the day though was

one that I'd been looking for since the start of the trip - sporting vivid orange across the forewings, prominent even in flight, the butterfly was a super male Cleopatra, close cousin of Brimstone.

Mid-afternoon, at the amazing buddleia bushes midway back down the valley, I found another Cleopatra, again a male. Also here, amongst perhaps three hundred or more butterflies scattered across the enormous buddleia bushes, a stunning Southern White Admiral, a couple of Swallowtails, a dozen Scarce Swallowtails and at least 40 Painted Ladies. Also abundant Great Sooty Satyrs, quite a few Dryads, three Holly Blues and a minimum of 15 Gatekeepers (the only ones seen on the trip, bar one near the coast on the first day). A few Hummingbird Hawk Moths also buzzing around. I managed to spend over two hours at this single patch of bushes, notching up 23 species in the process.

Then, it was back to Menton, a late afternoon wander on the beach predictably not quite as productive! 29 July. Milan. Up early and over the border into Italy, the journey home began. Stopped for a couple of hours near Milan, a random locality alongside a river. A pleasant conclusion to the trip, eleven species were noted, two Swallowtails amongst them, plus several Brown Argus, quite a few Grizzled Skippers and, the only ones recorded on the whole trip, both Bath White and Short-tailed Blue. And with that, a grand total of 104 species now recorded, the trip reached its end. And very successful it had been, all my targets seen and the whole week a very pleasant experience. +++ for detailed species list of all species seen +++[CLICK HERE](#)