

A Tale of Two Mountains, 14 June - 18 June 2018.

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Concentrating on two mountains in southern Greece, namely Mount Parnassus and Mount Chelmos, this short trip focussed on a range of the endemics and semi-endemics, the primary targets being Grass Jewel and assorted other species of blue. Over and above that, the basic idea was to just enjoy the clouds of butterflies that grace these areas in early summer.

DAILY LOG 14 June. Mount Parnassus. Athens 9.00 a.m., sun and high temperatures the order of the day. With the forecast not so promising over coming days however, the immediate plan was to exit the airport as quickly as possible, drive directly to Mount Parnassus and make the best of the weather. And excellent it turned out! Arriving at the base of Parnassus near midday, a quick pause at a coffee shop provided a splendid introduction - embankments either side of the cafe choc-a-bloc with butterflies, Great Banded Graylings, both Spotted and Lesser Spotted Fritillaries, Ilex Hairstreak and Swallowtail among them. Soon got even better - very much as hoped, nearby meadows provided my first of what would soon be a bewildering array of blues: among numerous Common Blues and Chapman's Blues, a mass puddling attracted Adonis Blues and Turquoise Blues, while several Amanda's Blues also nearby, plus one Eastern Baton Blue. Numerous stops as I ascended the mountain, abundant blues at each more than once causing a headache on this first day - sifting through the masses, added Zephyr Blue, Silver-studded Blue, Idas Blue and Escher's Blue, plus Blue Argus at higher altitude. Eleven species of blue! Not just blues though - a grand total of 49 species on this afternoon, including Southern White Admiral, a very nice Nettle-tree Butterfly and no less than seven skipper species (including Mallow Skipper, Olive Skipper, Orbed Red-underwing Skipper and Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper). Higher up the slope, another treat - fluttering around a meadow near the summit, a wonderful mix of Clouded Apollos and Black-veined Whites, splendid stuff. After several very pleasurable hours, I then descended to an extensive grassland bowl below the mountain, a habitat full of Balkan Marbled Whites, nice indeed. Also found here my second hairstreak of the day, this time a Sloe Hairstreak, before finally descending to Delphi to check into a hotel. Good first day!

15 June. Mount Parnassus & Delphi. With the forecast set to change by midday, I set off for Parnassus at 8 a.m, getting to the middle level slopes just as the butterflies were beginning to sun themselves. A good start to the day getting multiple stings from angry bees, then tumbling down a scree slope, but excellent butterflies again, lower slopes adding Glanville Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary, Lattice Brown and the excellent Ripart's Anomalous Blue, as well as many of the species of the day before. Fearing limited time though, I zoomed pretty quick to summit area to explore a couple of rich flower meadows - superb, upward of 40 Clouded Apollos, at least 20 Greek Clouded Yellows (among more common Clouded Yellows), a number of Zephyr Blues, several Escher's Blues and my only Large Grizzled Skippers of the trip. Blue Argus also noted, Silver-studded Blue common, many Small Heaths and Mountain Small White. Encroaching from both north and south, wrapping round the summit, cloudy skies did indeed hit by midday, forcing me down to the still sunny lower slopes - Wall Browns and Queen of Spain Fritillaries common, a couple of Swallowtails and my first Essex Skipper of the trip. Highlight however was my only Oriental Meadow Brown of the trip - a single on the embankment near the coffee shop, along with rather many Meadow Browns. But then cloud caught up with me - I descended further to no avail, skies darkening continuously. Added two Great Sooty Satyrs on a roadside rock cutting, but by early afternoon, it was heavily overcast cool and few butterflies were active. Fairly predictably, I failed in my quest to find Grass Jewel just below Delphi - wandered around withered meadows for an hour or so, seeing a single Common Blue and three Scarce Swallowtails, nothing else. In light rain, I then found Lattice Brown and a Ripart's Anomalous Blue. I then called it quits for a while. A bright ending to the day however - a brief sunny spell at about 4 pm tempted me out again to resume the search for my main target of the trip, this time searching an arid slope a few kilometres below Delphi - and success, Europe's smallest butterfly, one Grass Jewel. An absolute midget, it was very easy to lose as it flitted about, but what an exquisite butterfly to end the day! Recorded 50 species this day.

16 June. Mount Chelmos. Mount Chelmos, highest peak in the Peloponnesos and home to a whole range of localised butterflies, including Chelmos Blue, Chelmos Zephyr Blue and Odd-spot Blue, all basically restricted to this mountain in terms of their European range. This day was however somewhat frustrating with the weather - having driven from Delphi in bright sunshine, I arrived at Chelmos at 10 a.m. just as cloud began to cloak the summit! With the sun literally retreating up the slope as I pulled in at the ski centre at 1800 metres, an immediate chill swept across the hillside and not a single butterfly was to be seen flying. Somewhere on these slopes, the exceptionally rare Chelmos Blue should fly, but even on a good day, chances of finding it are low, so on a poor day I did not rate my chances very highly. And how correct I was - did manage a couple of Chelmos Zephyr Blues roosting, but otherwise it was just a number of Painted Ladies, several Wall Browns and two Small Tortoiseshells. With sunshine still on lower slopes, I decided to descend to make the best of things - but even here it was a morning of being chased by the clouds! As I explored meadow after meadow, each time I had barely half an hour before the cloud caught me up, obliterating out the sun and forcing me ever further down the mountain. Did see some good butterflies though - a total of 25 species, including numerous Balkan Marbled Whites and several Great Banded Graylings. Of particular note, also saw a nice male Grecian Copper at altitude 1450 metres, three Ripart's Anomalous Blues and a Lattice Brown at 1265 m and Ilex Hairstreak, Eastern Baton Blue, Blue Argus and Orbed Red-underwing Skipper at 1150 metres. By early afternoon, as a band of cloud from the mountain crashed into clouds rising from the coastal strip, I was finally engulfed! With a spell of rain to topping it off, off to the coast I scurried to sulk the afternoon away in a seaside apartment. A wander in evening brightness resulted in my

first Holly Blue of the trip, plus a pretty impressive Praying Mantis. Weather forecast for the following day was much the same. 17 June. Mount Chelmos. Early morning skies looked okay - no clouds and a sun rising. Quickly zipped up to an altitude of about 1200 metres and had a pretty good half hour or so with highlights including a Lattice Brown and several Purple Hairstreaks buzzing around an oak ...but already clouds were edging in. Looking at the summit of Mount Chelmos, ominous clouds were hanging over the upper slopes ...not very promising! Fortunately a miraculous handkerchief-sized patch of blue sky was sat directly over the summit, bathing the high-altitude grasslands in a warm sun for the entire morning! And what a contrast to the previous day – on a very pleasant wander, hundreds of Silver-studded Blues, plentiful Chelmos Zephyr Blues and a positive soup of other blues too, Chapman's Blues and Common Blues common, Turquoise Blue and Adonis Blue also present in small numbers. Failed to find the highly localised Chelmos Blue however. Also added a number of Black-veined Whites, both Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper and Orbed Red-underwing Skipper, plus my only Dingy Skippers of the trip. A little after 12.30, the precious opening in the clouds closed and, not many minutes later, it started to rain. End of action on the summit, I descended to lower slopes on the south hoping for a bit of a rain shadow effect – worked to a degree, a half hour or so of sun adding a few butterflies before cloud engulfed this area too. Among the top species, four Anomalous Blues, both Cleopatra and Brimstone and quite a few Brown Argus. Added Ilex Hairstreak and Eastern Baton Blue on route back to the northern slopes, then in brighter conditions stopped for a while at two random sites near the coast – several Holly Blues, another Ilex Hairstreak and six Silver-washed Fritillaries at the first, a roadside Great Sooty Satyr nearby and then Oriental Marbled Skipper, Mallow Skipper and my first Lang's Short-tailed Blue of the trip at the last stop. For a day of questionable weather, excellent it had been – recorded 46 species this day.

18 June. Vouraikos Gorge/Zarouchla. A spectacular final day – warm sunshine all day and plenty of surprises on the butterfly front. From dawn till 9.30 in the scenic Vouraikos Gorge – main reason to be here was to search for Two-tailed Pashas. First to fly though were Mountain Small Whites, followed by a new species for me - several flitting around the trunks of old knarled pines - Freyer's Graylings. Also Large Tortoiseshell and Eastern Baton Blue here too. As it warmed to 25 C, I slowly travelled up and down the valley, slowly scanning the tree tops of suitable looking areas for the Two-tailed Pashas. Initially no result, but checking one area at the very bottom of the valley, a brief glimpse of one I got. Time for the secret weapon – a pungent fruit bait that had been nicely fermenting in the car for a couple of days ...and successful it was, within mere minutes, two stunning Two-tailed Pashas had been attracted down, floating around for a few moments before settling at the bait for close fantastic views of this dramatic species. With this species seen, for a change of focus from the high altitude sites of the previous days, I decided to spend the remainder of the day exploring the middle altitude valley leading to Zarouchla. And wonderful it was, an amazing variety of species! Clouds of butterflies at almost every turn, Balkan Marbled Whites abundant, Great Banded Graylings frequent, plus a rich assortment of whites, blues and skippers. On a winding track snaking up a hillside towards many bee hives, masses of butterflies hogged fragrant purple flowers, often ten or twenty Balkan Marbled Whites per flower clump, plus Meadow Browns and, more notable, a couple of Long-tailed Blues, two Southern White Admirals and Oriental Marbled Skipper, Better still, not far from two Ripart's Anomalous Blues and three Anomalous Blues, my first Grecian Anomalous Blue, a superb trio! Persian Skippers at the next stop, very nice little butterflies sunning on bare patches of ground, this was another new species for me, and one high on my 'most wanted' list! Most impressive of all however was a truly amazing patch of thistles - packed with Balkan Marbled Whites and assorted other species such as Cleopatra and Brimstone, there were also yet two more new species for me! First up were strange pale butterflies that sent me diving for the fieldguide ...nice butterfly with a strange name - 'The Hermit'. Four present in all, mostly on the thistles, but one resting on the road for a while. Barely had I had time to appreciate these however when my companion mentioned a Swallowtail at the opposite end of the thistle patch. Strolled over to have a look ...and my eyes almost popped out! Large, bold colours, tiger stripes - a totally unexpected Southern Swallowtail. What a monster species! Nicely complemented by a Scarce Swallowtail some minutes earlier and by a 'standard' Swallowtail a little bit later, an ultimate hat-trick. Up at Zarouchla, a far more lush world of greenery and with it a new selection of species - felt a little bit like further north in Europe, oodles of Large Whites present, my only Green-veined White and Comma of the trip, plus Speckled Woods, a good number of Dark Green Fritillaries, a single Knapweed Fritillary and a Sloe Hairstreak. The day however was nearing its end, time to meander back down the valley, added a few more Cleopatras and a Great Sooty Satyr. A grand total of 51 species noted this day, a nice finale. And with that, it was then back to Athens for a flight early next morning. For a full list of the 87 species of butterflies seen during this summer trip, [CLICK HERE](#).