

Island Endemics, Sardinia & Corsica

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Travelling from 4-17 July 2019, this two-week trip focussed on the butterflies of Sardinia and Corsica, including species such as Nettle-tree Butterfly and, even more so, the dozen or so endemic species, top of the list the dramatic Corsican Swallowtail. Effort was also made to see the more notable birds of the two islands, including Eleonora's Falcon, Marmora's Warbler and the two endemics, Corsican Nuthatch and Corsican Finch.

Approximately 65 species of butterfly have been recorded across the two islands, 13 of which are endemic (depending on taxonomy) - of these, most occur on both islands, while three are restricted to just Sardinia. Additionally, distinctive island races of Corsican Silver-studded Studded Blue and Corsican Chalkhill Blue have potential to be upgraded to species level.

The endemic taxa are: • Corsican Swallowtail (*Papilio hospiton*) • Corsican Dappled White (*Euchloe insularis*) • Sardinian Blue (*Pseudophilotes barbagiae*) • Corsican Idas Blue (*Plebejus bellieri*) • Corsican Silver-studded Blue (*Plebejus argus corsicus*) • Sardinian Chalkhill Blue (*Polyommatus gennargentii*) • Corsican Chalkhill Blue (*Polyommatus coridon nufrellensis*) • Corsican Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais ichnusa*) • Corsican Fritillary (*Argynnis elisa*) • Corsican Wall Brown (*Lasiommata paramegaera*) • Corsican Grayling (*Hipparchia neomiris*) • Southern Grayling (*Hipparchia aristaeus*) • Sardinian Meadow Brown (*Maniola nurag*) • Corsican Heath (*Coenonympha corinna*) • Corsican Red-underwing Skipper (*Spialia therapne*)

Note, Southern Grayling is also considered endemic, as individuals formerly belonging to this species in the Balkans, Sicily and North Africa have now been split into separate species. In addition to the endemics, other notable species that occur on the islands include Two-tailed Pasha, Old World and Scarce Swallowtails, Plain Tiger, Nettle-tree Butterfly, Geranium Bronze and both Mediterranean and Pygmy Skippers.

Timing of Trip. Though the islands bake under a relentless sun in July and the vegetation in the lowlands is largely parched and withered, it is peak season for butterflies in the mountainous areas - particularly the Genneargentu range in Sardinia and the central massive in Corsica. Naturally, it is impossible to see all of the butterflies of Sardinia and Corsica on a single trip - in particular, the endemic Corsican Dappled White and Sardinian Blue both fly in the spring, while many of the others are late summer species. For greatest variety, middle of July is probably ideal - not only are numbers of most mountain species generally high, but traditionally late species such as Sardinian Meadow Brown and both Corsican and Southern Graylings have already emerged, while the generally earlier Corsican Swallowtail is still on the wing. In hindsight, travelling perhaps a week later could have been more optimal - I did not see Corsican Small Tortoiseshell, Corsican Red-underwing Skipper or Sardinian Chalkhill Blue, all of which were probably flying in the days after my trip. Had I travelled in late July however, I think chances of Corsican Swallowtail (my primary target) would have been much reduced.

DAILY LOG.

4 July. San Pedro Island. Arrived in Sardinia late morning, a sweltering 37 C awaiting. The westward drive across the island underlined the reality of the lowlands - hot, dry and largely devoid of any butterflies, thus was going to be hard work! In 80 km, I managed a grand total of one Small White, three Painted Ladies and, rather nice, one Old World Swallowtail! A pretty amazing spectacle waiting in the coastal town of Portovesme however - a roundabout at the town's edge was nicely irrigated and planted with abundant flowers. And upon these flowers, clouds of butterflies! A very pleasant 20 minutes here, trucks and cars rumbling round the roundabout, we wandering the middle - at least 450 Painted Ladies accounted for the bulk, quite amazing, though a single Cleopatra and two Southern Blues too. Took the ferry over to San Pedro Island, equally hot, dry and butterfly-less in the main. On the west of the island however lies the biggest colony of Eleonora's Falcons on Sardinia - blue sea, blue sky, a couple of Corsican Wall Browns (my first of the island endemics) and, most impressive, four Eleonora's Falcons in display above. Dark phase and light phase birds, soaring and chasing. Would return next morning for more of this, so then headed to Carloforte to spend half an hour locating our not-very-easy to locate accommodation! Worth it in the end though - in the rather untended garden, three Lang's Short-tailed Blues and, a real treat, two Geranium Bronzes, a species that has spread across much of the Mediterranean in recent years. And so ended the first day, a mere eight species of butterfly seen ...I was having a few doubts that I would manage to stay on the islands for two weeks!

5 July. San Pedro Island & Bosa. A perfect start to the day, sunrise at Capo Sandalo - moderately cool, masses of Scopoli's and Yelkouan Shearwaters milling just offshore, regular appearances of Eleonora's Falcons at eye level and added attractions with a pair of Peregrines also active, several Alpine Swifts, a pod of Bottle-nosed Dolphins briefly and my first Marmora's Warblers of the trip, a pair feeding fledged young. By 8.00 am, already the shearwaters were moving offshore, so I decided to move on, a quick look at the Carloforte saltpans adding Slender-billed and Audouin's Gulls, plus a small assortment of waders, including a few Kentish Plovers, Avocets, etc. Back at the accommodation, Geranium Bronzes still buzzing around, plus four Long-tailed Blues joining the Lang's Short-tailed Blues, not much else though. With that, ferry back to mainland Sardinia and the beginning of the journey north. Random stops were extremely unproductive - sweat-inducing 38C, but producing almost zero butterflies ... about ten Small Whites, three Southern Gatekeepers and one Mallow Skipper the sum of my rewards. Arriving in the Bosa area, my target was Griffon Vulture, a couple of colonies of which occupy the coastal cliffs just north of town. Now late in the afternoon, it didn't take too long to find the birds - amid dramatic landscapes, 24 splendid Griffon Vultures soaring above the crags, slowly descending to

roost upon the rock ledges. First Great Banded Grayling of the trip too, a single flying in to briefly pause on rocks. So to the end of day, the day's butterfly tally had amounted to ten species, not staggering stuff!

6 July. Sorgono & Desulo. The original plan had been to spend this day in the lowlands, slowly meandering up towards Santa Teresa Gallura for our ferry next morning to Corsica. Given the heat and lack of butterflies however, I decided to tweak the itinerary and head to the Genneargentu mountains, this also being the main destination for the later parts of the trip. And a good move it was! Winding up through the foothills, lands a degree greener, we reached the 700 metre altitude mark and magically butterflies began to appear. Near Sorgono, altitude 790 metres, a bunch of butterflies were active alongside the road - time for first stop! Excellent it was, a slither of meadow following a stream up the slope, dense clumps of flowering bramble overgrowing, oaks bordering. And butterflies everywhere, my first two Purple Hairstreaks of the trip included. Eighteen species noted in this single meadow, among the most prominent at least 40 Speckled Woods, 25 Holly Blues and the colourful trio of Silver-washed, Queen of Spain and Cardinal Fritillaries. Rather more exotic, a very nice Nettle-tree Butterfly. Continuing upwards, my main destination for the day was in the higher hills, upland meadow above the village of Desulo, altitude 1385 metres. Hot, but refreshing in comparison to the lowlands, this area was again fantastic - and immediately started finding some of the endemics to these two Islands - diminutive Corsican Heaths and Corsican Idas Blues in abundance, Sardinian Meadow Browns and Corsican Fritillaries. Also, now the very beginning of the grayling season, found the first very fresh individuals of the two endemic graylings - six Corsican Graylings and one Southern Grayling (both of these would become very common as the trip progressed). Also many Southern Blues, a few Southern Brown Argus and oodles of Painted Ladies. On the bird front, three Corsican Finches also seen, plus Woodlarks, etc. After a pleasant couple of hours wandering, amassing 26 species, we then descended to 990 metres to explore an open track along Riu Pedras Fitta stream. Also very good, lots of Cleopatras on the wing, plus a variety of more common species and two Oberthur's Grizzled Skippers, the only location I would see this species. Eventually it was time to head north again, dropping back into the lowlands and driving up to Santa Teresa Gallura. Only butterfly of note on route was an Old World Swallowtail at a service station near Olbia. 7 July. D'Arraggio & Col de Sorba. Early morning ferry from Sardinia to Corsica, Scopoli's Shearwaters skirting the wave tops, smaller numbers of Yelkouan Shearwaters alongside. Approaching Corsica, Scopoli's Shearwaters seemed to be gathering on the water, 20 or so settled, a few more flying. Scanning the flock, a flick of black and a white rump, into my binoculars flitted a Storm Petrel, a bit of luck indeed. A mere few seconds later however, I lost it - it possibly settled on the water with the shearwaters. So to Corsica, hitch-hiked to the nearby Figuri airport to collect a rental car, then drove a half hour or so to D'Arraggio, ruins of a castle at the top of an extremely hot and steep slope. Clambered up to the ruins, saw nothing, potted back down again and paused in the shaded gully at the bottom of the slope - and bingo, one stunning Two-tailed Pasha came floating in, did a couple of circuits, then settled just adjacent. Nice butterfly! Also here, my only Southern White Admiral of the trip, a minimum of 20 Cleopatras, a Purple Hairstreak, a Lang's Short-tailed Blue and at least 25 Holly Blues. Plan for this day was to have a relatively easy-going drive to the Marine de Bravone area, then relax. I however decided to change that, adding a detour to incorporate a first visit to Col de Sorba, altitude 1310 metres. Zigzagging up the hairpins into the pine-clad hillsides, we were now in the lands of the two endemic birds on this island, Corsican Nuthatch and Corsican Finch. Didn't see either on this day, but having seen both in the past, and knowing I would be here again in coming days, I was considerably happier with what I did see! Pulling into the small parking area on the last hairpin before the summit, a swallowtail immediately sailed into view. Jumped out of the car and hurtled off in pursuit ... something that didn't prove necessary as the butterfly promptly about turned and returned to thistles right next to the car ...and there it was, my main target of the trip, a stunning Corsican Swallowtail in all its glory, full scallops on the rear underwing and tiny red spots at the rear easily identifying it from Old World Swallowtail. And as I amazed, suddenly there were more, a grand total of four Corsican Swallowtails, one slightly worn, three very fresh. This was a bonus indeed, as I really hadn't planned to visit Col de Sorba this day. And more to the point, despite searching, I would see no more Corsican Swallowtails on this trip! After a good while with these beauties, we then travelled a few kilometres to the slopes on the other side of the pass and explored a little - quite windy, but still added over 20 species, including Northern Brown Argus, my only Bath Whites of the trip and a trio of graylings - Corsican, Southern and Great Banded Graylings. Red Kites overhead, a few Crossbills in pines. Late afternoon now, we continued on our way, a massive patch of Buddleias forcing the next stop as we passed through the mountain village of Venico - an impressive patch by any standard, Buddleia in full flower filled an entire gully and upon them, perhaps 150 or more butterflies. Numerous Painted Ladies and Silver-washed Fritillaries in the main, but also plenty of Small Whites and Clouded Yellows, along with smaller numbers of Cardinal and Queen of Spain Fritillaries, several Southern Blues and, of note, my only Peacock of the trip. And that basically concluded the day, I dragged myself away and drove to Marine de Bravone, evening in a very pleasant apartment by the sea.

8 July. Asco. Jagged peaks, wild country, lands of the Lammergeier and Golden Eagle, the Asco-Haut Asco region is not only of dramatic beauty, but it is also one of the best localities on the island for butterflies. And in grand weather, it certainly did not disappoint on this day - 33 species seen, the highest day total of the trip. Little but withered vegetation until you reach the village of Asco, altitude 650 metres, but then you enter a magical Goldilocks zone - abundant flowers, butterflies everywhere. And literally at the village of Asco it started - at the first hairpin above the village, a massive thistle patch was in full bloom, the purple heads a magnet to butterflies. And so it occupied me for a good hour - a very nice variety, headed by as many as 10 Mallow Skippers, five Tufted Marbled Skippers, a smart Scarce Swallowtail and a Two-tailed Pasha, never a bad mix! Plenty of Small Coppers and Southern Blues, a scattering of Corsican Idas Blues and

hundreds of Painted Ladies added mire attraction, along with the first Corsican Heaths of the day and all four of the possible fritillaries. Flowering bramble becoming common, numerous more stops as I zigzagged up towards Haut Asco, Queen of Spain Fritillaries here, Cleopatras there, a Long-tailed Blue at one stop, two very nice Nettle-tree Butterflies at another. At Haut Asco, altitude 1450 metres, it is a land of Alpine slopes, a rich mix of forest stands and Alpine meadow. And upon this, oodles of butterflies, Painted Ladies still abundant, but now also many hundreds of Corsican Idas Blues, these now pretty much dominant. Southern Blues also common, so too Corsican Heaths, Queen of Spain Fritillaries and Corsican Graylings. Spent quite a while searching for Sardinian Small Tortoiseshell, and kept an eye open for Lammergeier. I really should also have been keeping more of an eye on the sky - though I did see Golden Eagle, I did not see Lammergeier. Difficult sometimes to combine butterflies and birding! No success with Sardinian Small Tortoiseshell either, nor with the Corsican Red-underwing Skipper that I presumed would be on these slopes. No real complaints however, it was a grand day. Middle afternoon, I decided to descend and return to the coast. From Asco again in the arid lower altitudes, so decided to take a random back route to the coast taking the D71 over hills south-west of Ponte Lecce. Mistake as the roads were of pretty awful condition, and wash-outs resulted in several long detours. Not bad however from the angle of butterflies - among the highlights, two more Scarce Swallowtails, a Purple Hairstreak, 14 Great Banded Graylings on thistles and one very photogenic Two-tailed Pasha. Many Hummingbird Hawk Moths too. Back at the coast, time for a short break on the beach, predictably no butterflies seen there!

9 July. Col de Sorba & Col de Vizzavona. Overnight spells of rain, cloud and strong winds at dawn - not a promising start to the day! With such, adjusted the day's plan to begin with a spot of birding at Col de Sorba, target the two endemics. Parked at Corsican Swallowtail spot just below the pass and gazed out, Crossbills calling in the pines, Coal Tits and Goldcrests in small flocks. No initial sign of either Corsican Nuthatch or Corsican Finch. A short walk down the slope however remedied that - first two Corsican Finches feeding by the roadside, one very close, then the distinctive call of a Corsican Nuthatch right up at the pass itself. Predictably, by the time I hiked up there, the bird had fallen silent and elusive! Searching failed to locate this bird. With the skies showing considerable brightness, even breaks of blue, I decided to wander back to the Corsican Swallowtail spot. A Corsican Wall Brown appeared, several Painted Ladies too.

Then however my attention was distracted - a call from a pine immediately below and there was Corsican Nuthatch, a dapper little thing. Almost immediately, it flew to the next tree, a contorted pine of some age, then proceeded to run up and down for a number of minutes before once again flying, this time up the slope into denser forest. Bird lost, show over, but that had been a welcome little performance. Still only about 10 am, the day was now looking far better with a broad belt of blue sky edging in. Departed Sorba, drove the 15 km or so to Col de Vizzavona, a somewhat lower pass at 1160 metres and not dominated by pines, but rather upland meadow, deciduous woodland and rich patches of bramble.

Hot and sunny now, and a kaleidoscope of butterflies - a fresh brood of Great Banded Graylings, at least 60 dancing around the rocky slopes, Corsican Graylings even more abundant, plus a scattering of Southern Graylings for good measure. Queen of Spain, Cardinal, Silver-washed and Corsican Fritillaries too, plus both gatekeepers, loads of Corsican Heaths, a few Small Heaths and many Speckled Woods and Corsican Wall Browns. Even more interest among the blues - Southern Blues and Holly Blues as usual, plus quite a number of Corsican Idas Blues. What I almost overlooked however was a very similar species - whilst Corsican Idas Blues have relatively bold spots on the underwing, many on this slope had spots that appeared 'washed out'. Despite their fresh overall appearance, I initially assumed these to be faded individuals ... they were however actually a separate species - Corsican Silver-studded Blue! And, it turned out, many hundreds of them were flying on the slope. Heat was taken its toll on some visitors - two ladies were being stretchered off the hillside to waiting ambulance, apparent heatstroke. For me however, after a few enjoyable hours of wandering, we retreated to a village some kilometres further - coffee, ice-cream, four Scarce Swallowtails and a Two-tailed Pasha, good stuff. Meandered to the town of Corte, a moderately early finish this day, evening relaxing by a swimming pool, Swifts hurtling around, Red Kite drifting over.

10 July. Haut Asco. Return to the heights of Asco. Good start with oodles of butterflies active on a hillside full of thistles just above Asco village - among Southern Blues, Northern Brown Argus, Corsican Wall Browns, Southern Gatekeepers and others, no less than five Scarce Swallowtails, a half dozen Cardinal Fritillaries, one Lang's Short-tailed Blue and several Mallow Skippers. A little higher, Corsican Fritillaries and Queen of Spain Fritillaries, plus numerous Silver-washed Fritillaries et al. Things were about to change however - not long after 10 am, ominous rumbles of thunder and a darkening sky as one enormous storm rolled up the valley! A rapid disappearance of butterflies, soon replaced by torrential rain, thunder echoing around the peaks and bolts of lightning all over the place. Not conducive to searching for butterflies! Improvement from midday with spells of sunshine returning, Corsican Idas Blues and Corsican Heaths immediately appearing to sun themselves, Corsican Graylings soon after. Cloud however stubbornly lingered on the higher peaks, eventually persuading me to give up on the idea of ascending. Retreated instead to lower altitudes close to Asco village, plenty of butterflies, no new species, but a pretty impressive abundance of Scarce Swallowtails - a total of 16 seen, mostly on thistles. For a day blighted by cloud, not bad all in all - a total of 23 species seen. Golden Eagle, Corsican Finch and Cirl Buntings also noted.

11 July. Restonica Valley. Restonica was a last minute add-on to my itinerary, essentially had visited all the localities I wished to in Corsica, and still had a day to spare. It does however deserve a far greater accolade than being termed a mere add-on - the valley is stunning, and again had I peered more at the sky than the abundant butterflies, I may have seen Lammergeier. As it was, did see Golden Eagle, a couple of Corsican Finches and quite a few Crag Martins, but as per course for the trip, the focus was really on butterflies - no new species, and in many ways a replica of the butterflies at Haut Asco, but what a treat it is to be surrounded by brambles and dwarf plants teeming with Northern Brown Argus, Corsican Idas Blues and Corsican Heaths, often dozens on single flower clumps. Still no Sardinian Small Tortoiseshell, maybe in Sardinia I consoled myself. Plan for the evening was to take ferry back to Sardinia, accommodation booked for the other side. Upon arrival at the port, however, the news was not looking good - me mechanical issues, ferry cancelled! Full credit to

Moby Ferries though, for passengers without cars, they chartered small motor cruisers to transport us between the islands ... fantastic, instead of a lumbering ferry, across the waves we sped at sunset, spray in our faces, Scopoli's Shearwaters arching into the skies to a backdrop of the twinkling lights of Bonifacio. A very nice end in to the day. 12 July. Urzulei. Back in Sardinia, decided upon exploration of some random sites on the eastern side of the Genneargentu mountains. Extreme luck on route with a Plain Tiger spotted on route - a splendid individual cruising alongside the road near Olbia. Unfortunately, the road happened to a motorway, preventing chances to stop and photograph! At the Genneargentu, first location was just north of Urzulei on the SS 125 road, this proved pretty productive - numerous assorted graylings, three Old World Swallowtails and both Long-tailed and Lang's Short-tailed Blues. Not bad birding too - two Corsican Finches, one Marmora's Warbler, one male Moltoni's Subalpine Warbler, several Cirl Buntings and a bunch of Crag Martins. Not quite so good, I did however leave the car lights on, resulting in a dead battery after just an hour! After a bit of a laborious push, I then bump started down the mountain, thereafter enjoyed a leisurely drive towards the coast. Numerous fine meadows along this road with patches of thistle and bramble - more Old World Swallowtails, lots of Southern Brown Argus, several Cleopatra. Also Spanish Sparrows and Corn Buntings at a few localities, plus stunning Scarlet Darters among the dragonflies and damselflies. Stayed in a campsite near Arbatax - a dump, I was not impressed. Hot, humid, noisy. Its saving grace however was a nearby field full of blues - a short stroll revealing at least 35 Lang's Short-tailed Blues and six Long-tailed Blues. 13 July. Perda Liana. Departed the coast early and headed west into the limestone hills of the southern Genneargentu. Destination a stunning rock pinnacle at Perda Liana, the grasses around a supposed location for Sardinian Chalkhill Blue. I was probably two or three early for this late season species, but highly productive meadows on route - producing almost 30 species, patches of thistle and bramble alive with butterflies, among the more notable hundreds of Southern Blues and Southern Brown Argus. Also, among the dragonflies and damselflies, found Dainty Bluet, Keeled Skimmer and Southern Skimmer. A steep rocky climb to Perda Liana, Southern Blues, Corsican Heaths and Southern Graylings the main butterflies adding distraction, but the grasslands surrounding the rock pinnacle were sadly pretty poor in terms of butterflies - a couple of Corsican Idas Blues and a Queen of Spain Fritillary the only species new for the day. Good birding however - Crag Martins swirling around the pinnacle, bunches of Rock Sparrows at its base, two Blue Rock Thrushes on the cliff edge and both Marmora's and Moltoni's Subalpine Warblers in scrub a little lower. Continued another 30 km to my base for the next few days, the Miramonti Hotel in Seúlo. Very pleasant surprise on arrival - no less than eight Two-tailed Pasha feeding on fallen apricots at the front of the hotel! What a welcome, very cooperative Pashas too, one even settling on my hand for selfie pictures. Added attractions, one Red Admiral also on the apricots, several Speckled Woods and, flying through, one Old World Swallowtail. One young Peregrine here too, hassling a Sparrowhawk. 14 July. Aritso. The western side of the Genneargentu range, plan for the morning was to explore the small roads leading into the hills above Aritso. Morning efforts considerably hindered by high cloud, though a good showing of Purple Hairstreaks around oaks at lower elevations - in a brief period of hazy sun, at least 20 active around a couple of oaks. Climbing higher, clouds thickened and spots of rain basically closed down the day. Butterfly activity essentially halted, though it was relatively easy to find roosting butterflies, including a couple of Lang's Short-tailed Blues and two Corsican Idas Blues. And that is how the day remained until approximately 4 pm when a break in the clouds finally gave an hour of blue skies …and with it, an immediate transformation - mass butterfly activity, hundreds of individuals flying, everything from four species of fritillary and three species of grayling to numerous Southern Blues and Southern Brown Argus. And just as the day had begun, so it also ended with Purple Hairstreaks, a couple buzzing around the oaks as the sun again vanished behind cloud. Despite the cloud, 28 species seen this day, not a bad total. Special mention needs also to go to Hummingbird Hawk Moths - flying even when cloudy, at least 60 noted today, loose flocks of then feeding at thistle heads. 15 July. Desulo & Aritso. Following on from the previous day of cloud, I decided a return to the Aritso area was in order, starting at Desulo and then later back to the roads above Aritso itself. Fantastic weather this day, and quite a notable increase in graylings in the Desulo area in comparison to my visit nine days earlier - on the slopes, where there had been single Great Banded Graylings and Southern Graylings, now there were minimums of 40 and 60 respectively, where they had been six Corsican Graylings, now there were at least 25. Likewise, Southern Blues up from about 40 to over 120, a number of other species also higher to a lesser degree. Going the other way however, quite a drop in Corsican Idas Blues, the few remaining here mostly tatty and faded. Unfortunately, still no sign of Sardinian Small Tortoiseshell or Corsican Red-underwing Skipper, season still too early. Spotless Starlings, Corsican Finches, Crag Martins and Woodlarks among the birds. After a few pleasant hours of wandering, decided to descend to the Riu Pedras Fitta stream, a fairly productive locality on my earlier visit. And still productive it was on this visit too - along a bubbling stream, in dappled sunshine, a very nice range of butterflies, key among them two Oberthur's Grizzled Skippers still present and a couple of Mallow Skippers. Also a couple of Purple Hairstreaks, a healthy number of all four fritillaries (Queen of Spain, Corsican, Silver-washed and Cardinal). Sardinian Meadow Browns also here, along with Lang's Short-tailed Blue, lots of Speckled Woods and one Two-tailed Pasha. Mid-afternoon at Aritso was not particularly outstanding - pretty much the same species as the day before, nothing to persuade me to stay too long. So to conclude the day, I decided on an early return to the hotel and a short wander up a track behind the hotel ... Purple Hairstreak hotspot! In a mere hundred metres or so, bumped into no less than 40, quite wonderful. Seemed very much they were heading for roost, all fluttering to the lea of bushes and trees, immediately settling in the shade.

And so concluded the day, a wander back to the hotel and more encounters with Two-tailed Pashas a very pleasant finale. 16 July. Monte Tonneri & Villaputzu. Final day in the mountains, and a last attempt at Sardinian Chalkhill Blue. Still a couple of weeks early in the season, this was always going to be an outside chance, and so it was - hiked up to the summit of Monte Tonneri, a mere handful of kilometres from Perda Liana, site of my first attempt. Plenty of Southern and Corsican Graylings, two Purple Hairstreaks and a few Southern Blues and Southern Brown Argus, but that was

about it on the butterfly front - no Sardinian Chalkhill Blue! Not bad birding again however - luck with a family of Barbary Partridge prior to the climb, then Woodlarks, Tawny Pipits and Marmora's Warbler on the limestone plateau. With that, my trip to Sardinia was nearing its end - left the mountains, descended to the coast and decided on a random stop near Villaputzu, immediately finding Bee-eaters hunting low over the fields and Woodchat Shrikes feeding fledged young.

Some luck on the butterflies too - after checking several areas largely devoid of butterflies, I found an overgrown orange grove. And in this, a nice surprise - not only an Old World Swallowtail, several Lang's Short-tailed Blues, but a totally unexpected species - new for the trip, no less than three Pygmy Skippers! Not a bad way to end the day. 17 July. Villaputzu & Cagliari. In the coastal lowlands, a mid-summer landscape of dry grass and dusty tracks, my task this morning was to find patches of relative greenery and hope for butterflies. Started off at the orange grove of the evening before, rampant brambles in flower attracting a pleasing variety of butterflies - among Southern Blues and Southern Brown Argus, both Lang's Short-tailed and Long-tailed Blues taking in the morning sun, plus a fair number of Small Whites, and Clouded Yellows, etc. Fairly quickly, also began to relocate skippers - notched up five Pygmy Skippers five this morning, all on open dry tracks. Then I found another skipper, this one feeding on brambles - confirming my suspicion, long course hairs on the apical edge of the hindwing, one Mediterranean Skipper. A bonus indeed, and a nice compliment to the Pygmy Skippers. Close up shots of the apical edges of the wings - short sparse hairs on Pygmy Skipper, long course hairs on Mediterranean Skipper. As the sun warmed the day, a flash of orange wings through the trees - a much-hoped-for Plain Tiger sailing through the grove! Unfortunately, a very mobile Plain Tiger, soon vanishing off into the distance. Encouraged by this however, I set off to look for more - a few kilometres through arid fields and, low and behold, another Plain Tiger appeared, and promptly disappeared! A few kilometres more however and I found a ditch full of flowers, a number of Small Whites nectaring and, better still, a single Plain Tiger repeatedly returning to a clump of vegetation. And a significantly less mobile Plain Tiger, finally got a few photographs before it decided to fly off. Just for good measure, an additional individual also flew over. With this success under the belt, time to head for Cagliari, a flight out of the country imminent. A nice hour or two on the salt pans - Greater Flamingos, Gull-billed Terns, a flock of 25 Spoonbills, etc - then into the Old City for something to eat. Also a very nice Violet Dropwing here. Cafe in the heart of the city, the sun was setting, our trip was over ... except it wasn't! A fitting final conclusion, a wonderful Geranium Bronze came flitting in and settled on the fork of one surprised observer as she tucked into a nutella crêpe. Trip over.

SPECIES LIST

A total of 49 species were seen, this including 40 species on Sardinia and 41 species on Corsica. The list below summarizes all butterflies seen.

Old World Swallowtail Sardinia. Nine seen in total - one near Portovesme, one near Olbia, five near Urzulei, one at Miramonti and one at Villaputzu.

Corsican Swallowtail Corsica. Highlight of the trip, four at the Col de Sorba.

Scarce Swallowtail Corsica. Best numbers were in the Asco area, where a total of 17 were noted. Elsewhere, a single was seen at D'Araggio, two along the D71 south-east of Ponte Lecce, three at the Col de Vizzavona and four on buddleia in Venico.

Large White Sardinia. Not very common - three in the Desulo area and one at Perda Liana. Corsica. Only four seen - two at Asco and two at the Col de Vizzavona.

Small White Sardinia. Generally about 20-25 per locality in the highlands, though at least 50 were seen at Perda Liana. Lower numbers in the lowlands, mostly single figures, though up to 50 also scattered across the Villaputzu area. Corsica. Fairly common across the island, typical counts of 40-50 at each locality visited (though less common in the lowlands).

Green-veined White Corsica. Seen at three localities - two individuals at the Col de Sorba, 13 at Asco and five at the Col de Vizzavona.

Bath White Corsica. Only seen at the Col de Sorba, where two fairly tatty individuals were encountered just below the pass.

Clouded Yellow Sardinia. Common and widespread in the highlands - best numbers were noted at Desulo (up to 60 individuals), Aritso (at least 75) and Perda Liana (35+). Elsewhere in the hills, up to 15 individuals were noted per locality. Generally uncommon in the lowlands, mostly occasional singles, but at least 25 around Villaputzu. Corsica. About 10-15 seen at all the main localities visited (D'Araggio, Col de Sorba, Col de Vizzavona, Asco, Venico, Restonica).

Brimstone Sardinia. Females possibly overlooked to a degree due to the abundance of Cleopatra - four at Sorgono, two in the Desulo valley, five at Perda Liana and two at Aritso. Corsica. Less common than Cleopatra, just four positively identified - two at Asco and two at the Col de Vizzavona.

Cleopatra Sardinia. Fairly common and widespread in the upland areas (about 30 in the Desulo area, six at Urzulei, 40+ at Perda Liana, about 20 at Aritso and eight at Tonneri) and also a few in the lowlands (one at Portovesme and about ten in the Villaputzu area on the east coast. Corsica. Common with up to 20 at D'Araggio, 30 at Col de Sorba, 25 at Asco, 10 near Ponte Lecce, four at Col de Vizzavona and one at Venico.

Purple Hairstreak Sardinia. Very impressive numbers in mid-altitude oak woodlands, the best numbers being 20+ at a single group of oaks near Aritso and about 40 along a track above Miramonti. Additionally, singles or twos seen at Sorgono, Desulo, Perda Liana and Tonneri. Corsica. Two seen - one at D'Araggio and one south-east of Ponte Lecce.

Small Copper Sardinia. Widespread, though not excessively abundant - nine seen at Desulo, four at Urzulei, three at Perda Liana, three at Aritso and four at Villaputzu. Corsica. Common in the highlands, counts in excess of 30 at all the mountainous areas visited.

Geranium Bronze Sardinia. Seen at the very beginning and very end of the trip - two in gardens in Carloforte and one at a cafe in Cagliari Old City (flitting around potted plants, then landing to 'nectar' on nutella crêpe as it was being eaten).

Holly Blue Sardinia. Moderately common in wooded areas at mid-altitudes, records including 25+ at Sorgono, 35 in the

Desulo valley, six at Perda Liana and eight at Aritso. In the lowlands, one seen near Villaputzu. Corsica. Common in hill country - minimum counts of 25 at D'Araggio, 15 below the Col de Sorba, 35 at Asco, 15 south-east of Ponte Lecce, 20 at Col de Vizzavona and six at Restonica.

Lang's Short-tailed Blue Sardinia. Moderately widespread, though not common - best numbers were in coastal areas, specifically 35+ in a field near Arbatax, six near Villaputzu and five at Caloforte. In the mountains, one was seen in the Desulo valley, three at Urzulei and one at Aritso. Corsica. Two seen - one at D'Araggio and one at Asco.

Long-tailed Blue Sardinia. Widespread, but uncommon - most in the lowlands, four were seen at Carloforte, two at Urzulei, six at Arbatax and two at Villaputzu. Corsica. One record only, a single at Asco.

Corsican Idas Blue (Bellier's Blue) Sardinia. Possibly past peak season on Sardinia - 30+ recorded on the Desulo hillside on 6 July, but only six on 15 July. The only other individuals seen were two at Aritso on 14 July. Corsica.

Extremely common at high altitude, with many hundreds in the upper parts of Haut Asco and the Restonica Valley.

Corsican Silver-studded Blue Corsica. Common in mid-altitude grassland at Col de Vizzavona, hundreds present.

Northern Brown Argus Corsica. Two at Col de Sorba, 50+ at Asco and four in the Restonica Valley.

Southern Brown Argus Sardinia. Widespread and common in the highlands - minimum counts of 40-60 in the Urzulei, Perda Liana, Aritso and Tonneri areas, with up to 20 also at Desulo and Miramonti. In the lowlands, a total of 22 were counted in the Villaputzu area.

Southern Blue Sardinia. Generally, the most common and widespread of the blues - peak numbers were recorded at Desulo and Perda Liana (100+ at both), Urzulei, Miramonti and Aritso (55+ at all) and the Villaputzu area (35+). Smaller numbers were also noted in Caloforte, Bosa, Sorgono and Tonneri. Corsica. Common in most areas visited - 70+ at Asco, eight south-east of Ponte Lecce, 40+ Col de Vizzavona and 15 in the Restonica Valley.

Nettle-tree Butterfly Sardinia. One record, a single attracted to bramble flowers at Sorgono. Corsica. Two individuals at a single bramble patch in the valley above Asco.

Plain Tiger Sardinia. Restricted to lowland areas, this was one of the more dramatic species seen. A total of five individuals were noted - one flying across the road near Olbia, then four around Villaputzu.

Two-tailed Pasha Sardinia. An impressive 12 individuals were noted at Miramonti, eight of which were feeding on apricots in the hotel car park. Additionally, one was seen at Perda Liana and one in the Desulo valley. Corsica. A total of six seen - two at D'Araggio and singles at Asco, south-east of Ponte Lecce, Col de Vizzavona and in the Restonica Valley.

Red Admiral Sardinia. Three individuals seen - singles at Desulo, Perda Liana and Miramonti. Corsica. Two were seen at the Col de Sorba and one on buddleia flowers in Venico.

Southern White Admiral Corsica. One alongside a wooded stream at D'Araggio.

Peacock Corsica. One record only - a single on Buddleia flowers in Venico.

Comma Sardinia. Widespread, but not common - singles at Sorgono, Desulo, Perda Liana and Villaputzu, two at Aritso. Corsica. Four individuals noted - one at Asco, one south-east of Ponte Lecce and two at Col de Vizzavona.

Painted Lady Sardinia. Very common in the highlands - many hundreds at Desulo, Perda Liana and Aritso, at least 60 at Urzulei and smaller numbers at Miramonti. Scattered individuals also in the lowlands (eg. 10 in Caloforte, 15 at Bosa and seven at Villaputzu), though approximately 450 at flowers on a traffic roundabout in Portevesme. Corsica.

Abundant at all main localities visited, many hundreds present at highland sites, particularly from about 650 metres right up to 1500 metres and above.

Queen of Spain Fritillary Sardinia. Recorded at several of the highland sites visited - best numbers in the Desulo area (eight on the hillside, 20+ along the Riu Pedras Fitta stream), but also three at Sorgono, one at Perda Liana and eight at Aritso. Corsica. Fairly common in open areas and at bramble patches in the highlands - 55+ at Asco, 10 at both the Col de Vizzavona and Restonica Valley, six on Buddleia at Venico.

Cardinal Fritillary Sardinia. - two Sorgono, six Desulo area (4/1, 2/20), 12 Perda Liana, 12 Aritso, one Tonneri. Corsica - one Col de Sorba, 24 Asco, two south-east of Ponte Lecce, five Col de Vizzavona, eight Restonica Valley.

Silver-washed Fritillary Sardinia - 35+ Sorgono, (15/1,10/30) Desulo, four Urzulei, 10 Perda Liana, 35 Aritso, one Miramonti, Corsica - 20 Col de Sorba, 100+ Asco, 20 south-east of Ponte Lecce, 25+ Col de Vizzavona, 15 Restonica Valley, 40+ Venico.

Corsican Fritillary Sardinia - 30+/25, 0/4 Desulo, eight Perda Liana, 16 Aritso, Corsica - one Col de Sorba, 32 Asco, four Col de Vizzavona, 12 Restonica Valley.

Southern Grayling Sardinia. Freshly emerged, becoming very common in the later stages of the trip - only one at Desulo on 6 July, but then 60+ on 15 July. Similarly, in the period 12-16 July, 40+ were seen at both Perda Liana and Aritso, with smaller number also seen at Urzulei, Miramonti and Tonneri. Corsica. Widespread in the highlands, but moderately uncommon - one at the Col de Sorba, three at Asco, one south-east of Ponte Lecce, five at the Col de Vizzavona and four at Venico. Probably larger number would emerge in subsequent days.

Corsican Grayling Sardinia. The very beginning of the flight season, but still fairly common in the highlands - seen at Desulo (six on 6 July, 25+ on 15 July), Perda Liana (15 individuals), Aritso (11 individuals) and Tonneri (six individuals). Corsica. Abundant at the high altitudes - 160+ at Haut Asco, 200+ at Col de Vizzavona and 100+ in the Restonica Valley. Eight also noted at the Col de Sorba.

Great Banded Grayling Sardinia. Also early in the season, the best numbers seen were on the hillside at Desulo (one on 6 July, 40+ on 15 July) and at Aritso (nine individuals). Elsewhere, two at Miramonti and singles at Bosa, Sorgono, Urzulei and Perda Liana. Corsica. A fresh emergence of at least 60 at the Col de Vizzavona was impressive, some individuals still pumping open their wings. Additionally, six were seen at the Col de Sorba, 14 on thistles south-east of Ponte Lecce and five on Buddleia in Venico.

Meadow Brown Sardinia - several Sorgono Corsica - 10 D'Araggio, 15+ Col de Sorba, 30+ Asco, 15 south-east of

Ponte Lecce, 25+ Col de Vizzavona, four Venico.

Sardinian Meadow Brown Sardinia - 15+/10, 0/12 Desulo hillside, two Perda Liana, 15+ Aritso both days, four Tonneri.

Gatekeeper Sardinia - four Sorgono, 0/14, 0/5 Desulo, two Urzulei, 25 Perda Liana, 14 Aritso both days, two Miramonti Corsica - four Asco, 12 south-east of Ponte Lecce, 15 Col de Vizzavona,

Southern Gatekeeper Sardinia - three Bosa, two Desulo, four Urzulei, four Perda Liana, five Aritso, five Tonneri. Corsica - 23 Asco, 10 Col de Vizzavona

Small Heath Sardinia - two/10 Desulo hillside, four Perda Liana, three Aritso, two Tonneri, six Villaputzu. Corsica - two Col de Sorba, two Asco, four Col de Vizzavona,

Corsican Heath Sardinia - 25+ Desulo hillside both, 35+ Urzulei, 15 Perda Liana, 35+ Aritso, one Miramonti Corsica - four Col de Sorba, several hundred Asco, 50+ Col de Vizzavona, several hundred Restonica Valley.

Speckled Wood Sardinia - 40+ Sorgono, 35 Desulo area (15/20, 40/30), 10 Urzulei, six Perda Liana, 30+ Aritso both days, 25+ Miramonti, 25 Tonneri, 30+ Villaputzu. Corsica - one D'Arraggio, 30+ Asco, two south-east of Ponte Lecce, 25+ Col de Vizzavona, 25+ Restonica Valley.

Corsican Wall Brown Sardinia - five Caloforte, four Desulo hillside, one Urzulei, five Perda Liana, five Aritso Corsica - one Col de Sorba, 55+ Asco, one south-east of Ponte Lecce, 40+ Col de Vizzavona, five Restonica Valley, four Venico.

Mallow Skipper Sardinia. Scattered individuals across the island, both in the hills and on coastal areas - one near Bosa, two in the Desulo valley (second visit only), one at Aritso and four in the Villaputzu area. Corsica. Only recorded at Asco, where up to 10 seen along the road verges above the village (in same general area as Tufted Marbled Skippers).

Tufted Marbled Skipper Corsica. At least five counted at Asco, most in the first couple of kilometres above the village.

Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper Sardinia. Two along the Riu Pedras Fitta stream near Desulo on both visits.

Mediterranean Skipper Sardinia. One in an old orange grove near Villaputzu.

Pygmy Skipper Sardinia. Eight near Villaputzu, along tracks and in an old orchard.