

Butterflies & Moths of the Spanish Pyrenees

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly to Zaragoza or Bilbao
Day 2/7	Gentle day walks in search of the profusion of butterflies, moths and other natural history to be found in the Spanish Pyrenees
Day 8	Fly UK

Departs

July

Focus

Primarily butterflies and moths; also birds and scenery.

Grading

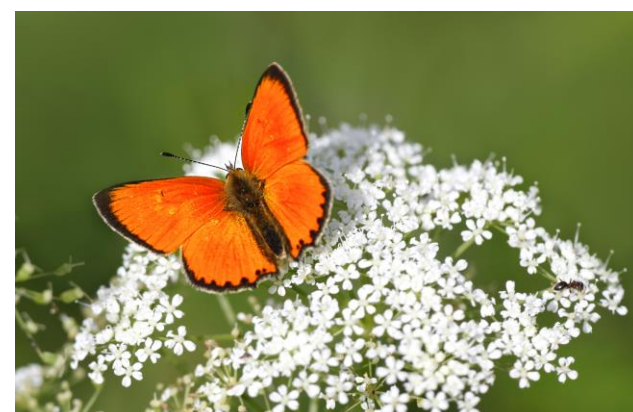
Grade A/B.

Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP37) or brochure.

Highlights:

- A charming guesthouse situated beneath the pretty hilltop village of Berdún
- We hope to see up to 120 butterfly species during the week, including fritillaries, & blues such as Gavarnie & Forster's Furry Blue
- Camberwell Beauty, Purple Emperor, Apollo, Two-tailed Pasha possible
- Night-time moth-traps to reveal the area's diverse moth fauna



Two-tailed Pasha, Apollo and Scarce Copper



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Introduction

The mosaic of habitats in the Spanish Pyrenees supports a wonderful array of Lepidoptera and, from our base in the pretty hilltop village of Berdún, we will make leisurely daily excursions in search of butterflies, while at night we will set a moth trap, weather permitting. During our week we'll explore the foothills and valleys of the Veral and Aragon Rivers, and the spectacular Biniés Gorge, looking for several different hairstreaks and walls, Spanish Gatekeeper and such blues as Adonis, Idas, Small and Spanish Chalkhill Blues, Scarce and Purple-edged Coppers, Swallowtail, Great-banded Grayling, and Grizzled, Marbled, Dingy, Small and Large Skippers amongst many more! We will also visit the beautiful Hecho Valley, where we'll look for ringlets, skippers, blues and fritillaries in the alpine meadows, while at Riglos we should see more Mediterranean, sun-loving species such as Black-veined White. In the Aisa Valley we should see alpine species such as Apollo, Clouded Apollo and many ringlets and blues. Botanists will enjoy the carpets of gentians and Pyrenean Buttercups in the valley bottom and, if we are lucky, we may glimpse the Pyrenean race of Chamois that occurs here, or perhaps Alpine Marmots as we search for butterflies amongst some of Europe's most spectacular scenery.

NB. Please note that the itinerary outlined below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour. Any such changes will always be done to maximise the best use of time and weather conditions available.

Day 1

Casa Sarasa, Berdún

Pick up at Zaragoza or Bilbao airport and transfer by minibus (around 2½ hours) to our base for the week: Casa Sarasa, a delightful Casa Rural (auberge) set below the village of Berdún. Berdún is a spectacular old hilltop village, sitting amidst the floodplains of the Aragon and Veral rivers, and surrounded by the mountains and foothills of the Spanish Pyrenees. It makes a very good base for the week with easy access to both Mediterranean and alpine habitats. In the evenings we'll set our moth trap in Casa Sarasa's lovely garden which is surrounded by fields and orchards. This is the first time we have done this at Casa Sarasa so we should find a lot of new moths for the list!

We will keep the itinerary flexible during the week so we can adapt to weather conditions – there's no point in going somewhere exposed to strong winds for example – and the preferences of the group.

Day 2

Berdún

Today we will explore the areas rich in butterflies (and plants and birds) around the village of Berdún, an ancient and spectacular hilltop village that commands an airy position above the River Aragon to the south, and the River Veral to the west. We will focus today on gentle walks in the Aragon and Veral Valleys, looking for such butterfly species as Scarce Swallowtail, Black-veined White, Clouded Yellow, Pale Clouded Yellow, Cleopatra, Dappled White, Southern White Admiral, Spanish Gatekeeper, Dingy and Grizzled Skippers, Long-tailed and Short-tailed Blues as well as Little Blue, Holly Blue, Common Blue and Baton Blue. We may be lucky enough to see a few Spanish Festoons, too. Common Heath, Latticed Heath, Burnet Companion Moths and Humming-bird Hawk-moths are also frequently seen here, whilst Cream-spot Tiger and Great Peacock Moth are also occasionally found. Green Tiger Beetles can also be observed on sunny pathways.

Griffon and Egyptian Vultures, Booted and Short-toed Eagles, Black and Red Kites will be wheeling overhead among a large variety of bird species, whilst Quail and Golden Oriole may frequently be heard calling. A rich flora beneath our feet holds many orchids including Woodcock (*Ophrys scolopax*), Early Spider (*O. sphegodes*), Bug (*Orchis coriophora*), Pyramidal (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), Southern Marsh (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*), Lesser Butterfly (*Platanthera bifolia*) and Marsh Helleborine (*Epipactis palustris*).

Day 3

The Hecho Valley

Today we'll drive up the beautiful Hecho Valley which rises steadily to high alpine scenery just below the border with France. We'll stop at flower and butterfly-rich areas along the valley ranging from fields and pine forest through high Atlantic forest of Beech and Silver Fir up to alpine meadows set beneath impressive limestone peaks rising well above 2000 metres.

Butterflies recorded from here include Apollo, Clouded Apollo, Camberwell Beauty, Copper, Orange-Tip, Wood White, Clouded Yellow, Cleopatra, Spanish Brassy Ringlet, Mountain Ringlet, Piedmont Ringlet, de Prunners Ringlet, Southern White Admiral, Poplar Provençal Fritillary, Spotted Fritillary, Glanville Fritillary and Large Grizzled Skipper.

We will do some moth trapping after dark.

Day 4

San Juan De La Peña

We will explore the hills and limestone outcrops to the south-west of Jaca. Meadows around the monastery of San Juan de la Peña have a rich flora and many butterflies are attracted to the plants here. We will search for Scarce Swallowtail, Brimstone, Orange Tip, Black-veined White, Wood White, Heath Fritillary, Speckled Wood, Camberwell Beauty, Ilex Hairstreak, Blue Spot Hairstreak, Green Hairstreak,

White Letter Hairstreak and other butterflies, whilst the coniferous forests are famed for their elusive Black Woodpeckers. There are also large nests of Wood Ants. Roadside plants such as Wild Tulip (*Tulipa australis*), Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio* ssp. *champagneuxii*), Pyrenean Hyacinth (*Brimeura amethystina*), Pink Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium* ssp. *pyrenaicum*) and several colourful species of Flax (Linum) are among the plants attractive to the butterflies and other insects. Among the non-Lepidopterous insects worth noting are the Chafer Beetle (*Oxythyrea funesta*), abundant on many flower-heads, and *Trichodes alvearius*, a handsome blue and red beetle also very common on flowers especially umbellifers, though its larvae feed on the grubs of solitary bees.

Day 5

The Aisa Valley

Today we will visit the beautiful Aisa Valley situated to the north-west of Jaca. On a gentle walk up the valley amongst some of the finest Pyrenean scenery, we will look for more meadow and alpine Lepidoptera such as the Apollo, Clouded Apollo and many ringlets and blues. Lammergeier, Golden Eagle and Rock Bunting are amongst the bird species most typical of the area, and the botanists in our party will additionally find carpets of gentians and Pyrenean Buttercups in the valley bottom, and numerous saxifrages and other rock-dwelling plants on the scree slopes above. The Pyrenean race of Chamois also occurs here, together with Alpine Marmot and Wild Boar, though being rather shy the latter are only seen with a little luck.

On the way there and back we'll stop at any likely spots – rivers, Scots Pine forest, fields and gardens and so on, to look for Lepidoptera.

Day 6

Foz De Biniés

Today we will explore the very spectacular Foz de Biniés, a lowland gorge north of Berdún with a good variety of plants, birds and butterflies. In particular we will look out for Swallowtail, Black-veined White, Clouded Yellow, Berger's Clouded Yellow, Orange-tip, Moroccan Orange-tip, Brimstone, Cleopatra, Wood White, Green Hairstreak, Green-underside Blue, Chequered Blue, Provence Chalkhill Blue, Mazarine Blue, Nettle Tree Butterfly, Southern White Admiral, Queen of Spain Fritillary, Heath Fritillary, Silver-washed Fritillary, Spotted Fritillary, Marsh Fritillary, Yellow-spotted Ringlet, Spanish Gatekeeper, Small Heath, Pearly Heath, Grizzled Skipper, Chequered Skipper and Large Skipper. Praying Mantids can also be found here though they are exceedingly difficult to spot.

Birds here include Alpine Swift, Woodchat Shrike, Golden Oriole, Hoopoe and Melodious Warbler, plus an excellent range of birds of prey. The gorge is also home to the elusive Eagle Owl, which is best located at dusk. The river banks leading to the gorge support Burnt and Pyramid Orchids and the Pyrenean Pink Rockrose. Growing on the spectacular gorge face are large bright red clumps of *Antirrhinum majus*, *Euphorbia characias*, Queen of the Pyrenees (*Saxifraga longifolia*), Pyrenean Golden Drops (*Onosma bubanii*), Large Yellow Rest Harrow (*Ononis natrix*), several species of Allium including

Yellow Onion (*Allium moly*) and *Petrocoptis hispanica*, a member of the Pink family endemic to the Jaca area. These plants are all attractive sources of nectar to butterflies and other insects.

Day 7

The Tena Valley

The Tena Valley is another spectacular high alpine valley with wonderful alpine meadows carpeted with flowers and many butterflies. The butterflies here should include Green Hairstreak, Green-underside Blue, Spotted Fritillary, Mountain Ringlet and Grizzled Skipper. If the conditions are good a number of other fritillaries and satyrids are also possible here. Burnet Companion Moths are abundant and Burnet Moths, Foresters and many other day-flying moth species are also worth searching for.

The views are spectacular and, as well as butterflies, we'll see many alpine flowers including wonderful orchids and many mountain bird species. We'll also stop at a high reservoir which is great for butterflies and dragonflies.

Day 8

Transfer to Airport

As the flight back to London leaves in the evening we will make a day of exploring some of the habitats between Berdún and the airport. This includes the amazing rock pinnacles of Riglos – home to Lammergeiers, as well as Western Europe's most northerly outposts of Blue Rock Thrushes and Black Wheatears. Alpine Choughs call continually here. Typical shrubs of the (maquis) matorral can be found here, including Rosemary, Helichrysum and Lavender. We will, of course, be particularly enjoying the butterflies found in these areas, including Duke of Burgundy, Provence, Chalkhill Blue and Spanish Gatekeeper and, hopefully, Moroccan Orange Tip.

Grading

Grade A/B. We will undertake mainly gentle walks which will be easy to moderate in nature, though one or two tougher optional walks may be offered. Our pace will generally be slow, as we look for butterflies, wild flowers, birds and other wildlife.

Weather

We have chosen July as being an ideal time for this tour. The weather should be mostly warm and settled.

Focus

Primarily butterflies and moths; also plants, birds and scenery.

Food & accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this holiday. We'll be based in a small, comfortable and peaceful village guesthouse.

How to book your place

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.



Scarce Swallowtail