

Butterflies of the Swiss Alps

Naturetrek Tour Report

30 June – 7 July 2019



Apollo by Stan Darling



Map (Levana form) by Stan Darling



Mountain Clouded Yellow by Stan Darling



Arran Brown by Stan Darling

Report compiled by Jon Stokes
Images courtesy of Stan Darling & Jon Stokes



Naturetrek

Mingledown Barn

Wolf's Lane

Chawton

Alton

Hampshire

GU34 3HJ

UK

T: +44 (0)1962 733051

E: info@naturetrek.co.uk

W: www.naturetrek.co.uk

Tour participants: Jon Stokes (leader) with seven Naturetrek clients

Day 1

Sunday 30th June

We set off from Heathrow airport but our flight was unfortunately delayed, so we arrived in Zurich an hour late and missed our train. Fortunately there was another one, and we actually had an easy passage through Switzerland although it was stiflingly hot at 35 degrees. From the train we saw our first butterflies, managing to spot Small Tortoiseshell, Large and Small Whites and Common Ringlets.

We arrived at Wengen and the bags were whisked to the hotel where, after a shower and change of clothes, we went to a small meadow (christened 'Margaret's Meadow' in honour of the lady who found it). In the meadow we found lots of butterflies including Geranium Argus, Chequered skippers (a great find for this site), Black Veined Whites, False Heath Fritillaries and a Mountain Clouded Yellow.

Then dinner, with a distant view of Chamois on the adjacent hillside, before a quick explanation of the week and a much needed trip to bed. All in all, a good if hot day to start our holiday!

Day 2

Monday 1st July

The sky dawned bright, clear, sunny and hot and, as always, the view with breakfast is stunning. After eating we set off early for the high ground of Mannlichen (2,227 metres).

Here the morning light had stirred Alpine Lacky Moth caterpillars into life, which were making their webbing cocoon. Our first butterflies of the day were Dewy Ringlets and there was a mass of Painted Ladies over the whole hill top.

After an ice cream in the hot mid-morning sun, we saw a flight of Snow Finch around the buildings, and then in a small alpine pool we found dozens of Alpine Newts, something the leader hadn't seen for over a decade.

The flowers were in their stunning abundance at this altitude and the Bird's Eye Primrose and Alpine Snowbells drew the eye. Then as we walked, on what was probably a Pine Martin scat, we found an Alpine Blue which showed off to perfection, as overhead masses of Alpine Chough flew past and a Sparrowhawk shot through.

After our first picnic lunch looking at the north face of the Eiger (with a nest of baby Snowfinches for company), we walked down the hill and were pleased to find clouds of Small Blues and in a meadow of orchids, a fluttering Marsh Fritillary caught the eye.

We decided then to have a hot chocolate, coffee or beer at a mountain hotel and, as we drank, the Alpine Chough descended and fed on scraps from our lunch. After the descent by train, those with sufficient energy wandered up to the meadow where we found our first Damon Blue, some Large Blues, our first Titania's Fritillary of the trip and some stunning Apollos.

After dinner we went out bat hunting, but only a few Pipistrelles began to emerge before we needed to go to bed.

Day 3

Tuesday 2nd July

The day dawned bright and sunny, so we set off over the mountain on the train for Grindelwald. As the train descended off the top of the mountain we saw a Citril Finch followed by some excellent Alpine Marmots boxing on top of an earth mound.

From Grindelwald we travelled up to the top at First where we found Large Grizzled Skippers, Small Blues by the hundred and more Alpine Blues, plus dozens of Swallowtails and a Clouded Yellow. On top we also found Mountain Green Veined White and masses more Small Blues.

Walking down to the cable car, we descended down to Bort, where we had lunch by the river and found masses of Geranium Argus, Sooty Coppers and Shepherd's Fritillary. However it wasn't until we left that we got our first unsatisfactory views of Sudetan Ringlet. Alongside the river, Green Hairstreaks revealed themselves to grateful group members and every plant in flower was heaving with flies, beetles and butterflies, whilst Alpine Heaths were everywhere.

Our next butterfly of the day was a Duke of Burgundy Fritillary which was a new species for the trip and showed that the late season that we were experiencing, was probably about three weeks behind normal. Then we spotted our first Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth (another sign of a late season).

After a great spell of butterfly watching we travelled down on the cable car again, and then after an ice cream, we travelled up and over the mountain by train. Those with energy then got out at Almund station, walking down to the hotel revealing, lots more butterflies, but only adding Bright-eyed Ringlet and Woodland Ringlet to the list.

Then dinner and possibly one of the most astonishing mountain thunderstorms whilst we ate.

Day 4

Wednesday 3rd July

Another hot and sunny morning dawned, so after breakfast we travelled down the valley to Lauterbrunnen. Hopping onto the bus, we set off for the Sefinental Valley. The ascent to the valley was as always quite spectacular, via a cable car alongside a vertical cliff wall.

Walking through the village of Gimmelwald we explored Europe's first 'Honesty Shop' and the whites in the village were Southern Small Whites. As we walked, Buzzards, Ravens and Red Kites soared overhead in front of the stunning mountain views. Heading down into the Sefinental we were amazed at the number of Apollos, which at a conservative estimate numbered 30+ individuals, with eight on display simultaneously at one at one point. Amongst the Dark Green Fritillaries were large numbers of High Brown Fritillaries, and Scotch Argus and Arran Browns were everywhere. There were also Swallowtails nectaring on Knapweeds.

Some set up base at a shady bench, whilst others wandered down into the valley, spotting another Narrow Bordered Bee Hawkmoth, Black-veined Whites, Six-spot Burnet moths, and a couple of Red Helleborine (*Cephalanthera rubra*) growing under the conifers.

As we wandered up, the Apollos kept coming and our lunch was spent listening to Firecrests calling in the

surrounding trees. Then we travelled back down on the cablecar to the Trümmelbach Falls, and walked into the caves where the spectacle of 20,000 litres of water flowing off the mountains every second blew our senses. The cold air of the cave also gave us huge relief from the searing temperatures outside in the valley.

After the caves we went back to the bus and returned to the hotel, and then down to another fantastic dinner with that stunning view. Then we had our normal de-brief on the day, followed by a bat walk which yielded Common Pipistrelles and Northern Bats.

Day 5

Thursday 4th July

This morning the weather was again stunning - so we set off to the other side of the valley and the village of Murren. Getting to Murren involves two trains and a cable car and by the time we arrived the warm weather had encouraged lots of moths and butterflies to be on the wing.

Flying around we had lots of Bright Eyed Ringlets, Heath and False Heath Fritillaries and as for moths we had lots of Latticed Heath and another cracking day flying moth, that is abundant here *Anania funebris* - a stunning black and white checker board moth.

Swallowtails were everywhere and as we walked we found a stunning Map butterfly feeding on an umbellifer, alongside some massive green eyed Horseflies. On the grass we found a roosting Golden Ringed Dragonfly and on a gravel pile there were a couple of Chequered Skippers searching for nutrients.

After a pre-dinner ice cream we found a spot for lunch out of the baking heat and enjoyed the stunning views over the mountain scenery. Then being aware that the weather was changing as the humidity built up, we arrived back at the cable car station just as the rain began to fall.

Descending the mountain we went down to the valley bottom and onwards from these high pastures down to the lowlands of Wilderswil. We took a walk through this ancient village, surrounded by houses built in the 16th century, then over a 17th-century bridge, and we stopped on the edge of a beech woodland. Here, we saw White Admirals and a Silver-washed Fritillaries plus a Humming-bird Hawk-moth, before even here the weather closed in and the rain began to fall.

Therefore we retreated back up the hill to our home in Wengen for dinner and a catch up on the days sightings.

Day 6

Friday 5th July

A stunning morning dawned and we set off on the train to the top at Kleine Scheideg. Here we found a party of Redpoll and once again the Marmots were boxing. Then it was down to Grindelwald where we caught the bus to Grosse Scheideg.

Walking around on a coll between the astonishingly beautiful mountains, we walked over the top finding a Shepherd's Fritillary and a few Dewy Ringlets. Diane was hunting about for a Violet Copper – a species not seen in the past 100 years in this part of Switzerland, but which we had found last year in this area, even though we hadn't realised it until one of last year's trip checked their pictures well after the trip had finished. Amazingly she

found and photographed one of these stunning butterflies, before losing it again.

The group all then searched for this rare species, but we failed to find it again, and so eventually stopped for a drink and a comfort stop at the hotel. Descending down the other side of the mountain, we stopped to check the spot where the species had been photographed last year, and to our great satisfaction we found a small colony of Violet Coppers in a small dip in the hills. Here these stunning creatures (which were new to the leader), displayed fascinating behaviours as they perched and sought mates from the short plants, returning after each foray to the same spot. Amongst the Violet Coppers (whose purple iridescence was like that of the Purple Emperor and only visible at certain angles) were Large Blues and many Swallowtails.

Walking down the hill we found Water Ringlet before we stopped for lunch in the shade of some pine trees, and on a neighbouring pond Large White-faced Darter dragonflies and Northern Damselfly flitted around in the sunshine.

We descended lower and hit a zone filled with Clouded Apollo butterflies. Bright-eyed Ringlets were everywhere and we eventually reached the bottom and our mountain bus stop, stopping to savour a stunning afternoon in the mountains in the baking heat.

On the train home we had stunning views of the Eiger mountain before settling down on the terrace to dinner and views of the mountains. After dinner we set out for a bat and moth walk, finding Common Pipistrelles and lots of moths.

Day 7

Saturday 6th July

For our last day we decided to return to Bort to see what had changed butterfly wise in a week. To do this we set off to the top of Mannlichen where again the Dewy Ringlets were everywhere and there were a few Grizzled Skippers flying in the early morning sun. We then descended down in a replacement bus service as the cable cars were being repaired. This was a slightly terrifying trip down, but we did see a few Marbled White butterflies as we went down the hill.

Catching the cable car up to Bort, we found Mountain Green Veined Whites, Bright-eyed Ringlets, and many more species, with Purple-shot Coppers, and more of that stunning Sudetan Ringlet.

In a small meadow, House Leeks grew on a large rock and many Alpine Heath allowed for good photographs. Then once again the weather began to turn and we headed down to a mountain bar for a hot chocolate. Arriving, the wind picked up ahead of another thunderstorm and just as we entered the bar, the rain began to fall. As we drank, the weather deteriorated and we heard later that we had been lucky, for the other side of the valley had horizontal torrential rain and 100kph gusts which took down trees.

Returning to the cable car, we discovered that everyone else had fled the hill tops and the cable cars were all filled with fleeing tourists, so it took a while to get down the hill, and by the time we got off the mountain we had missed the train over the top, However the train down the valley was still waiting, so we took a new way home, returning about 5 minutes earlier than we had hoped!

In Wengen, the weather had improved after the thunderstorm, and so we went again to Margaret's Meadow where we found stunning Bee Chafer beetles, and clouds of butterflies including Titania Fritillaries, Apollos and Damon Blues.

Day 8

Sunday 7th July

Today was our last day and it was another beautiful sunny morning. We had a few hours before we needed to set off for the train and the flight home. Using them wisely in the local meadows, we had stunning views of Black-veined White and Titania's Fritillary. Dark Green Fritillaries and clouds of browns and skippers were everywhere as they warmed up, especially Arran Browns.

Then we returned to the hotel to say our goodbyes and left for the train to return home. We ended with 79 species of butterfly on our list, and a host of memories of the mountains, the flowers and the bats to last us for a considerable time.

Receive our e-newsletter

Join the Naturetrek e-mailing list and be the first to hear about new tours, additional departures and new dates, tour reports and special offers. Visit www.naturetrek.co.uk to sign up.

Social Media

We're social! Follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram and be the first to hear about the launch of new tours, offers and exciting sightings and photos from our recently returned holidays.



www.facebook.com/naturetrekwildlifeholidays



www.twitter.com/naturetrektours



www.instagram.com/naturetrek_wildlife_holidays



Apollo by Jon Stokes



Chalkhill Blue by Jon Stokes

Species Lists

Butterflies (☐=recorded but not counted)

	Common name	Scientific name	June/July							
			30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Small Apollo	<i>Parnassius phoebus</i>				✓				
3	Apollo	<i>Parnassius apollo</i>		✓		✓				✓
4	Clouded Apollo	<i>Parnassius mnemosyne</i>						✓		
5	Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
6	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
8	Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>	✓			✓		✓		✓
9	Southern Small white	<i>Pieris mannii</i>		✓	✓	✓				✓
10	Mountain Green-veined White	<i>Pieris bryoniae</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	
11	Peak White	<i>Pontia callidice</i>		✓				✓	✓	
12	Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
13	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>			✓					
14	Moorland Clouded yellow	<i>Colias palaeno</i>					✓			
15	Mountain Clouded yellow	<i>Colias phicomone</i>	✓					✓		
16	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
17	Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
18	Purple-edged Copper	<i>Palaeochrysophanus hippothoe</i>			✓					
19	Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>			✓		✓		✓	
20	Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21	Large Blue	<i>Maculinea arion</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
22	Mazerine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
23	Osiris blue	<i>Cupido osiris</i>	✓			✓	✓			
24	Violet Copper	<i>Lycaena helle</i>					✓			
25	Scarce Copper	<i>Lycaena virgaureae</i>				✓				
26	Geranium Argus	<i>Eumedonia eumedon</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
27	Mountain Argus	<i>Aricia artaxerxes</i>	✓				✓			
28	Alpine Blue	<i>Plebejus orbitulus</i>		✓	✓			✓		
29	Chalk-hill Blue	<i>Polyommatus coridon</i>				✓	✓		✓	✓
30	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓						✓
31	Damon Blue	<i>Polyommatus damon</i>		✓		✓			✓	✓
32	Turquoise Blue	<i>Polyommatus (Plebicula) dorylas</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
33	Duke of Burgundy	<i>Hamearis lucina</i>			✓					
34	White Admiral	<i>Limenitis camilla</i>					✓			
35	Map	<i>Araschnia levana</i>					✓			
36	Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
37	Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
38	Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>	✓					✓	✓	✓
39	Silver Wash Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>						✓		
40	Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Argynnis aglaja</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
41	High Brown Fritillary	<i>Argynnis adippe</i>				✓				
42	Shepherd's Fritillary	<i>Boloria pales</i>		✓	✓			✓		
43	Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
44	Titania's Fritillary	<i>Boloria titania</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
45	Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	False Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea diamina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
47	Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea athalia</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			

	Common name	Scientific name	June/July							
			30	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
48	Marsh Fritillary	<i>Euphryas aurinia</i>		✓						
49	Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>					✓		✓	✓
50	Alpine Grayling	<i>Oeneis glacialis</i>				✓	✓	✓		
51	Scotch Argus	<i>Erebia aethiops</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
52	Common Brassy Ringlet	<i>Erebia cassioides</i>		✓						
53	Arran Brown	<i>Erebia ligea</i>				✓			✓	✓
54	Blind-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia pharte</i>	✓		✓	✓				✓
55	Bright-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia oeme</i>	✓	✓				✓		✓
56	Piedmont Ringlet	<i>Erebia meolans</i>							✓	
57	Dewy Ringlet	<i>Erebia pandrose</i>		✓				✓	✓	
58	Sooty Ringlet	<i>Erebia pluto</i>					✓			
59	Water Ringlet	<i>Erebia pronoe</i>						✓		
60	Sudetan Ringlet	<i>Erebia sudetica</i>			✓				✓	
61	Swiss Brassy Ringlet	<i>Erebia tyndarus</i>					✓			
62	Woodland Ringlet	<i>Erebia medusa</i>			✓					
63	Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
64	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
65	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>					✓			
66	Alpine Heath	<i>Coenonympha gardetta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
67	Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓					✓	
68	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>				✓	✓			
69	Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
70	Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
71	Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
72	Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineolus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
73	Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>			✓			✓	✓	✓
74	Large Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus alveus</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	
75	Alpine Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus andromedae</i>						✓	✓	
76	Dusky Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus cacaliae</i>		✓						
77	Olive Skipper	<i>Pyrgus serratalae</i>		✓						
78	Chequered Skipper	<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>	✓				✓			
79	Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>	✓	✓						

Moths

Diasemia reticularis

Pyrausta cingulata

Pammene aurana

Ematurga atomaria

Psodos quadrifaria

Chimney Sweeper, *Odezia atrata*

Speckled Yellow, *Pseudopanthera macularia*

Scopula ternate

Red Twin-spot Carpet, *Xanthorhoe spadicearia*

Bordered Straw, *Heliothis peltigera*

Mother Shipton, *Euclidia mi*

Oak Eggar, *Lasiocampa quercus*

Zygaena exulans

Pyrausta aerealis

Pyrausta despicata

Chiasmia clathrata

Epirrhoe alternata

Minoa murinata

Perizoma albulata

Argent and Sable, *Rheumaptera hastata*

Silver-ground Carpet, *Xanthorhoe montanata*

Silver Y, *Autographa gamma*

Burnet Companion, *Euclidia glyphica*

Humming-bird Hawk-moth, *Macroglossum stellatarum*

Zygaena filipendulae