

Butterflies of the Swiss Alps

Naturetrek Tour Report

2nd – 9th July 2023



Alpine Chough



Burnt Tip Orchid



Apollo



Spurge Hawk-moth caterpillar

Tour report and images compiled by 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 2nd July

We set off from Heathrow airport a few minutes late and arrived in Zurich. Having collected our bags, we wandered through the airport and caught our first train. On the train to Interlaken, we watched the countryside and spotted the occasional Red and Black Kites. On the lakes there were Coots, Yellow-legged Gulls and Mute Swans. We then changed trains, heading for Lauterbrunnen and the mountains.

Up the hill on the last train of the day, we arrived in Wengen late afternoon, with the scream of Swifts overhead. The evening was damp and overcast, so we headed to the hotel, showered and had dinner, before a quick explanation of our plans for the week.

Day 2

Monday 3rd July

The day dawned bright and sunny and the view was stunning with the lower slopes of the Jungfrau cloaked in cloud, but the top of the mountain in bright sunshine. After breakfast we set off early for the high ground of Mannlichen (2,227 metres), with the ever present Chamois on the mountain side below the top, easily visible from the cable car.

On the top, just above the cloud which was sweeping up from the valley, but in bright sunshine, we had Alpine Choughs and a beautiful Swallowtail in flight. However as so often the case, the butterflies needed a while to warm up before they started to fly. While we waited, we looked at Net-leaved Willow and Frog Orchid, along with Black Vanilla and Small White Orchids – plus the mass of other amazing plants that there always are at this altitude.

There were also the occasional Snow Finches flying around, plus the sound of Skylark and pipits. Then from the cliff face a croaking call, - which sounded like a Ptarmigan, but the leader had never seen this species before here – so we hunted but failed to find the bird.

Heading on the downward path from the top, we passed a few more Snow Finches around the buildings, stopped for an ice-creme in the café, and then stopped by a small alpine pool, where we found Alpine Newts and the first Dewy Ringlets and Shepherd's Fritillaries.

Heading down the path the cloud covered the higher mountains, and we enjoyed a mass emergence of Small Blue. Our first picnic lunch of the week was taken on a small bench, where the view was obscured by the mist, but the food was good. Alpine Marmots called from the valley and then there was the croak of the Ptarmigan again. And this time it flew into view, allowing the whole group to get a good view of this amazing mountain bird.

As the cloud was bad on this side of the mountain, we dropped back to Wengen in the cable car, where the weather was better and walked up to Margaret's Meadow. Here the Mazarine Blues were abundant, along with False Heath and Heath Fritillaries, Black-veined Whites and many other species. A great way to finish the day, before we returned to the hotel and enjoyed our dinner, with the view of the mountains creating a breathtakingly beautiful dinner backdrop.

Day 3

Tuesday 4th July

The day dawned cloudy, so we set off over the mountain on the two cable car rides to Grindelwald. We walked along the river, before ascending to Bort. Here we had lunch by the river and in the sunshine we found masses of Purple-edged Coppers, Titania's Fritillaries, Large Blues, Sooty Coppers and slightly up the hill, four or five Clouded Apollo - a species rarely encountered on this trip. We also got our first views of a single Sudetan Ringlet and a few Hummingbird Hawkmoths.

However, the highlight of the day, was the lunchtime appearance of a Lammergeier overhead. This amazing bird flew around the top of the hill at first, giving superb views of the largest bird of prey in Europe.

Eventually we had to leave the hills and descended down to Grindelwald, then up over the top at Kleine Scheidegg, and down to Almund. Here some of the group went on to Wengen but a few left the train and walked back to the hotel. The walking party had an astonishing gathering of upwards of 500 blue butterflies on a damp salty area. Here a mixture of Small Blues and Mazarine Blues, were in the company of Dingy Skippers. Then down through the woods to the hotel, with Firecrests, a Fox and cow bells for company, as we walked.

Dinner and the amazing view as always, closed out the day, before a catch up on the species list and a good night's sleep.

Day 4

Wednesday 5th 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 us we had lots of Heath and False Heath Fritillaries, Bright-eyed Ringlets and a stunning black and white checkerboard moth - *Anania junestris*. Titania's Fritillaries were abundant along with Chalkhill Blues and our first Alpine Heaths.

We found a spot for lunch on a bench in the hot morning sun and enjoyed the stunning views over the mountain scenery. However, after lunch as the butterflies were a bit thin in number in the lower pastures (as the cows had grazed off all the flowers), we decided to try something different. We therefore headed to the churchyard in Wilderswill to try to find lowland species, but by the time we arrived, the weather had changed and a thunderstorm was beginning. So after looking at the church and the amazing ancient buildings, we returned home for dinner and to photograph a Great Capricorn Beetle - *Cerambyx credo*, which was found on the wall of the hotel.

Day 5

Thursday 6th July

A hot and sunny morning dawned, so after breakfast we travelled down the valley to Lauterbrunnen, hopping onto the bus, and 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, Red Kites soared overhead in front of the stunning mountain views.

Heading into the Sefinental there were lots of Apollos, Dark Green Fritillaries, plus Scotch Argus and Arran Browns, and some Swallowtails.

Wandering down into the valley, Six-spot Burnet moths were in the meadows and Martagon Lilies were flowering under the conifers and there were also three Red Helleborines in flower – one of Europe's rarest orchids. These beautiful flowers usually appear once every 12 years, and it must be about this length of time since we last saw the species in this valley.

The walk out of the valley was hot and, after we found a stunning caterpillar of a Spurge Hawkmoth, we stopped for ice-cream and beer in the village, spotting Ibex on the cliff faces opposite. Then we descended down the cable car and got on the bus to the Trummelbach falls. These amazing waterfalls are the main outflow of the glaciers for the Jungferau and Eiger and create an astonishing spectacle as millions of gallons of water corkscrew down through the mountain. As we ate cake in the café, the rain began to set in, and then we went back to Wengen, arriving fortunately as the weather improved.

Dinner, good conversation and then bed, rounded off a great day.

Day 6

Friday 7th July

Today, we decided to travel to First to see what we could find. On the top there were Dewy Ringlets, Mountain Clouded Yellows, and Mountain Green-veined Whites. As we stood by the clifftop walkway, a look skywards revealed a group of three Griffon Vultures soaring overhead amongst the paragliders. Griffon Vultures have only recently returned to Switzerland following the expansion of numbers in central France. A re-introduction programme there in the 1960's, has now allowed birds to disperse and over the last few years, up to a hundred (mostly juveniles) have been recorded in Switzerland. This group of three was therefore significant in many ways, as firstly Jon had never seen one in Switzerland, and secondly two of these individuals were adults. This sets up the possibility that they will eventually breed in these high hills and become a local part of the bird life.

As we walked, we saw a Blind Ringlet (a new species for this trip), many thousands of blues and Ringlets and a considerable number of Small Tortoiseshells in these high pastures.

With lunch we could hear Alpine Marmots on the hills, and the walk back to the cable car station yielded Alpine Grizzled Skipper, Damon Blues and Alpine Blues. We then travelled back to the valley bottom and returned to the churchyard in Wilderswill, to have another go at the lowland species, finding Silver-washed Fritillary, White Admiral and Pearl-bordered Fritillary before returning back to Wengen for dinner and a rest.

Day 7

Saturday 8th July

A cloudy start meant we went to Wengenalp (up the hill) by train to see what we could find. Here we found a few Bright-eyed and Blind-eyed Ringlets as we sat on the bench looking down on Wengen and had an excellent view of a pair of Nutcrackers flying around and perching on telegraph poles.

As the weather improved, we decided to press on to the highest ground at Eigergleicher station to look for a Mountain Fritillary, a species we found for the first-time last year. As we arrived the sun came out and gave astonishing views of the base of the Jungfrau and we walked down to the edge of the glacial moraine. A shout

went up from Sarah, and suddenly we realised we were literally eye-to eye with a Lammergeier flying past at a range of about a hundred feet. The next hour was astonishing with the bird staying in view, finding an animal carcass, collecting bones, flying them into the air and dropping them, then eating the marrow from the bones. All in all, an astonishing experience and one that will live long in the memory!!

Then lunch was surrounded by ravenous Alpine Choughs, while Mountain Fritillary, Swiss Brassy Ringlets and Dewy Ringlets flew past.

After lunch a potter around the high pastures yielded Green Hairstreaks, a Narrow-bordered Bee Hawkmoth, Southern Small Whites, Mountain Green-veined Whites and many more species.

Then back to Wengen, to have a last look at Margaret's Meadow, where alongside the range of usual butterflies, we found a beautiful Chequered Skipper – only the second one Naturetrek tours have found in the area.

Walking back to the hotel then yielded another new species for the group – Idas Blue, a beautiful species hiding in plain sight amid a mass of Mazarine and Small Blues. What a way to end a trip!

Day 8

Sunday 9th July

Today was our last day and it was another beautiful sunny morning. One part of the group set off early back to the airport, while the others had a few hours before we needed to set off for the train and the flight home. Using them in the local area, we had views of Titania's Fritillary and clouds of browns and ringlets. There was also the most enormous ant Jon had ever seen close to the hotel, it being fully 2cm from head to toe.

Then we said our goodbyes to Martina and left for the train to return home. The return journey was simple as it usually is in Switzerland, and we arrived in Zurich with time to have a snack before we headed home. We ended the trip with 70 butterfly species on our list, and a host of memories of the vultures, the mountains, flowers and the scenery.

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

Species lists

Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name	July 2023							
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Butterflies									
Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Small Apollo	<i>Parnassius phoebus</i>			✓					
Apollo	<i>Parnassius apollo</i>					✓			
Clouded Apollo	<i>Parnassius mnemosyne</i>			✓					
Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	
Mountain Green-veined White	<i>Pieris bryoniae</i>						✓	✓	
Peak White	<i>Pontia callidice</i>		✓				✓	✓	
Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>				✓				
Moorland Clouded yellow	<i>Colias palaeno</i>				✓	✓	✓		
Mountain Clouded yellow	<i>Colias phicomone</i>						✓		
Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>		✓						
Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>							✓	
Purple-edged Copper	<i>Palaeochrysophanus hippothoe</i>			✓					
Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>			✓	✓			✓	
Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Large Blue	<i>Maculinea arion</i>		✓				✓	✓	
Mazerine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>						✓		
Geranium Argus	<i>Eumedonia eumedon</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Alpine Blue	<i>Plebejus orbitulus</i>						✓		
Chalk-hill Blue	<i>Polyommatus coridon</i>			✓		✓	✓		
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Damon Blue	<i>Polyommatus damon</i>						✓		
Eros Blue	<i>Polyommatus eros</i>							✓	
White Admiral	<i>Limenitis camilla</i>					✓			
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>					✓	✓		
Painted Lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>						✓	✓	
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>					✓	✓	✓	
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>		✓				✓		
Silver Wash Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>					✓			
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Argynnis aglaja</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
High Brown Fritillary	<i>Argynnis adippe</i>				✓				
Queen of Spain Fritillary	<i>Issoria lathonia</i>			✓					
Mountain Fritillary	<i>Boloria napaea</i>							✓	
Shepherd's Fritillary	<i>Boloria pales</i>		✓						
Titania's Fritillary	<i>Boloria titania</i>		✓			✓	✓		

Common name	Scientific name	July 2023							
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>						✓		
False Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea diamina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea athalia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Large Ringlet	<i>Erebia euryale</i>			✓					
Scotch Argus	<i>Erebia aethiops</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common Brassy Ringlet	<i>Erebia cassioides</i>		✓					✓	
Silky Ringlet	<i>Erebia gorge</i>		✓		✓			✓	
Arran Brown	<i>Erebia ligea</i>				✓			✓	
Blind-eyed ringlet	<i>Erebia pharte</i>				✓			✓	
Bright-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia oeme</i>				✓			✓	
Dewy Ringlet	<i>Erebia pandrose</i>		✓	✓				✓	
Sudetan Ringlet	<i>Erebia sudetica</i>				✓				
Swiss Brassy Ringlet	<i>Erebia tyndarus</i>							✓	
Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓					✓	
Alpine Heath	<i>Coenonympha gardetta</i>					✓	✓	✓	
Speckled Wood	<i>Pararge aegeria</i>						✓		
Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>		✓	✓				✓	
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Alpine Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus andromedae</i>		✓				✓	✓	
Dusky Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus cacaliae</i>			✓		✓	✓		
Carline Skipper	<i>Pyrgus carlinae</i>			✓					
Olive Skipper	<i>Pyrgus serratulae</i>							✓	
Chequered Skipper	<i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>							✓	
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>		✓				✓	✓	
Blind Ringlet	<i>Erebia pharte</i>					✓			
Moths									
Hummingbird Hawk	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>								
Oak Eggar	<i>Lasiocampa quercus</i>								
Chimney Sweeper	<i>Odezia atrata</i>								
The Lackey	<i>Malacosoma neustria</i>								

Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	July 2023							
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Birds									
Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>		✓					✓	
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓							
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓							✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓							✓
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓							✓
Great Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	✓							✓

Common name	Scientific name	July 2023							
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓							✓
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>					✓	✓		
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>			✓					
Lammergeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>			✓				✓	
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>			✓					
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>								
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓			✓		✓	✓	
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓							✓
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓							✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>			✓		✓		✓	
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>	✓						✓	
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Spotted Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>						✓	✓	
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>		✓	✓		✓			
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓			✓		
Marsh Tit	<i>Poecile palustris</i>		✓	✓			✓		
Coal Tit	<i>Parus ater</i>		✓					✓	
European Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>			✓				✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>		✓	✓					
Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>					✓			
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Common House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>				✓				
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>				✓				
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>		✓					✓	
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>			✓	✓	✓			
Common Firecrest	<i>Regulus ignicapilla</i>			✓	✓	✓			
Goldcrest	<i>Regulus regulus</i>			✓		✓			
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>			✓	✓				
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>			✓	✓	✓			
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>		✓		✓	✓			
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>							✓	
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓		✓			✓		
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>	✓		✓			✓	✓	
Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>								
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>		✓			✓		✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
White-winged Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>		✓	✓		✓		✓	

Common name	Scientific name	July 2023							
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					✓			
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓		
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>		✓		✓			✓	
Common Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>					✓	✓		
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>					✓	✓		
Common Redpoll	<i>Carduelis flammea</i>							✓	
Common Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>		✓					✓	
Red Crossbill	<i>Loxia curvirostra</i>			✓				✓	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>							✓	
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>							✓	

Others

		July 2023							
Common name	Scientific name	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Mammals									
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>						✓		
Parti-coloured Bat	<i>Vespertilio murinus</i>						✓		
Noctule Bat	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>						✓		
Alpine Marmot	<i>Marmota marmota</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>			✓					
Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Ibex	<i>Capra ibex</i>					✓			
Reptiles									
Viviparous Lizard	<i>Lacerta vivipera</i>						✓		
Amphibians									
Alpine Newt	<i>Ichthyosaura alpestri</i>		✓		✓			✓	