

# Butterflies of the Swiss Alps

Naturetrek Tour Report

2nd – 9th July 2025

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Large Wall Brown



Purple-edged Copper



Red Helleborine



Dark Red Helleborine

Tour report by Jon Stokes



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

## Day 1

**Wednesday 2nd July**

We set off from Heathrow airport on Swissair (on time as one might expect) and arrived in Zurich just before noon. Having collected our bags, we travelled through the airport at speed and caught our train only forty-five mins after landing. On the train to Interlaken, we watched the countryside and spotted occasional Red and Black Kites, plus some Alpine Swifts around Berne. On the lakes there were Coots, Yellow-legged Gulls, Great Crested Grebes and Mute Swans.

We then changed trains, heading for Lauterbrunnen and the mountains, and arrived in Wengen late in the afternoon, with the scream of Swifts overhead. The evening was sunny, so once checked in, we went up to a local meadow to look for butterflies, although we didn't find more than a few Common Ringlets and a couple of Large Whites. However, the Jungfrau did do its magical trick of turning pink just after dinner, for the close of a lovely first day.

## Day 2

**Thursday 3rd July**

Cloud and a hint of rain were in order for the start of the day, so we decided to set off for the high ground of Mannlichen (2,227m), with the ever present Alpine Chamois on the mountainside easily visible from the cable car.

On the top, the clouds and mist were lurking, but there was the hint of something better to come later. A couple of Alpine Accentors and some Snowfinches were flying around the top, along with the ever-present Water Pipits. As we explored, we saw Net-leaved Willow, along with Black Vanilla and Small White Orchids, plus the mass of other amazing plants that there always are at this altitude.

The rain began, so we jumped into the cable car down to Grindelwald (just for the ride!) and were delighted with excellent views of the Alpine Marmots, before returning to the top of the hill again. Upon arrival, the sun came out, the clouds cleared, and the butterflies began to fly, including the first Dewy Ringlets and Shepherd's Fritillaries.

The cloud covered the higher mountains, and we enjoyed a few Little Blues, and one Alpine Blue. Our first picnic lunch of the week was taken on a small bench, with Alpine Marmots calling from the valley below; brilliantly, a Wallcreeper flew over, showing its lovely red wing flashes.

Continuing our walk down the hill, we saw the first Cranberry Fritillaries of the trip, mating on a dandelion, a Mountain Clouded Yellow egg laying on the Alpenrose, Marsh Fritillaries in the bog, and what must have been tens of thousands of marsh orchids. One client started a long conversation with a local lady about the hills, the flowers and all the wildlife, but eventually he dragged himself away, and we finished our descent.

On the last hillside, a Fox was stalking about among the Chamois, and although it didn't disturb them, it did set off panic among the Marmots, who called constantly. Finally in a pond above the station we found Alpine Newt, before we caught the train and descended to Wengen. A final walk to Margaret's Meadow before dinner revealed a Damon Blue, lots of Black-veined Whites, and another Fox.

Dinner came as usual with the breathtakingly beautiful view of the mountains. Then we walked down to the village square, to watch the local village and its musical evening of cow bells, a brass band and best of all, the village yodelling group. All these were accompanied by the stunning screams of the local Swifts. After the musical fun, bed called and we all retired for the night.

## Day 3

Friday 4th July

The day dawned slightly cloudy, so we set off over the mountain on the two cable car rides to Grindelwald. By the time we reached Grindelwald, the sun had come out, and there was a beautiful Rose Chafer in the flowers around the station. We walked along the river, before ascending to Bort, where we had lunch by the river. However, the sunshine was lurking further down the hillside, so we only had a few Purple-edged Coppers, Titania's Fritillaries and a nice Sooty Copper.

To find the sunshine, we decided to leave Bort and walk down to Grindelwald. As we did so, the sun came out and the butterflies appeared everywhere. There were masses of Marbled Whites, mixed with High Brown Fritillaries, over meadows with Greater and Lesser Butterfly Orchids. As we walked, Clouded Yellows and Pale Clouded Yellows mixed with Arran Browns and a few Pearl-bordered Fritillaries.

As we walked further down among the trees, we found Dark Red Helleborines and Silver-washed Fritillaries, and then to everyone's delight a Smooth Snake slid across the path among the feet of passing hikers: a genuine surprise to all. There was also a beautiful Western Bonelli's Warbler singing from a Sycamore, which made for a good bird sighting.

Two trains and a walk took us back to our hotel, where dinner and the amazing view closed out the day, before a catch up on the species lists and a good night's sleep.

## Day 4

Saturday 5th July

This morning the weather was stunning, so we set off to the other side of the valley and the village of Gimmelwald. The journey involved two trains and two cable cars, and by the time we arrived the warm weather had encouraged lots of moths and butterflies onto the wing.

In 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, and then someone spotted the first Golden Eagle of the trip, which gave great views overhead.

In the Sefinental, there were lots of Apollos (a favourite for everyone), Dark Green Fritillaries, plus Scotch Argus and Arran Browns, and some Swallowtails. We also 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 also abundant, along with Chalk-hill Blues and Arran Browns. As we wandered down into the valley, Six-spot Burnet moths were in the meadows and Martagon Lilies were flowering under the conifers, and there were also a stunning Red Helleborine in flower.

We decided to walk down the valley to the bottom of the hill, which was a first for the trip. One of the meadows we passed was full of butterflies, with a bee hawk-moth whizzing around (although we could see which species).

Overhead we had another Golden Eagle, but this one was ‘mobbing’ a Bearded Vulture which was occupying the same airspace. It was quite something to see two of Europe’s largest birds of prey interacting in this way.

Further down the path, a dead shrew on the path had a Carrion Beetle on it, which was quite a sight, while on the valley sides we could see Alpine Chamois feeding. The descent also took us through woods, along rivers and downhill; it was a beautiful walk, with Bullfinch, lots of White Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries as our companions

Eventually, at the bottom of the hill, we found the bus and headed back to Wengen for dinner. After dinner, good conversation and competitive crosswords followed the list, before we all retired to bed.

## Day 5

## Sunday 6th July

It was a beautiful start to the day, so we decided to head for the highest ground at Eigergleicher station to look for Mountain Fritillary, a species of these high slopes. As we arrived, the sun came out and gave astonishing views of the base of the Jungfrau. Alpine Choughs were feeding their young, while Peak Whites, Mountain Fritillaries, and Swiss Brassy and Dewy Ringlets flew past. An Alpine Accentor crept among us and then someone spotted a group of Alpine Ibexes on the hillside. We had known they were present from the scat which we had found, but it was amazing to see these stunning creatures, especially as three of them were large males with huge horns.

We took the cable car down to Grindelwald and headed up to First to see what we could find. On the top, there were Dewy Ringlets, Mountain Clouded Yellows, and Mountain Green-veined Whites. We also saw a Blind Ringlet, many blues and other ringlets and a few 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 Damon and Alpine Blues.

The return trip went flawlessly, with the ride over the mountain providing a great view, followed by dinner, crosswords and bed.

## Day 6

## Monday 7th July

The morning started cloudy in the valley, but the mountain tops looked clearer, so we went back up to the top of Mannlichen in the cable car. As we arrived on the top, the sun lifted above the clouds and the first butterflies began to fly. There were Dewy Ringlets, Shepherd’s Fritillaries, and a good number of Alpine Heaths, plus Bright-eyed and Blind Ringlets

Last year, we saw Ptarmigan on these upper slopes, so we stopped to see if we could find them again. Just after someone remarked that this looked like a good spot, a male Ptarmigan leapt up from the rocks and flew up to a high peak, where it called in a fantastic manner. Over the next hour this Ptarmigan and its mate put on a great display with display flights, calling, and the male passing so close to the group that you could feel the wind from its wings. The supporting cast of Ring Ouzels, Frog and Musk Orchids and a pair of Nutcrackers added to the high mountain experience.

We took the cable car down to the middle station at Holenstein, where we had lunch. The woods nearby were filled with the lovely Ground Pine, while overhead Crested and Willow Tits displayed beautifully. Black-veined

Whites and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were floating around the meadows, and overhead we had another spectacular Golden Eagle floating past.

The final highlight was a beautiful red fungus (Alder Tongue) which was found growing on Green Alder catkins. However, the rain then started to threaten, so we headed home by two trains. By the time we had reached Wengen, the heavens had opened, so we had dinner under cover, before another round of competitive crosswords, lists and then bed.

## Day 7

**Tuesday 8th July**

Today the weather looked a bit wet, so we descended by cable car and got on the bus to the Trummelbach Falls. These amazing waterfalls are the main outflow of the glaciers of the Jungfrau and the Eiger, and create an astonishing spectacle as millions of litres of water corkscrew down through the mountain.

The caves did their job; the rain passed overhead while we were inside, so we travelled back along the valley bottom and visited the village of Wilderswill. Here, we looked for lowland species, finding Silver-washed and Meadow Fritillaries, and White Admiral, before we returned to Wengen for dinner and bed.

## Day 8

**Sunday 9th July**

Today was our last day, and it was another beautiful sunny morning. We said our goodbyes to Martina and left by 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 boarded our flight. We ended the trip with sixty-nine butterfly species on our list, and a host of memories of the wildlife, the mountains, the flowers and the scenery.

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## Species lists

### Butterflies

Common name	Scientific name
Common Swallowtail	<i>Papilio machaon</i>
Common Apollo	<i>Parnassius apollo</i>
Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>
Silver-spotted Skipper	<i>Hesperia comma</i>
Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>
Essex Skipper	<i>Thymelicus lineola</i>
Dingy Skipper	<i>Erynnis tages</i>
Common Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>
Dusky Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus cacaliae</i>
Alpine Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus andromedae</i>
Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>
Common Brimstone	<i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>
Pale Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias hyale</i>
Berger's Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>
Mountain Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias phicomone</i>
Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias croceus</i>
Moorland Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias palaeno</i>
Black-veined White	<i>Aporia crataegi</i>
Peak White	<i>Pontia callidice</i>
Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>
Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>
Mountain Green-veined White	<i>Pieris bryoniae</i>
Green-veined White	<i>Pieris napi</i>
Common Orange-tip	<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>
Purple-edged Copper	<i>Lycaena hippothoe</i>
Sooty Copper	<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>
Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>
Large Blue	<i>Phengaris arion</i>
Little Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>
Alpine Argus	<i>Agriades orbitulus</i>
Geranium Argus	<i>Eumedonia eumedon</i>
Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>
Chalk-hill Blue	<i>Lysandra coridon</i>
Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>
Damon Blue	<i>Polyommatus damon</i>
White Admiral	<i>Limenitis camilla</i>
Silver-washed Fritillary	<i>Argynnis paphia</i>
Dark Green Fritillary	<i>Speyeria aglaja</i>
High Brown Fritillary	<i>Fabriciana adippe</i>
Shepherd's Fritillary	<i>Boloria pales</i>
Mountain Fritillary	<i>Boloria napaea</i>
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria selene</i>
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	<i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>
Titania's Fritillary	<i>Boloria titania</i>
Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>
Peacock Butterfly	<i>Aglais io</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Small Tortoiseshell	<i>Aglais urticae</i>
Comma	<i>Polygonia c-album</i>
Marsh Fritillary	<i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>
False Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea diamina</i>
Heath Fritillary	<i>Melitaea athalia</i>
Meadow Fritillary	<i>Melitaea parthenoides</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>
Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>
Common Marbled White	<i>Melanargia galathea</i>
Common Ringlet	<i>Aphantopus hyperantus</i>
Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>
Swiss Brassy Ringlet	<i>Erebia tyndarus</i>
Common Brassy Ringlet	<i>Erebia cassioides</i>
Bright-eyed Ringlet	<i>Erebia oeme</i>
Dewy Ringlet	<i>Erebia pandrose</i>
Large Ringlet	<i>Erebia euryale</i>
Arran Brown	<i>Erebia ligea</i>
Woodland Ringlet	<i>Erebia medusa</i>
Scotch Argus	<i>Erebia aethiops</i>
Blind Ringlet	<i>Erebia pharte</i>

## Moths

Common name	Scientific name
Lackey	<i>Malacosoma neustria</i>
Oak Eggar	<i>Lasiocampa quercus</i>
Hummingbird Hawk-moth	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>
bee hawk-moth sp.	<i>Hemaris</i> sp.
Chimney Sweeper	<i>Odezia atrata</i>

## Birds (H = Heard only)

Common name	Scientific name	July 2025							
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Mute Swan	<i>Cygnus olor</i>	✓							✓
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	✓							✓
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	✓							✓
Rock Ptarmigan	<i>Lagopus muta</i>							✓	
Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	✓							✓
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	✓							✓
Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	✓							✓
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	✓							✓
Yellow-legged Gull	<i>Larus michahellis</i>	✓							✓
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	✓							✓

Common name	Scientific name	July 2025							
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Bearded Vulture	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>				✓				
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>						✓		
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>				✓		✓		
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>				✓				
Red Kite	<i>Milvus milvus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>						✓		
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>		✓			✓		✓	
European Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridis</i>		✓					✓	
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>		✓						
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>		✓				✓		
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>								
Northern Nutcracker	<i>Nucifraga caryocatactes</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Carrion Crow	<i>Corvus corone</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>			✓		✓			
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>	✓						✓	
Crested Tit	<i>Lophophanes cristatus</i>							✓	
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>							✓	
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>							✓	
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>			✓				✓	
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Eurasian Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	✓							✓
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	✓				✓			
Western Bonelli's Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus bonelli</i>				✓				
Willow Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochilus</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>								
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>		✓						
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>	✓		✓				✓	
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>			✓			✓		
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>			✓					
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>							✓	
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
European Robin	<i>Erithacus rubecula</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>						✓		
White-winged Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>	✓		✓		✓			
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓		



Common name	Scientific name	July 2025							
		2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>					✓	✓		
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>				✓	✓	✓		
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>				✓				
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>					✓			
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
European Goldfinch	<i>Carduelis carduelis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Citril Finch	<i>Carduelis citrinella</i>						✓		
European Serin	<i>Serinus serinus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

## Mammals

Common name	Scientific name
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>
Alpine Marmot	<i>Marmota marmota</i>
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>
Alpine Ibex	<i>Capra ibex</i>
Alpine Chamois	<i>Rupicapra rupicapra</i>
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>

## Reptiles & amphibians

Common name	Scientific name
Common Smooth Snake	<i>Coronella austriaca</i>
Alpine Newt	<i>Ichthyosaura alpestris</i>