



Butterflies of Corfu (Kerkyra)

08 – 15 May 2023

Led by Dan & Libby Danahar



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Introduction

[Corfu Butterfly Conservation \(CBC\)](#) aims to encourage the conservation of Corfu's butterflies along with their habitats, so they can be enjoyed by everyone, forever. One means by which we aim to do this is to encourage eco-tourism, to demonstrate to the inhabitants of the island that biodiversity has an economic value. Subsequently, it became self-evident that it was a good idea to work with a company like **Greenwings**, with its fantastic reputation for supporting conservation efforts wherever it works.

In this unique partnership **CBC** worked with **GreenWings** to actively engage butterfly enthusiasts with an opportunity to learn about the work of **CBC** to conserve the island's butterflies. Furthermore, all the records made by our guests were incorporated into the **Corfu Butterfly Survey (CBS)**, thus helping us learn more about the distribution and phenology of the butterflies found on the island.

The **Butterflies of Corfu 2023** was our first tour designed to show off the island's impressive butterfly assemblage of 76 known species, from an island of only 242 miles² in size. Of this number 66 of these species can be seen flying during May and so this seemed like a perfect time for our guests to visit the island. However, on this week in May the weather wasn't kind to us, with several cold and damp days. This is why we intend to offer our next trip, the **Butterflies of Corfu 2024**, during the month of June.

Never-the-less, our back up plans were gratefully appreciated by our guests, and so we spent the week watching butterflies, in lots of stunning landscapes, as well as participating in some cultural events. Given this was our pilot tour, we had but four guests joining the leaders and they were, Aiden, Emma, Stephen, and Graham. At different points of the tour, our guests met a range of **CBC's** committee members and guides. And of course, they had tea with our ambassador, Dr Lee Durrell, wife of the late [Gerald Durrell](#).

What follows is a daily diary, species list and a photo gallery.

Day 1, Monday 8th May

On this overcast afternoon Dan & Libby picked up Graham, Stephen, Aiden, and Emma, from Corfu's Ioannis Capodistrias International airport, on the outskirts of Corfu Town. Our guests were then taken to the Hotel Apollon, where they unpacked their belongings and prepared for their first outing. Before their departure they were each provided with a hard copy of the [Corfu Butterfly Identification guide](#).

Stop 1. Fundana Villas in the Corfu Lake district.

This region is an unspoilt area, resting on Triassic Breccia, in the lowlands of Corfu and not well known by anyone except the local inhabitants. It offered an introduction to Corfu's butterflies and particularly its orchids, including the regional subspecies of the Woodcock Orchid - *Ophrys scolopax cornuta*, remarkable for the development of the side lobes on the lip of its flowers. Here we saw seven species of butterfly including the Glanville Fritillary, Red Admiral and Holly Blue.



This excursion was followed by an evening meal at the Hotel Apollon.

Day 2, Tuesday 9th May

On this overcast but warm day our target was the iconic Southern Swallowtail (it is the CBC logo). To see this we travelled to the west coast of Corfu, to a population discovered through the CBS only a year earlier.



Stop 1. This site, near to **Pendati**, follows what is likely to have been a former donkey trail and is now a narrow road leading to a couple of villas. It runs parallel with the coast at between 80 to 100 metres above sea level and bisects an Olive grove. The land to the west of this trail slopes gently towards the sea and is composed of Mio-Pliocene deposits, whilst on the eastern side of the trail the land is formed of Triassic Carbonates and rises to an altitude of 350 metres.

Having arrived early in the morning, the hope was to discover some newly emerged Southern Swallowtails which at this time of the year, in the right conditions, was likely to be met with a fair degree of success. Our first gold star went to Emma who discovered a beautiful newly emerged male, resting on a Scabious flower, in the Olive grove. Given its posture and the immaculate condition of its wings, it's likely that this individual had emerged perhaps three to four hours earlier and that it had not taken its maiden flight.



On a provisional visit to the site a week earlier, when we went to ensure the presence of this species for our guests, the exceptionally hot weather had made photographing the butterfly and monitoring their numbers quite difficult. On this visit the much cooler temperatures made both activities far easier. In fact, footage seen in CBC's [film of the Southern Swallowtail](#) was taken on this visit and was later incorporated into the video.

Over the course of the morning, we managed to count 15 individual Southern Swallowtails from the site and during this time the butterflies allowed our guests a great opportunity to engage with them on an almost personal level. The site also yielded several other interesting species.

During the early afternoon we stopped for a picnic lunch prepared by Hotel Apollon.



Stop 2. Before our return to the hotel, after discussions about habitat management for Mediterranean butterflies, we travelled further south to a site, east of **Paramonas**, resting on similar geology to our first stop. Here we walked through a dense Olive grove to illustrate the impact of a full canopy on a Mediterranean butterfly fauna. Typically, these low light conditions revealed species like the Speckled Wood, Large White and Clouded Yellow.

However, once the group had been shown the abundant Mediterranean Buckthorn - *Rhamnus alaternus*, growing along the edge of the trail, it did not take Aiden long before he discovered several Cleopatra caterpillars.

In total, we counted 20 species during this first day, including the Green Hairstreak, Eastern

Dappled White, Wood White, Oriental Marbled Skipper, and Scarce Swallowtail.

On return to the Hotel Apollon, Libby, Aiden, Emma, and Steven went for an energetic swim in the sea, in Paleokastritsa bay. After our evening meal at the Hotel Apollon, we went for a stroll with the fireflies.

Day 3, Wednesday 10th May

On this overcast day we also had to contend with showers. However, it was hoped that the cooler weather would make it possible for our guests to have a better view of and opportunity to photograph one of Corfu's rarest and flightiest of butterflies, the Eastern Orange Tip, our target species for the day. Indications are that this species is now very much endangered within Europe as a whole.

Stop 1. All our guests were reminded that the Eastern Orange Tip was probably accidentally imported when Woad - *Isatis tinctoria* (the hostplant) was shipped to the island for use as a dye to colour wool. This took place at least 200 years ago and perhaps even earlier. Modern sightings of this species go back to the 1970's and show that the butterfly has always been restricted to the north-eastern coast of the island. CBC's sightings are mostly restricted to the Jurassic Carbonates of the area.



On arrival we quickly set out in search of the butterfly, and it wasn't long before we encountered its caterpillars on the Woad, indicating that the flight season had been quite long, this year (CBC records show it was flying for 53 days in April and May 2023).





The Eastern Orange Tip is a sexually dimorphic species and so the brighter males are very much easier to see. However, their ardent flight, solely focussed on finding virgin females makes the chase for this insect more like a sport than a leisure activity, even in the cooler temperatures. In fact, not everyone was able to keep up with the males once we had found them and it was only Emma and Stephen who eventually managed to photograph them.

Meantime, once Aiden had been shown how to reveal the final instar caterpillars of the Sage Skipper, he was more than content to allow the others to chase the Eastern Orange Tips. Very real additional bonuses at this site included the Southern Small White, Southern Swallowtail, Scarce Swallowtail, Orange Tip, Holly Blues, Wall Brown, and Glanville Fritillary.

An hour after we photographed the Eastern Orange Tip, we found ourselves sitting in our minibus eating a picnic lunch provided by the Hotel Apollon, because it was raining.

Stop 2. In our efforts to stave off the impact of the rain we travelled to the 'Lake of the Lilies' (as described by Gerald Durrell in [My Family and other Animals](#)) on the north-eastern coast at **Agios Spyridonas**. From here we took a leisurely walk past the famous beach that now has but remnants of the Sea Daffodil population that was formally so extensive. We then made our way along a dirt track through spring meadows, towards the wild and exposed coast at the top of the island. On route we ventured into an abandoned monastery, with an intact Chapel. Here we saw the Meadow Brown, Red Admiral, Small White and Holly Blue.



Our evening meal was once again had at the Hotel Apollon.

Day 4, Thursday 11th May

From the outset it was clear that this was to be a very cold, grey day. However, part of what makes Corfu so incredibly diverse and unusually temperate for a Mediterranean island is its climate, which has its fair share of wet days. Given that a rainy day was always a possibility in a Corfiot spring, this cold grey day led to us putting into action our planned Corfu Cultural Day in and around Corfu Old Town, a UNESCO world heritage site. This is what we discussed and outlined with our guests first thing in the morning, over a sumptuous breakfast at the Hotel Apollon.

Stop 1. [The Capodistra Museum](#). Liverpool has the John Lennon International Airport; Corfu has the Ioannis Capodistria International Airport. Count Ioannis Capodistrias was the first governor of Greece, minister for foreign affairs of the Russian Empire and one of the most important European statesmen of the early 19th century.

Whilst the award winning Capodistria Museum is primarily known as the home of Ioannis Capodistria, this modest building is set in some delightful grounds, perched above the surrounding countryside in central Corfu. CBC's relationship with the Capodistria Museum has grown over recent years and we have frequently staged events to engage children with butterflies in their garden, encouraging them to record their sightings on our website.



The museum is currently the repository for all CBC publications, from **butterfly identification guides** to **posters of the butterflies** found on the island. Currently, CBC is working with our colleagues in the museum to employ a CBC project officer to promote our joint work. Our guests were able to visit the house of Ioannis Capodistria and its grounds and to learn about our relationship with the heart of Corfiot society.

Stop 2. [Corfu Old Town](#). We started our day in Corfu Town by taking a coffee or a chocolate drink at the [Liston](#), a pedestrian street constructed during the French rule of the island, which imitates the rue de Rivoli, in Paris. It is one of the most popular and culturally significant locations in the city, where Corfiots take time to walk along the promenade and meet as we were doing to drink coffee/chocolate and talk.



We knew that even if we hadn't had a wet day, we would still have tried to find time to take our guests to the [Casa Parlante](#). This exquisite museum set behind the Liston, recreates the everyday life of the island's former 19th century nobility. Subsequently, it gives us an insight into the societal structure of that time and the economic factors which consequently influenced land use on the island. As conservationists, this leads to an awareness of the impact this will have had on the local wildlife and in particular [butterflies](#).

At lunch we stopped off for some traditional Corfiot pastries.

After we had eaten we dodged in between the rain showers and visited [St Spiridon's Church](#). If you have ever read *My Family and Other Animals* you will know this as the location where Margo, Gerry and Mother got caught up in the crowd which was parading the mummified body of St Spiridon around the town and where after kissing the mummified feet of St Spiridon, Margo came down with a dreadful illness. The church is a traditional Greek Orthodox building, with an internal splendour making it well worth a visit.

The [Museum of Asian Art](#) is a fascinating museum, full of remarkable artifacts from all over Asia, but in truth it was our last escape for shelter from the rain.

Stop 3. Finally, the sun came out and so we visited the [British Cemetery](#) in Corfu Town which is famous for its orchids. Here we saw many *Serapias* and some late flowering *Ophrys*.

Whilst this site is well known for its orchids, it was also from here that we managed to record our only butterflies of the day, the Common Blue, Wall Brown and Meadow Brown.





In the evening we went to a traditional Greek restaurant which loosely translated is called “No Plan” and here our group met three Corfiot members of the CBC committee; Daria Koskorou, Anne Sordinas & Zoi Fondoulakou, for an authentic meze meal.

Our guests made a point of letting us know that this was a particularly helpful way for them to acquire some Corfiot perspective on the work of CBC. Overall, they appeared quite impressed by the commitment of our Corfiot colleagues.

Desert was ice cream from the famous gelateria ‘Papa Giorgios’.

Day 5, Friday 12th May

It was with relief that we awoke to a bright, warm day.

Stop 1. The CBS relies on enthusiasts entering the locations of the butterflies they see, on to our website. This produces distribution data, but also allows us to generate some information about the phenology of these insects. However, it does not generate standardised abundance data of the butterflies on the island. This is why we were so very grateful when Lord Rothschild agreed to funding work on landscape management for the conservation of Corfiot butterflies.

Thus, we set up a transect on his estate on the north-eastern coast of Corfu. Such data will help us to verify our own phenology trends and give us some idea, year on year, about the abundances of different butterfly species on Corfu. Additionally, we are being funded to set up experiments that investigate the effects of grassland strimming, Olive grove management and availability of different ornamental flowers as nectar sources for Corfiot butterflies of the wider countryside.

This presented a unique opportunity for our guests to visit the estate and to walk the transect route, helping us record the butterflies and allowing us to talk about the work we were doing. Our group was met by Chris Little one of the directors of CBC and we encountered seventeen species of butterfly including the Grizzled Skipper, Large Wall Brown, and Green Hairstreak.



During the early afternoon we stopped at the Pita House in Acharavi for lunch.



Stop 2. It was widely agreed that the visit to meet [Dr Lee Durrell](#) was one event that everyone had been looking forward to. Thankfully, the weather had settled down and it became comfortably warm. As we pulled up outside Lee's villa the clouds finally parted allowing us to see the blue sky above.

After introductions, Lee gave us a guided tour of her beautiful wild garden and she described the mowing regime that she and her partner Colin undertook to manage their grassland for the local flora

and fauna. We then explored their woodland, where the group discussed several management approaches that could maximise biodiversity gain.

Overall, their garden hosted numerous species of orchid but more importantly we saw lots of butterflies, including: the Southern Swallowtail, Green-underside Blue and plentiful numbers of Glanville Fritillaries. It was fantastic for our guests to see butterflies in the types of abundances that is typical of a normal warm Corfiot spring day.

After our tour we had tea and Colin's home-made apple tart on the terrace, where we admired the hills composed of Triassic Breccia that rose above the valley in which we were sitting. We spoke with both Colin and Lee about her



role as ambassador for CBC and the work that both Colin and Lee had undertaken to support our efforts.



Finally, our guests were each given their own personal copy of the [Corfu Butterfly Poster](#) signed by Lee. This poster shows all the species of butterflies that CBC had good reason to believe were on the island (our species list has changed a little since printing). By the time we left it was felt that everyone had a delightful afternoon and overall, this had been our most successful day with 22 species of butterfly recorded.

Our evening meal was once again enjoyed at the Hotel Apollon.

Day 6, Saturday 13th May

We had always intended to take our guests into the uplands of Corfu but the cold, cloudy weather had returned and we knew from experience that the habitat just below the summit of [Mount Pantokrator](#) would probably be wet as well. Subsequently, we decided to up our game by inviting three members of CBC to join us, to increase the likelihood of us finding some interesting butterflies.

Stop 1. We met Anne Sordinas, as well as David and Lesley Shearan enroute to the uplands and initially went to explore the ancient pastures resting on the Triassic Carbonates below Mount Pantokrator. It was windy, cold, and cloudy but still we managed to find some butterflies (and orchids) including: the Grecian Copper, Mazarine Blue, and Small Blue. These butterflies were hunkered down in the grasslands and therefore challenging for us to find but very rewarding when we discovered them.



Whilst the Grecian Copper is relatively common on the island, the Mazarine Blue and Small Blue are both restricted to the uplands of Corfu and so the records that our guests had helped us acquire were invaluable. After we had scoured these meadows, we walked along a designated nature trail but the weather really started to limit our finds and so we decided to travel to our next stop.



Stop 2. Even in poor weather [Old Perithia](#) usually delivers interesting discoveries. However, as we drove in, we saw that the entire village had been taken over by Thames Television, who were secretly filming "Mamma Mia: I have a dream". It was packed with TV crews and every taverna was fully booked. Still determined to make the most of our journey there, we walked the circular path around the village and stopped to eat our packed lunches, before visiting Vasilikis, the beekeeper and stopping off for walnut cake and coffee.

Unsurprisingly, we only recorded 8 butterfly species during the day, but the rugged beauty of the upland landscape had been impressive, and we enjoyed the rewarding discussions in which we had participated. On our return, we prepared ourselves for the evening meal at the Hotel Apollon and our guests began to feel increasingly happy to be warm and dry in the Hotel bar.

Day 7, Sunday 14th May

This was our last full day together and although it was still slightly overcast and cool, it was a day full of guarantees because it wasn't only adult butterflies that we were to encounter.

Stop 1. Kyprinades is a small village in the center of northern Corfu. It rests on Miocene deposits through which runs a stream, surrounded by a mixture of native woodland and Olive groves. Here we showed our guests how the traditional management in this woodland had created just the right conditions for Birthwort *Aristolochia rotunda* to grow, the host plant of the spectacular Southern Festoon butterfly. Consequently, it wasn't long before the group were photographing the caterpillars of this butterfly. It was relatively easy to find these caterpillars because they do not hide, and the black and red warning colours make them quite conspicuous. Their host plants produce Aristolochic acids which in some vertebrates may lead some organs to fail. Somehow the caterpillars avoid the toxic effects of these chemicals but benefits by being avoided by vertebrate predators. In some locations the caterpillars are found on every birthwort plant.



Further explorations of the surrounding area led us to discovering an unknown colony of Grizzled Skippers. It became quite apparent that these insects had been pre-emergent at the point when the cold weather had hit the island and so when we found them there were several butterflies that looked very freshly emerged. In the cool temperatures of this particular morning, they sat cooperatively as we took multiple photographs. It was true that poor weather during this week had really limited the diversity and abundance of

the butterfly species that our guests had been able to see. However, it was these very same conditions that really delivered opportunities to take stunning photographs when we were able to find our quarry, as had been the case on the very first day when we were able to take our time photographing the Southern Swallowtail.

This site also delivered the Small Skipper, Clouded Yellow, Grecian and Small Copper, Brown Argus, Green-underside Blue, Common Blue, Glanville Fritillary, Painted Lady, Small Heath, and Meadow Browns.

By popular demand we found ourselves returning to the Pita House in Acharavi for lunch.

Stop 2. Our final visit was to the Waterfall of [Nymphes](#) and we were confident that this site would deliver, given all the rain that we had experienced. During the summer months this, the largest waterfall on the island, stops flowing and eventually dries up by July/August. When we arrived, there were plentiful supplies of water tumbling over the edge of the rocks, into the fresh, clean pool below, which was the residence for many common Toad tadpoles.

Here Dan was explaining that solitary willow saplings growing by the river could easily be used by butterflies like



the Camberwell beauty or Large Tortoiseshell



as locations for oviposition. At this point he found caterpillars of the Large Tortoiseshell, which caused quite a lot of interest from our group and other people who happened to be visiting the waterfalls at the same time. On our return to the minibus, Dan was also able to point out some more Large Tortoiseshell caterpillars feeding on Poplar.

It was also on this walk back that Aiden picked off the path an adult *Herophila tritis*, a rather striking Longhorn Beetle, that feeds on deciduous trees, in particular Fig.

On our return to the Hotel Apollon, several members of the group decided to take a final sea swim, which was both refreshing and invigorating.

The last supper at the Hotel Apollon was filled with merriment and when we had finished our meal, we all retired to the bar for cocktails. The conversation flowed and there was a lot of laughter. Our leaders felt very fortunate to have completed the first Corfu Butterfly Tour with such understanding and supportive people, given the entirely atypical weather that the group had experienced.



Day 8, Monday 15th May

Of course, on the day of departure the weather was both warm and sunny. We exchanged our final thoughts with each other over breakfast and we then took Graham to the airport. Whilst we were enroute to the airport, Stephen, Emma, and Aiden spent the remainder of their spare time searching around Paleokastritsa before they too were driven to the airport, so that they could catch their return flights.

Summary

We always knew that our contribution to the GreenWings portfolio of trips would be unique because this tour was never about just finding butterflies. The CBC story is one that we were keen to share because if our Corfiot brothers and sisters are ever to truly recognise the riches that their natural heritage represents, then they probably must do so by first seeing that biodiversity can also have a financial value. Eco-tourism is one step in that direction.

However, whilst all the records that our guests provided were incorporated into the CBS and 10% of the profits from this tour will go to CBC, this tour was not a one-way street. Through the many conversations that we had with each other during our week together, our guests provided many useful insights into how they thought we might pursue our goals as an organisation. This advice was unlooked for but very gratefully received.

Our group saw only 36 of the 66 species (55%) that are usually flying in Corfu during the month of May. Whilst this was a disappointment, what is more unfortunate is that our guests did not see the landscape bathed daily in sunlight as it normally is and thus, they did not see the butterflies on the island in anywhere near the super abundances which is normal for this time of year. As we outlined at the beginning of this report, this is why we are planning the **Butterflies of Corfu 2024**, to be in the June of 2024. Changing the date of our tour will no doubt mean we will fail to see some butterfly species, e.g., Eastern Orange Tip, but we will certainly have a good chance of seeing others such as the Two-tailed Pasha.

However, what we really hope to show next year's guests is a healthy, diverse, and super abundant butterfly fauna. So, if you are interested why not get in touch?



✓ = seen

? = possibly seen

C = caterpillars

Butterflies of Corfu 2023 species checklist			Mon 15th May	Tue 9th May	Wed 10th May	Thur 11th May	Fri 12th May	Sat 13th May	Sun 14th May	Mon 15th May
Butterflies			Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	Swallowtails & Festoons	Family Papilionidae								
01	Southern Swallowtail	<i>Papilio alexanor</i>		✓	✓		✓			
02	Scarce Swallowtail	<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>		✓	✓					
03	Southern Festoon	<i>Zerynthia polyxena</i>							C	
	Whites and Yellows	Family Pieridae								
04	Large White	<i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓			✓			
05	Small White	<i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓	✓		✓			✓
06	Southern Small White	<i>Pieris mannii</i>			✓					
07	Green-veined White	<i>Peris napi</i>					✓			
08	Eastern Dappled White	<i>Euchloe ausonia</i>		✓						
09	Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis caradmones</i>			✓		✓			
10	Eastern Orange Tip	<i>Anthocharis damone</i>			✓C					
11	Clouded Yellow	<i>Colias crocea</i>		✓			✓		✓	✓
12	Cleopatra	<i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>		✓ C			✓			
13	Wood White	<i>Leptidea sinapis</i>		✓						
	Blues, Coppers and Hairstreaks	Family Lycaenidae								
14	Green Hairstreak	<i>Callophrys rubi</i>		✓			✓			
15	Grecian Copper	<i>Lycaena ottomana</i>						✓	✓	
16	Small Copper	<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>					✓		✓	
17	Brown Argus	<i>Aricia agestis</i>		✓			✓	✓	✓	
18	Holly Blue	<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓			
19	Small Blue	<i>Cupido minimus</i>						✓		
20	Mazarine Blue	<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>						✓		
21	Green-underside Blue	<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>		✓			✓		✓	
22	Common Blue	<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Aristocrats and Browns	Family Nymphalidae								
23	Large Tortoiseshell	<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>							C	
24	Red Admiral	<i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	✓	✓		✓			
25	Painted lady	<i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓	✓			✓		✓	
26	Glanville Fritillary	<i>Melitaea cinixia</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
27	Small Heath	<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	✓				✓		✓	
28	Large Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata maera</i>						✓		
29	Wall Brown	<i>Lasiommata megera</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
30	Meadow Brown	<i>Maniola jurtina</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
31	Speckled Wood	<i>Parage aegeria</i>		✓			✓			
	Skippers	Family Hesperiidae								
32	Sage Skipper	<i>Muschampia proto</i>			C					
33	Oriental Marbled Skipper	<i>Muschampia orientalis</i>		✓						
34	Large Skipper	<i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>		✓			✓			
35	Grizzled Skipper	<i>Pyrgus malvae</i>					✓		✓	
36	Small Skipper	<i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>							✓	
	Totals		7	20	12	3	22	8	17	3