

Corfu's butterflies: a cause for concern?

Dr Dan Danahar explains why now is always the best time to start recording data on different butterfly populations and their distributions.



Southern Swallowtail
Papilio alexanor
female ovipositing on
Scaligeria napiformis.



Dr Dan Danahar
Dan is a Biodiversity Educationalist and Executive Chairman of Corfu Butterfly Conservation.

Thank you
I would like to say a special 'thank you' to the trustees of the Percy Sladen Memorial Fund, administered by the Linnean Society of London, and my colleagues at Butterfly Conservation for their support (particularly Julie Williams, Sam Ellis and Ewa Prokop).

In 1967 the American primatologist and conservationist Dian Fossey estimated that the Mountain Gorilla population in the Ruhengeri region of Rwanda, stood at 240 individuals. It was expected that this species would become extinct by 2000. Fortunately, due to the efforts of Dian and a host of other conservationists, today the world population of Mountain Gorillas stands at 1,004 individuals. However, while this is a clear improvement on earlier population sizes it is still a woefully low number.

Currently, the Corfiot butterfly species appear to be both diverse and abundant, but I raise the case of the Mountain Gorilla because there must have been a time when its baseline population size was far greater than it is today. The rate of decline in some species can be so slow that it's not possible to perceive this during a human lifespan. So, the baseline size of a population may reduce with every successive human generation, while declines go unnoticed. Consequently, it's possible that no one was ever fully aware of the extent to which the Mountain Gorilla was in decline.

This 'shifting baselines' concept was originally brought to the attention of conservationists by a fisheries ecologist, Daniel Pauly, and is now widely understood as a major obstacle in the public's perception of species declines. So, we need to be vigilant, monitoring the population sizes of even those species that currently appear to be robust. This is exactly why Corfu Butterfly Conservation (CBC) launched its Corfu Butterfly Survey (CBS), in January 2021.

Crossing borders

Previously, most of what was known about butterflies of Corfu was found in short, obscure scientific articles, written by visiting entomologists on family holidays. Although a guide to Corfu's butterflies was published in 2013, no extensive mapping of the island's butterfly species had been undertaken. The need for distribution maps to make future comparisons was clear. The question was, how could this be done in a foreign territory?



Large Tortoiseshell

How you can help
We have regular visits from UK butterfly enthusiasts who contribute to our recording scheme. If you would like to participate or can contribute to our project in other ways, we would love to hear from you. Email info@corfubutterflyconservation.org.



Nettle Tree Butterfly

In April 2014, a Corfu Butterfly Facebook page was set up. We aimed to follow UK Butterflies' example by 'encouraging the establishment of a responsible community of butterfly enthusiasts' – bringing together concerned residents, island visitors and European scientists. This community has grown and, at the time of writing, has 826 members.

In April 2019, CBC had its inaugural meeting and became a UK registered Community Interest Company (No.13813164) in 2021, effectively turning our project into an organisation. We are now a non-profit organisation working in partnership with both governmental and non-governmental associates in Greece, the UK and Europe.

What's next for Corfu's butterflies?

Our mission is to conserve the butterflies of Corfu along with their habitats, so they can be enjoyed by everyone, forever. To achieve this, we intend to stimulate informed interest and produce robust scientific data that can be used to influence policy and protect habitat for the benefit of Corfu's butterflies and the wider natural environment, on which we all depend.

To date 2,682 records have been submitted to our citizens science – CBS, recording 21,947 butterflies. This helps us determine the number of species present on the island, their distribution, as well as their flight periods. Ultimately, we intend to publish the first comprehensive Corfu Butterfly Atlas based on this information.

Our website, funded by the Royal Entomological Society's Goodman Award, describes the 75 species of Corfiot butterflies we have confirmed, and encourages enthusiasts to record their sightings, as participants of the CBS. 🦋

FIND OUT MORE
corfubutterflyconservation.org displays 'live' phenology and distribution data, as well as describing all of the known species of butterflies found on Corfu.