

# Spring Butterflies of Andalusia

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

2<sup>nd</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> May 2025

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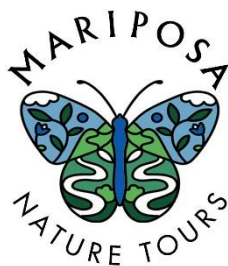
Tour leaders David Moore, Pau Lucio & Juan Pablo Cancela

Trip report by David Moore

Images kindly shared by our guests

(Images above, clockwise from top left: Green-striped White (Ralph & Claudette), Aetherie Fritillary (Wouter), Provence Orange Tip (Robert & Geoff), Spanish Fritillary (Roy))

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**Spring Butterflies of Andalusia, 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> May 2025**

This tour takes in some of the best areas in which to find the many wonderful spring butterflies that inhabit this southernmost province of Spain.

It is a two-centre trip, with the first part being spent in the coastal city of Motril and the latter part in the foothills of the El Torcal massif in the town of Antequera.

Joining the three guides, David M, Juan Pablo and Pau, for the week were David J, Ralph & Claudette, Wouter, Jane & Andrew, Roy, Martine, Andrew D, Peter & Helen, Geoff & Robert, Andrew E and John.

**Day 1 – Arrival**

With guest arrival times staggered through the morning and early afternoon, some left earlier than others but all eventually met up at the coastal town of Castell de Ferro, just to the east of Motril.

After a cooler and damper spring than is normal in this part of Spain, the guides were not sure if the main target species, Desert Orange Tip, would be around.

Thankfully, this African species had endured the worst of the conditions and was on the wing, with over a dozen individuals seen, mainly along the sheltered bank at the top of the site.

Other species at this site, which is little more than an expanse of waste ground, were Clouded Yellow, Mallow Skipper, Southern Blue, Bath White and a small colony of African Grass Blue, which were active at the bottom end of the site, much to the interest of the group who spent a good while photographing them.

From there, it was onward to the first hotel in Motril, where Martine spotted a Monarch, a species known to be present at the charca close to the where the group were staying.

A good meal and a good night's sleep were the order of the evening in readiness for the first full day.

**Day 2 – Castell de Ferro, Retamar, Cabo de Gata**

It was decided to make another stop at Castell de Ferro this morning, to give the group an opportunity to perhaps get a little closer to the skittish Desert Orange Tips in the cooler temperatures.



White-headed Duck © Ralph &amp; Claudette

This largely went successfully, with several more individuals seen, before the group headed to Retamar to a rather barren-looking site, but one which has lots of jujuba bushes, the larval host plant of Common Tiger Blue.

There were decent numbers of these tiny Lycaenids to be observed, and while little else was flying in this desolate scrubland, there were a number of Geranium Bronze nectaring from

the ornamental flowers outside the adjacent hotel. Surprisingly, a Plain Tiger was also seen; a butterfly that is generally uncommon prior to July.

From there, it was a 20 minute journey to see Greater Flamingo and White-headed Duck near to the estuary, along with a sizeable lizard that gave everybody quite a shock.

The final site was on the Cabo de Gata, where a track runs along a sheltered, rocky hillside. There weren't huge numbers of butterflies here,



Greater Flamingo © David J

but notable ones were Southern Marbled Skipper, Sage Skipper, Green-striped White, and Spanish Gatekeeper, although the absence of Spanish Marbled White was an indication of the lateness of the season.



Green-striped White © Ralph &amp; Claudette

By the end of this first full day, 18 different species had been recorded, some of which cannot be seen anywhere else in mainland Europe.

### Day 3 – Padul, Venta del Rayo

The morning and early afternoon was spent at a delightful site near the town of Padul, en route to Antequera. The habitat is a series of ruderal fields surrounded by grassy scrub, which is perfect for Pierids at this time of year.

Sure enough, there were plenty of them, including the biggest prize of all – Sooty Orange Tip.



This species is impossible to predict as it is fast-flying and largely nomadic, so it was a moment of great delight when one passed through, allowing the group to take photographs.

With cloud regularly bubbling up, it was touch and go whether our number one target, Spanish Fritillary, would be seen, given that this is a warmth-loving species. However, David J put in a monumental stint in the area where they are usually seen and called out to others when one appeared. This deliciously fresh insect then posed nicely for all who were there to see it.



Sooty Orange Tip © Wouter



Spanish Fritillary © Roy

There were lots of Western Marbled White, but in amongst them were a few Spanish Marbled Whites too, providing John with his first sightings of this Iberian species.

Other species of interest included Panoptes Blue, Swallowtail, and Berger's Clouded Yellow.

Following lunch, it was time to head to the second site which is one Pau knows well due to the presence here of Montagu's Harrier. Good

views were had of one individual when the group were going down the main track, but the focus was mainly on the butterflies which were present along the damp edges of the lower tracks which had scrubby meadows on each side.

Green-striped White showed well here, and the week's only Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper was found here too. Southern Brown Argus and Black-eyed Blue were also notable additions.

In total, 29 species had been recorded during the day, taking the week's total to 37 prior to the second leg which was based in the town of Antequera.



Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper © Robert & Geoff

#### Day 4 – Campanillos and south of Serrato

The day started rather overcast, meaning that Pau's suggestion to stop at a temporary lagoon near the town of Camillos was a good one.

As suspected, there were a few Greater Flamingo on this lake and, as the weather brightened up slightly, a handful of butterflies emerged too – Painted Lady, Small White, and Meadow Brown.



Aetherie Fritillary © David J

The group then moved on to a roadside area to the south of the town of Serrato. Things didn't look immediately promising as skies were very overcast, but to everybody's amazement Juan Pablo, who discovered the site the previous year, found a roosting Aetherie Fritillary on a knapweed flower by the side of the road!

A few moments of sunshine brought out a couple more of this species in the adjacent field, allowing most of the group to get very close due to the relatively gloomy conditions.

Further along the road were a series of olive groves, in which the grasses supported plenty of wild flowers. There were new species to be found here, with Spanish Gatekeeper being the first followed by Black-veined White. Essex Skipper, Red Admiral, and Long-Tailed Blue were also seen. Clouded Yellow was probably the commonest butterfly but with conditions so poor, not too many of any species were out and about.



Spanish Gatekeeper © Wouter

Everybody was hoping that conditions would improve for the following day's visit to El Hondonero.

## Day 5 – El Hondonero

Things started rather cloudy again this morning, but the El Hondonero site has sunken, sheltered areas so, with a little sunshine, it was probable that a few butterflies would become active quickly.



Lorquin's Blue © Ralph &amp; Claudette

Normally, at this time of year, the hawthorn blossom is at its pomp and Black-veined White are everywhere, but in a sign of the tardiness of the season, most of the blossom had not yet emerged and Black-veined White proved very thin on the ground.

The frequent bursts of sunshine were sufficient to tempt Small Copper out, with Western Dappled White also prominent. Then, Helen spotted a small, blue butterfly in the long grass.

This turned out to be a male Lorquin's Blue, one of the top targets of the week. A handful more were seen elsewhere on the site, but this first individual was the freshest.



Another major target was then found by David J, a beautifully ochreous Spanish Festoon, perched confidently on a blade of grass. Many in the group got their feet wet getting into prime position to photograph this beauty, as where it had settled was right beside the damp gully at the bottom of the hill.

Every now and again, a male Provence Orange Tip would fly by, seldom settling even in these cool, largely overcast conditions.



Spanish Festoon © Roy



Provence Orange Tip © Robert & Geoff

Several Brimstone were active and the week's first Cleopatra joined the party too. However, the biggest thrill of the day was the sighting of a Portuguese Dappled White, a species David M had been hunting for in this area hitherto without success.

The sixth newcomer for the trip was Chapman's Blue, and these half dozen took the week's total to 48, a commendable tally given weather conditions that had been far from perfect.

## Day 6 – Mirador del Pantano de Guadarranque, Sendero de Monarcas

The sunshine returned during the hour and a half drive down towards Gibraltar, with the famous rock coming into view once the group had passed Manilva.

Rather irritatingly though, cloud steadily built up as the group entered that part of Andalusia that is subject to the Atlantic air mass.

This was to cause frustration, as the first stop was at a well-known Two-tailed Pasha hilltopping site. For this butterfly to indulge in such antics, it needs a good percentage of clear sky, sunshine and warmth.

At the peak of the hill, a couple of Wall Brown were enjoying the intermittent sunshine, whilst a Lang's Short-tailed Blue was seen perched in a tree by the summit.

Eventually, a Two-tailed Pasha was fleetingly seen, but sadly it did not descend in spite of the bait that had been put down to try and tempt it.



Iberian Scarce Swallowtail © Robert & Geoff



It was just a 20 minute drive to the next site, the Sendero de Monarcas, an unusual habitat in this part of Spain, with quite dense riparian woodland and a fair amount of brambles and bracken.

Sure enough, the site lived up to its name, with Monarch around in decent numbers, but there were also plenty of Holly Blue and even a Small Skipper.

With a long journey back, the group departed just prior to 4pm, having added seven more new species to the week's list.

### Day 7 – El Torcal and environs, Molino Blanco

Having seen lots of cloud *en route* to the limestone plateau at the top of El Torcal, it was both a surprise and a relief when the group arrived at the car park to largely clear skies and welcome sunshine.

The scenery was spectacular, and there were quite a few butterflies around in the rocky fields, albeit largely the commoner ones. Also evident here were numerous orchids, and Iberian Ibex.



The sunny conditions only lasted an hour or so, however, so the group moved down to the bottom of the road leading up to the visitor centre, but sunny spells were scarce so it was decided to move even lower to a roadside spot near Molino Blanco.

Almost immediately, an immaculate Sage Skipper was spotted at the top of the verge, unsurprising given the quantity of its larval host plant.

Black-eyed Blue, Knapweed Fritillary, Swallowtail, Spanish Gatekeeper, and Western Dappled White were also recorded, as was the only Southern Gatekeeper of the week.

Spanish Marbled White was also on the wing here, along with Clouded Yellow, but it was rather a frustrating hour as any sunny intervals lasted only a minute or two, before cloud returned to suppress butterfly activity.

That said, it had been an enjoyable day, and the week's total ended up at a very respectable 56 species.



### Day 8 – Return to Malaga

The journey to Malaga airport went without incident and everyone managed to board their flights to schedule, although it was again frustrating to see the sunshine, which the group had lacked the previous two days, return when it was too late to be of use to us!

### Summary and acknowledgements

Mariposa would like to thank all guests for their enthusiasm, good-humour and convivial company throughout this tour.

This trip is normally undertaken in largely warm and sunny conditions – however, while conditions were far from ideal on many of the days, nobody lost their focus and all the main target species were found.

A total of 56 different butterfly species was not bad going given the lateness of the season, and for once the vegetation was green and lush due to the cool and wet conditions that most of Spain had been exposed to in the months leading up to the tour.

Both bases, in Motril and Antequera, offered a range of sights and experiences during what was an excellent week.

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SPRING BUTTERFLIES OF ANDALUSIA 2 <sup>nd</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> MAY 2025									
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	<b>Butterflies</b>								
1	False Mallow Skipper <i>Carcharodus tripolinus</i>						✓		
2	Mallow Skipper <i>Carcharodus alceae</i>	✓	✓	✓					
3	Southern Marbled Skipper <i>Carcharodus baeticus</i>		✓						
4	Dingy Skipper <i>Erynnis tages</i>								
5	Rosy Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus onopordi</i>								
6	Southern Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>								
7	Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>			✓					
8	Sage Skipper <i>Muschampia proto</i>		✓					✓	
9	Red-underwing Skipper <i>Spialia sertorius</i>			✓					
10	Lulworth Skipper <i>Thymelicus action</i>						✓		
11	Southern Brown Argus <i>Aricia cramera</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
12	African Grass Blue <i>Zizeeria knysna</i>	✓	✓						
13	Common Tiger Blue <i>Tarucus theophrastus</i>		✓						
14	Holly Blue <i>Celastrina argiolus</i>						✓	✓	
15	Lorquin's Blue <i>Cupido lorquini</i>					✓			
16	Black-eyed Blue <i>Glaucopsyche melanops</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
17	Lang's Short-tailed Blue <i>Leptotes pirithous</i>						✓		
18	Long-tailed Blue <i>Lampides boeticus</i>				✓	✓		✓	
19	Adonis Blue <i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>			✓					
20	Southern Blue <i>Polyommatus celina</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
21	Chapman's Blue <i>Polyommatus thersites</i>					✓			
22	False Baton Blue <i>Pseudophilotes baton</i>								
23	Panoptes Blue <i>Pseudophilotes panoptes</i>			✓		✓		✓	
24	Geranium Bronze <i>Cacyreus marshalli</i>		✓		✓	✓			
25	Small Copper <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
26	Provence Hairstreak <i>Tomares ballus</i>								
27	Chapman's Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys avis</i>								
28	Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys rubi</i>								
29	Blue-spot Hairstreak <i>Satyrrium spini</i>								
30	Cardinal <i>Argynnis pandora</i>								
31	Marsh Fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>								
32	Spanish Fritillary <i>Euphydryas desfontainii</i>			✓					

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
33	Queen of Spain Fritillary <i>Issoria lathonia</i>								
34	Provençal Fritillary <i>Melitaea deione</i>								
35	Meadow Fritillary <i>Melitaea parthenoides</i>								
36	Spotted Fritillary <i>Melitaea didyma</i>								
35	Aetherie Fritillary <i>Melitaea aetherie</i>				✓				
37	Knapweed Fritillary <i>Melitaea phoebe</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
38	Monarch <i>Danaus plexippus</i>	✓		✓			✓		
39	Plain Tiger <i>Danaus chrysippus</i>		✓						
40	Two-tailed Pasha <i>Charaxes jasius</i>						✓		
41	Small Tortoiseshell <i>Aglais urticae</i>								
42	Large Tortoiseshell <i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>								
43	Comma <i>Polygonia c-album</i>								
44	Red Admiral <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
45	Painted Lady <i>Vanessa cardui</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
46	Iberian Scarce Swallowtail <i>Iphiclides feisthamelii</i>			✓		✓	✓		
47	Swallowtail <i>Papilio machaon</i>			✓		✓		✓	
48	Spanish Festoon <i>Zerynthia rumina</i>					✓			
49	Provence Orange Tip <i>Anthocharis euphenoides</i>					✓			
50	Western Dappled White <i>Euchloe crameri</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
51	Desert Orange Tip <i>Colotis evagore</i>	✓	✓						
52	Sooty Orange Tip <i>Zegris eupheme</i>			✓					
53	Berger's Clouded Yellow <i>Colias alfariensis</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
54	Clouded Yellow <i>Colias crocea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
55	Cleopatra <i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>					✓	✓		
56	Brimstone <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>			✓		✓	✓		
57	Wood White <i>Leptidea sinapis</i>								
58	Large White <i>Pieris brassicae</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
59	Green-veined White <i>Pieris napi</i>								
60	Southern Small White <i>Pieris mannii</i>								
61	Small White <i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	Bath White <i>Pontia daplidice</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
63	Green-striped White <i>Euchloe belemia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
64	Black-veined White <i>Aporia crataegi</i>				✓	✓			
65	Small Heath <i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>			✓		✓			
66	Large Wall <i>Lasiommata maera</i>								
67	Wall <i>Lasiommata megera</i>						✓		
68	Speckled Wood <i>Pararge aegeria</i>			✓		✓	✓	✓	
69	Spanish Gatekeeper <i>Pyronia bathseba</i>		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
70	Southern Gatekeeper <i>Pyronia cecilia</i>							✓	
71	Meadow Brown <i>Maniola jurtina</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Spanish Marbled White <i>Melanargia ines</i>			✓	✓	✓		✓	
73	Western Marbled White <i>Melanargia occitanica</i>			✓	✓				
#	Essex Skipper <i>Thymelicus lineola</i>				✓	✓		✓	
#	Portuguese Dappled White <i>Euchloe tagis</i>					✓			
#	Small Skipper <i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>						✓		
	<b>Daily total:</b>	8	16	29	23	32	24	22	
	<b>Running total:</b>	8	18	37	43	48	55	56	

SPRING BUTTERFLIES OF ANDALUSIA 2 <sup>nd</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> MAY 2025 Other wildlife – list kindly compiled by Martine									
	Species name								
	<b>Moths seen by day</b>								
	<i>Hyles livornica</i>								
	<i>Macroglossum stellatarum</i>								
	<i>Malacosoma castrensis</i>								
	<i>Utetheisa pulchella</i>								
	<i>Heliothis peltigera</i>								
	<i>Synthymia fixa</i>								
	<i>Aspitates ochrearia</i>								
	<i>Uresiphita gilvata</i>								
	<i>Synaphe diffidialis</i>								
	<i>Nomophila noctuella</i>								
	<i>Nemophora raddaella</i>								
	<i>Epichnopterix plumella</i>								
	<b>Various insects</b>								
	<i>Nemoptera bipennis</i>								
	<i>Empusa pennata</i>								
	<i>Sympetrum foscolumbii</i>								
	<i>Megascolia bidens</i>								
	<i>Mylabris quadripunctata</i>								
	<b>Reptiles; amphibians</b>								
	Large Psammmodromus <i>Psammmodromus algirus</i>								
	Sierra Nevada Ocellated Lizard <i>Timon nevadensis</i>								
	Western Three-toed Skink <i>Chalcides triatus</i>								
	<b>Mammals</b>								
	Iberian Ibex <i>Capra pyrenaica</i>								



## Guests' Galleries

All images that follow were kindly shared by tour participants.



Images © Martine





Images © Martine





Images © David J





Images © David J





Images © John





Images © Robert & Geoff





Images © Robert & Geoff





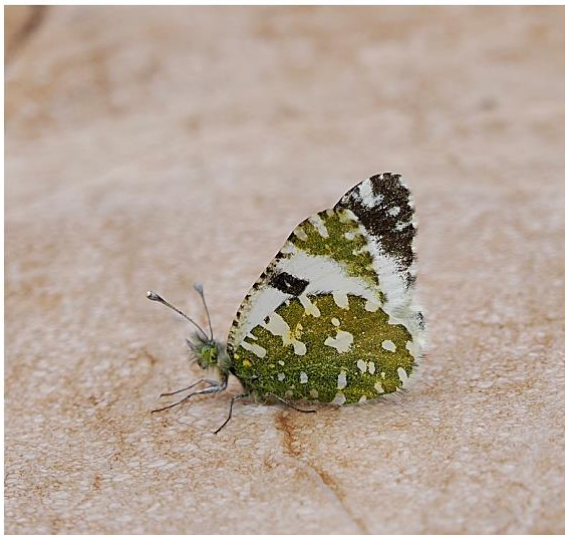
Images © Ralph & Claudette





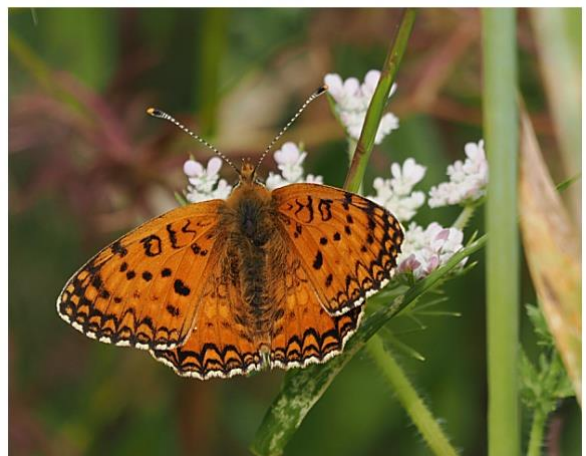
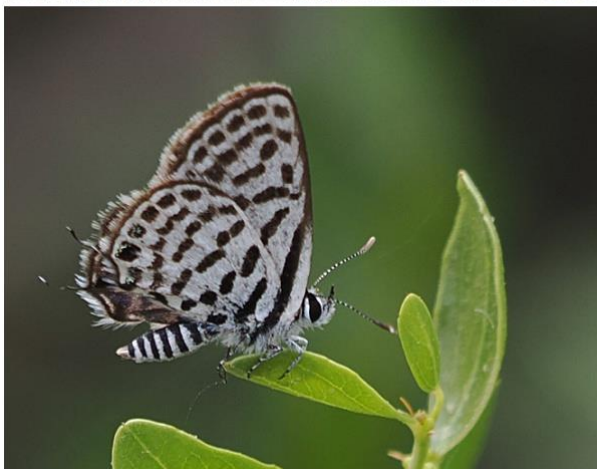
Images © Ralph & Claudette





Images © Wouter





Images © Wouter

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