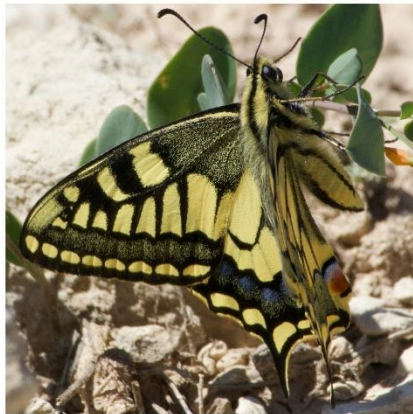


# Spring Butterflies of Central & Northern Spain

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

22<sup>nd</sup>-29<sup>th</sup> April 2025

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Tour leaders David Moore & Juan Pablo Cancela

Trip report by David Moore

(Images, clockwise from top left: Spring Ringlet © Ralph & Claudette; Spanish Festoon © Bob;

Sooty Orange Tip © Don; Swallowtail © Bob)

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**Spring Butterflies of Central & Northern Spain, 22<sup>nd</sup> to 29<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

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

It is a two-centre trip, with the first part being spent in the historic town of Albarracin and the latter part in the foothills of the Pyrenees in the small village of Berdun.

Joining the two guides, David M and Juan Pablo, for the week were David J, Don, Phil, Ainslie, Ralph & Claudette, Neil & Jan, Bob & Rosalind, Simon and Mike.

**Day 1 – Arrival**

Arrivals day is usually a case of simply getting to the accommodation base with maybe a short stop en route. However, the cool and cloudy weather looked like ruining any opportunity to see any butterflies, but the group nonetheless made a diversion to a stretch of road close to the village of Terriente.

Conditions at the parking area were far from ideal, with David M having to take care moving the van after having first parked it on an extremely slippery area where mud had collected. With light rain in the air and a temperature of just 9°C, this was going to be a difficult task to find any butterflies.

Suddenly, there was a promising gap in the cloud cover overhead, and a little brightness saw a Painted Lady take to the air. Close to where the butterfly landed, a roosting Panoptes Blue was found and sure enough, as soon as the sun broke temporarily through the overcast sky, the main target, Spring Ringlet, was seen flying along a sheltered bank.



This was indeed a blessing, because once the cloud returned, this normally skittish butterfly remained torpid allowing everybody to get close and take photographs.

It was an unexpected but very welcome find, and shortly after the group departed, making their way to the hotel in the beautifully preserved, historic town of Albarracin.

**Day 2 – Beyond Moscardon, Noguera and Monterde de Albarracin**

The morning dawned cool but sunny, allowing the group to venture to 1,500m on wooded hillsides close to the village of Moscardon.

Unsurprisingly, butterfly activity was slow to get going, with temperatures not exceeding 13°C for the first hour. That said, Queen of Spain Fritillary had no difficulty getting around in these conditions and before long the first couple of Spring Ringlet took to the air too.

Red Admiral and Painted Lady were also seen, along with an Iberian Scarce Swallowtail which was something of a surprise.

After little more than an hour, it was decided to move lower in altitude to a sheltered site near the village of Noguera.

Butterfly numbers were somewhat higher here, with Green Hairstreak and Small Heath making their presence felt immediately.

The main target here was Iberian Sooty Copper, and there was misplaced excitement near to the vans as the two possible candidates warring with each other turned out to be Small Coppers.



Rosy Grizzled Skippers were found in the fields close to the stream, whilst both Large and Small Tortoiseshell were encountered, the latter certainly being an unusual find at this site.

A small number of Provence Orange Tips were seen amongst larger numbers of their close cousins, Orange Tips. Another two closely-related species were present as well – Brimstone and Cleopatra.



Speckled Wood, Peacock, Wood White and Wall made it seem like a day out in the UK, although Panoptes Blue and Bath White were a reminder that we were a little further from home.

A fairly brief stop at the ruderal fields near Monverde de Albarracin saw Mallow Skipper added to the day's list, and there were plenty of Clouded Yellows to brighten up what had turned into an ever more cloudy afternoon.

By the end of the day, 29 different species had been seen.

### Day 3 – Terriente and El Vallecillo

Another welcome sunny morning allowed the group to stop again at Terriente en route to the main site at El Vallecillo.

The sunshine was equally welcome to the Spring Ringlet population, with several dozen being recorded over the subsequent hour and a half. There weren't too many other species present at this rather barren location, although Berger's Clouded Yellow put in a pleasing first appearance.

Once at El Vallecillo, it was clear the season was quite late, as butterfly numbers were rather more sparse than is usual, although the odd Provence Orange Tip kept everybody on their toes, as well as a couple of further Spring Ringlets, which occur here in small numbers.



The last stop was at a waterfall just down the road from El Vallecillo. Common Blue was found in the meadow near the lake and other species seen were Green Hairstreak, Southern Grizzled Skipper, Bath White and more Panoptes Blues.

Just the three new species today, with the decision made to modify the following day's itinerary in order to accommodate a further search for the elusive Iberian Sooty Copper.



Panoptes Blue © Ralph & Claudette

#### Day 4 – Calomarde, Tramacastilla, Noguera and Monterde



Black-eyed Blue © Ralph & Claudette

The narrow canyon at Calomarde is one of the greenest places in this semi-arid region, and this morning the water was actually flowing onto the track at the beginning of the pathway, meaning the group had to pick their way carefully to avoid getting wet feet.

A few Queen of Spain Fritillaries were active first thing, but the main sighting was the week's first Black-eyed Blue, which stood out amongst the Chapman's and Panoptes Blues that were also present.

Comma was also recorded for the first time, along with Swallowtail.

A fairly brief stop was made at Tramacastilla en route to a repeat visit to Noguera. This latter stop was essentially for Iberian Sooty Copper, but David J gained top marks for finding a mating pair of Provence Orange Tips; probably one of the few times when the males of this species stay still!

Also found was Western Dappled White, along with a few more Peacocks. Disappointingly, there was again no sign of the Iberian Sooty Copper, and with transit day tomorrow, it seemed likely that for the first time on this spring tour, this species would not be recorded.



Provence Orange Tip © Don

#### Day 5 – Transit day

Today was the day to visit one of the foremost places in Europe for spring butterflies – the semi-arid steppes and ruderal fields close to the village of Candasnos.

Whilst it was largely sunny, there was a fair wind blowing across the exposed landscape here, meaning that butterflies were largely sticking to the sheltered areas where they would not be so buffeted.

Western Marbled White, Red-underwing Skipper and Adonis Blue were quickly added to the list of species seen, with Knapweed Fritillary soon following. Juan Pablo ventured down into the dip between two hillsides and discovered there were several Provence Orange Tips along with a couple of Spanish Festoons.



Further newcomers were Southern Marbled Skipper and Spanish Gatekeeper, but there was no sign of Spanish Greenish Black Tip, although with the wind and steadily building cloud, it was not a day conducive to hill-topping.

From here it was on to Berdun to spend three nights at the wonderful Casa Sarasa and prior to the evening meal everyone agreed to a change in the itinerary the following day.

### Day 6 – Los Monegros

Given the frustrations with weather conditions the previous day, a repeat visit to the area near Candanos was approved by all, and this time there was warm sunshine and light winds on the agenda.

There was much more butterfly activity at the top of the hill, but surprisingly there was again no sign of Spanish Greenish Black Tip.

One species that was successfully confirmed was Spanish Marbled White, flying in tandem with Western Marbled White.

A few Swallowtails further enriched proceedings before the group headed down into the series of ruderal fields in the basin at the lower end of this vast site,

David M noticed a Sooty Orange Tip speeding its way through the main field, and while the males of this species rarely settle, towards the end of the afternoon one actually did, and the group was able to make a close approach.



More Spanish Festoons were seen in one of the sheltered areas, attracted by the flowering thyme, and Tufted Marbled Skipper was also sighted, adding a third new species for the day.

### Day 7 – Mirador del Fago, Canfranc Estacion, Valle de Hecho

This final full day was a busy one. First stop was a site recommended by Peter, the owner of Casa Sarasa, and it was a good choice as the delightful Chequered Blue made its bow, sunning itself in a sheltered spot near the road.

It was then onward to Canfranc Estacion, near the French border, where the lateness of the season was underlined by the absence of any Duke of Burgundy, even though the cowslips were in full flower.



The damp area near the car park is a good spot for Camberwell Beauty, and one duly showed up, landing at first on a grassy bank before spending the next half hour perched in a nearby tree, teasing the group of onlookers below.

The final stop was near the village of Hecho, where the first hour was spent searching without success for the rare Spanish Fritillary.

However, there were several species of interest on the track leading up into the mountains. There were a handful of Green-underside Blue next to where the vehicles had been parked, and Weaver's Fritillary was found in a small field close to the stream nearby. Small Blue was also sighted in the gullies at the side of the track.

### **Day 8 – Return to Valencia**

Instead of the originally intended destination of Javalambre, it was decided to return to Noguera en route to Valencia for one last attempt to find Iberian Sooty Copper.

The increased numbers of general butterflies suggested that the season was beginning to catch up a little, but the presumption was that this species had not yet emerged this year due to the cool and damp conditions which had been prevalent throughout much of Spain in the early part of 2025.

### **Summary and acknowledgements**

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

This trip involves a considerable amount of travelling to take in the best of what the wider region has to offer, but the scenery, particularly near and in the Pyrenees, is spectacular which makes the journeys much less onerous.

A total of 52 different butterfly species in the month of April is laudable, especially given the lateness of this spring's emergences.

Both bases, Albarracin and Berdun, are an absolute delight to spend time in and offer contrasting sights and sounds, making the week especially enjoyable.

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SPRING BUTTERFLIES OF CENTRAL & NORTHERN SPAIN 22 <sup>nd</sup> -29 <sup>th</sup> April 2025									
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	<b>Butterflies</b>								
1	Mallow Skipper <i>Carcharodus alceae</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
2	Dingy Skipper <i>Erynnis tages</i>							✓	
3	Rosy Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus onopordi</i>		✓	✓	✓				
4	Southern Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>			✓				✓	
5	Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>								
6	Red-underwing Skipper <i>Spialia sertorius</i>					✓	✓		
7	Lulworth Skipper <i>Thymelicus acteon</i>								
8	Southern Brown Argus <i>Aricia cramera</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
9	Brown Argus <i>Aricia agestis</i>								
10	Holly Blue <i>Celastrina argiolus</i>		✓	✓				✓	
11	Small Blue <i>Cupido minimus</i>							✓	
12	Green-underside Blue <i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>							✓	
13	Black-eyed Blue <i>Glaucopsyche melanops</i>				✓	✓	✓	✓	
14	Lang's Short-tailed Blue <i>Leptotes pirithous</i>								
15	Long-tailed Blue <i>Lampides boeticus</i>								
16	Short-tailed Blue <i>Cupido argiades</i>								
17	Adonis Blue <i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>					✓	✓		
18	Common Blue <i>Polyommatus icarus</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
19	Chapman's Blue <i>Polyommatus thersites</i>		✓		✓		✓	✓	
20	Baton Blue <i>Pseudophilotes baton</i>								
21	Panoptes Blue <i>Pseudophilotes panoptes</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Small Copper <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>		✓	✓	✓				
23	Iberian Sooty Copper <i>Lycaena bleusi</i>								
24	Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys rubi</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
25	Weaver's Fritillary <i>Boloria dia</i>							✓	
26	Pearl-bordered Fritillary <i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>								



	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
27	Marsh Fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>								
28	Spanish Fritillary <i>Euphydryas desfontainii</i>								
29	Queen of Spain Fritillary <i>Issoria lathonia</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓		
30	Heath Fritillary <i>Melitaea athalia</i>								
31	Provençal Fritillary <i>Melitaea deione</i>								
32	Glanville Fritillary <i>Melitaea cinxia</i>								
33	Spotted Fritillary <i>Melitaea didyma</i>								
34	Knapweed Fritillary <i>Melitaea phoebe</i>					✓	✓		
35	Small Tortoiseshell <i>Aglaia urticae</i>		✓	✓				✓	
36	Large Tortoiseshell <i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>		✓		✓			✓	
37	Comma <i>Polygonia c-album</i>				✓			✓	
38	Camberwell Beauty <i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>							✓	
39	Red Admiral <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
40	Painted Lady <i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Iberian Scarce Swallowtail <i>Iphiclides feisthamelii</i>		✓	✓	✓				
42	Swallowtail <i>Papilio machaon</i>				✓	✓	✓		
43	Spanish Festoon <i>Zerynthia rumina</i>					✓	✓	✓	
44	Orange Tip <i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
45	Provence Orange Tip <i>Anthocharis euphenoides</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
46	Western Dappled White <i>Euchloe cramerii</i>				✓	✓	✓		
47	Sooty Orange Tip <i>Zegris eupheme</i>						✓		
48	Spanish Greenish Black Tip <i>Euchloe bazae</i>								
49	Berger's Clouded Yellow <i>Colias alfacariensis</i>			✓				✓	
50	Clouded Yellow <i>Colias crocea</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
51	Cleopatra <i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
52	Brimstone <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Wood White <i>Leptidea sinapis</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
54	Large White <i>Pieris brassicae</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
55	Green-veined White <i>Pieris napi</i>		✓	✓	✓			✓	
56	Small White <i>Pieris rapae</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
57	Bath White <i>Pontia daplidice</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
58	Duke Of Burgundy <i>Hamearis lucina</i>								
59	Small Heath <i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓	✓	✓				
60	Large Wall <i>Lasiommata maera</i>								
61	Wall <i>Lasiommata megera</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
62	Speckled Wood <i>Pararge aegeria</i>		✓		✓	✓		✓	
63	Spring Ringlet <i>Erebia epistygne</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓				
64	Meadow Brown <i>Maniola jurtina</i>								



	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
65	Western Marbled White <i>Melanargia occitanica</i>					✓	✓		
#	Peacock <i>Aglais io</i>		✓		✓				
#	Spanish Gatekeeper <i>Pyronia bathseba</i>					✓			
#	Southern Marbled Skipper <i>Muschampia baeticus</i>					✓			
#	Tufted Marbled Skipper <i>Carcharodus flocciferus</i>						✓		
#	Spanish Marbled White <i>Melanargia ines</i>						✓		
#	Chequered Blue <i>Scolitantides orion</i>							✓	
#									
#									
#									
#									
	<b>Daily total:</b>	3	29	28	32	24	27	29	
	<b>Running total:</b>	3	29	32	36	43	46	51	

## Galleries

All images that follow were kindly shared by tour participants



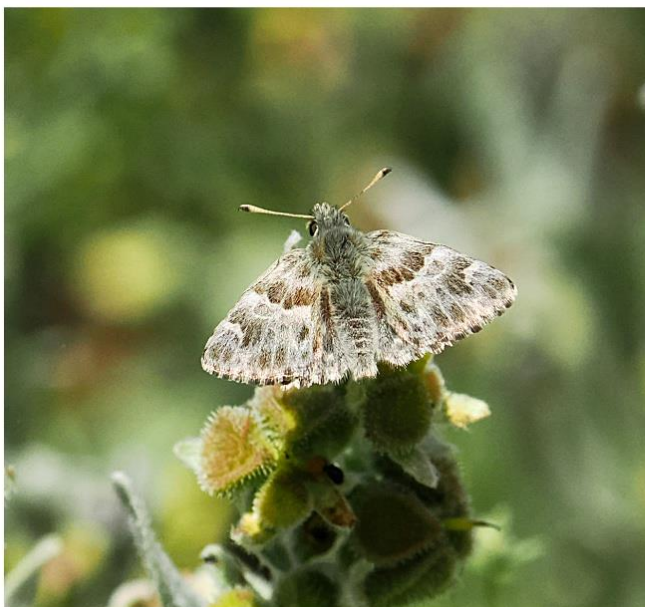
Images © Ralph & Claudette





Images © Ralph & Claudette





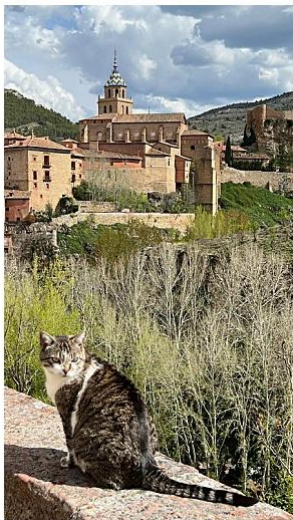
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Images © Rosalind





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