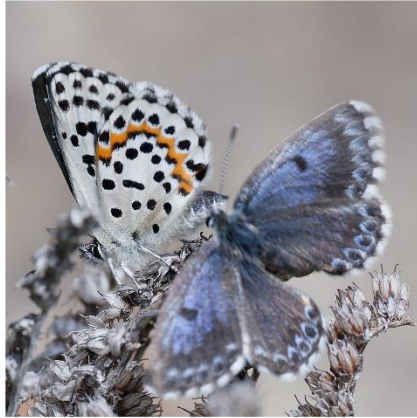


Spring Butterflies of the French Pyrenees

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report

21st-28th May 2025



Tour leaders David Moore & Emmanuelle Juan

Trip report by David Moore

(Images, clockwise from top left: Chequered Blue © Harry; Map © Dudley & Jean;

Violet Copper © Steve; Spanish Festoon © Robert)



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Spring Butterflies of the French Pyrenees, 21st to 28th May 2025

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

It is a one-centre trip, with the base being in the delightful spa town of Vernet-les-Bains, close to Villefranche-de-Conflent.

Joining the two guides, David and Emmanuelle, for the week were Dudley & Jean, Steve & Anne, Harry, Robert & Josephine, Tony & Sue, and Eve.

Day 1 – Arrival

With Perpignan airport being so small, it was a relatively straightforward task to get all guests on the road relatively promptly. The drive to Vernet-les-Bains was a pleasant one, and the group were then able to meet with Dudley & Jean who had travelled independently and gone straight to the hotel.



Red-underwing Skipper © Steve

After a short break to get settled in the rooms, the group reunited outside to head up the nearest col, although this was not without incident as David M's vehicle began to emit smoke from the engine compartment.

Incredibly, this had been caused by someone at the car hire firm forgetting to replace the oil cap when the vehicle was last checked. Fortunately, one of the guests spotted the oil cap at the base of the windscreen, so it was easily replaced and all was fine thereafter.

There were two separate tracks to explore here on the col, with most of the group taking the easier option of the gentler, lower slope.

This paid dividends as several Chequered Blue were seen at the track edges, with Red-underwing Skipper, Adonis Blue, and Green Hairstreak also prominent. Weaver's and Queen of Spain Fritillary were also active in this area, but the most popular butterfly was undoubtedly the highly attractive Provence Orange Tip, several of which were seen patrolling the banks and occasionally settling on yellow crucifer flowers.

Other notables were Western Dappled White, Baton Blue, Large Wall, and Iberian Scarce Swallowtail. Given the duration of the excursion lasted no more than two hours, an encouraging 27 species had been recorded this first afternoon.



Iberian Scarce Swallowtail © Harry

Day 2 – Sournia hillside and quarry

Today was the only disappointing day as far as the weather was concerned. Skies were largely cloudy *en route* from the hotel to the first site, a scrubby hillside close to the village of Sournia.

There were occasional breaks in the overcast conditions which meant that reasonable numbers of butterflies were seen, the most numerous being Western Marbled White, which were easy to spot flying around the meadows.



The sheer amount of salmon-pink sainfoin growing meant that it was inevitable that two species that use this as a larval host plant were around too – Osiris Blue and Chapman's Blue.

Unfortunately though, as the morning progressed, light rain began to fall so it was decided to take an early lunch and visit the two quarries on the other side of the village.

Little was active at the smaller quarry thanks to the cloud, although Emmanuelle spotted a *beckeri* form of Marsh Fritillary up one of the tracks. A Southern White Admiral was active by the bridge next to the car park, along with Holly, Mazarine, and Green-underside Blue, but all in low numbers.

The larger quarry proved more productive, especially during the sunny intervals which occasionally developed. A handful of Spanish Festoon were seen, which were very approachable during duller periods, and there was a nice cameo from a Cardinal which spent time visiting the copious valerian flowers, along with a Swallowtail, much to the delight of everybody.

Several Cleopatra and Spotted Fritillary were seen, with the supporting cast including Bath White, Spanish Gatekeeper, Large Wall, and Provencal Fritillary.



In spite of the largely cloudy conditions, 34 species were recorded, bringing the overall tally to 40 after just one full day.

Day 3 – Around Py and Sahorre

Sunnier conditions were gratefully welcomed on this second morning, and by just after 10am the group had arrived north of the village of Sahorre to a roadside location with several grassy meadows on one side and grassy slopes on the other.

There were several species of interest during the circuitous walk, with Provence Orange Tip always eye-catching. Rather less bright was a male Sooty Copper found in a small but



Apollo © Dudley & Jean

gloriously productive little grassy meadow further up the road. The first Brown Argus and Large Skipper were recorded here too.

On the other side of the road, Duke of Burgundy was seen near the river, as was Large Wall and Pearl-bordered Fritillary. Steve latched onto another skipper on the way back to the car park which turned out to be Tufted Marbled Skipper which was a welcome addition.

Moving higher up the mountain road saw further new species added. Foremost was undoubtedly Apollo, several of which were patrolling the steep banks at the roadside and occasionally settling on thistles to feed. Surprisingly, just the one in-flight Clouded Apollo was seen. Normally this species is quite common at this time of year at around 1,200m along this track.

Dudley & Jean found good numbers of Provencal Fritillary nectaring on a patch of flowering thyme, whilst Berger's Clouded Yellow and De Prunner's Ringlet were also seen.

42 species during the day was good going for late May, with the 10 new species now making it a total of 52 for the week.



De Prunner's Ringlet © Robert

Day 4 – Eyne, Porte Puymorens and Carancas Gorge

Today was the best weather forecast for the week, so it made sense to drive uphill and inland to the montane plateau near the town of Font Romeu.

First stop was a lightly wooded meadow close to the village of Eyne. This area is unusual in the sense that one end of the meadow is very damp and the other is quite dry, meaning that a variety of butterfly species inhabit it.



Violet Copper © Steve

Adonis Blue and Dingy Skipper were among the first to be recorded, with both Chapman's and Common Blue present too. A handful of Large Grizzled Skipper were on the wing, along with Wood White, Red-underwing Skipper, Green Hairstreak, and Queen of Spain Fritillary. De Prunner's Ringlet were seen in low numbers, but there was no sign of the *debilitata* form of Marsh Fritillary, sadly.

The next site was near Porte Puymorens, a rather barren landscape but home to a colony of the rare and threatened Violet Copper. Sure enough, a couple of males were seen

immediately, lekking in the damp area at the bottom of the site. Elsewhere, there were Pearl-bordered Fritillary and the week's first Small Tortoiseshell.

There was mild disappointment upon arriving at Carancas Gorge later that afternoon to find the bar was not open, but there were a few butterflies around to compensate, including the first Comma of the week as well as further Chequered Blue, the latter of which species maintained its record of having been recorded every day thus far.



Day 5 – Forca Real and Conat

At 500m, Forca Real is not especially tall, but it is the highest point towards the eastern coast of this part of France and its dry scrub attracts different species of butterfly than the damper areas further inland.



That was immediately clear on arrival as Western Marbled White and Spanish Gatekeeper were the two most prominent species. Similarly, Lulworth Skipper was found for the only time during the trip at the roadside at the lower end of the road leading up to the summit.

A welcome moment came when a mint-fresh male Cleopatra suddenly arrived, fluttering around some of the flowers near the summit and allowing everybody to take a close look at this perennially popular species.

Even more welcome was the brief appearance of a Two-tailed Pasha behind the hermitage building. Frustratingly, this insect did not settle and, unusually, did not return to the high point.

Nonetheless, there were several Swallowtail and Iberian Scarce Swallowtail hilltopping, along with Wall Brown, Painted Lady, and Red Admiral. Two newcomers for the week were Southern Small White and Long-tailed Blue, with Grayling also being recorded here.

After leaving behind the beautiful views and butterflies of this site, it was all change as the group made their way to a tight and sheltered series of roadside meadows just beyond the village of Conat.



This quiet road appears relatively nondescript, but the verges are always very green here due to the sharp relief, and some notable species were found in the 90 or so minutes spent exploring the site.



The area by the river near the car park played host to a Southern White Admiral that kept doing circuits of the trees and occasionally settling for the group to take a reasonably close look. Holly Blue was also seen around this area.

A Marsh Fritillary, form *beckeri*, was active in the grassy area along the roadside verge, with a couple of Spanish Festoon sighted too.

Further along the road, two welcome firsts were recorded, with False Heath Fritillary and Black-veined White finally making it onto the list. There was also a Pearly Heath in one of the final meadows which hitherto had not been seen.

Sighting of the afternoon was undoubtedly Harry's Camberwell Beauty, which unfortunately he was the only one to see.

The day had been the best of the week so far with 44 different butterfly species recorded, the dozen new ones bringing the total for the week to 69.



Day 6 – Beyond Mosset

Weather conditions were somewhat marginal this morning, but the mountain mist was restricted to the top of Col de Jau at 1,500m so the group stopped about 200m lower down at a series of grassy meadows replete with flowering orchids.



Things took a while to get going on the butterfly front, with Green Hairstreak and Sooty Copper the first to appear, followed shortly after by the week's first Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper. A nice Meadow Fritillary was then found, with the other newcomer being Amanda's Blue.

A visit to the col itself was a rather abbreviated one, as the mist kept rolling by, drastically reducing the temperature, although Small Tortoiseshell and Painted Lady didn't seem to

mind.

On the way back down, the group stopped in a lay-by near a hairpin bend, where several Provencal Fritillary were seen nectaring from the thyme flowers. There were also Weaver's Fritillary, Dingy Skipper, and Mazarine Blue present here.

Given the largely unsuitable weather during the day, it was decided to return and make another stop at this site en route to the Aude department the following day.

Day 7 – Beyond Mosset and into the Aude

The main reason for stopping again just prior to Col de Jau was to try and locate Purple-edged Copper. Sadly, this butterfly once again did not appear, and the species on the wing were the same as those the previous day only in slightly larger numbers due to the sunnier conditions.

So, it was onward over the col shortly after and into the Aude department, to a minor road just past the village of Aunat. Immediately after getting out of the vehicles, Tony spotted a Chequered Skipper high up the bank.



The group enjoyed excellent results with Map. This species is usually on its last legs at this time of year, but the late season this year meant there were several of them about, with many being in excellent condition. One particularly nice individual was puddling in a damp area alongside a couple of mint fresh male Amanda's Blue, and several Small Blue.

The other species new for the week was Silver-studded Blue, with just a solitary individual seen.

Other notables were Swallowtail, False Heath Fritillary, Clouded Apollo, Osiris Blue, Provence Orange Tip, and Duke of Burgundy.

Day 8 – Return to Perpignan

After bidding farewell to the staff at the hotel in Vernet-les-Bains, the journey to the small and user-friendly Perpignan airport went without incident and everyone managed to board their flights to schedule,

Summary and acknowledgements

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

This trip is not always immune from adverse weather conditions, but on this occasion, apart from one often cloudy and sometimes wet day, the itinerary was successfully followed in full and all sites were visited.

A total of 75 different butterfly species were recorded, which is slightly fewer than average, but the relative lateness of the season was largely responsible for that shortfall.

The hotel was well situated with comfortable rooms and good evening meal service, leading to an immensely enjoyable week for all involved.



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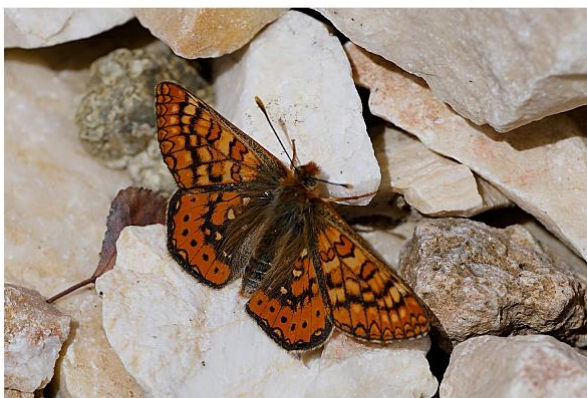
SPRING BUTTERFLIES OF THE FRENCH PYRENEES 21 st -28 th MAY 2025									
	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
	Butterflies								
1	Mallow Skipper <i>Carcharodus alceae</i>								
2	Tufted Marbled Skipper <i>Carcharodus flocciferus</i>			✓					
3	Chequered Skipper <i>Carterocephalus palaemon</i>							✓	
4	Dingy Skipper <i>Erynnis tages</i>				✓		✓	✓	
5	Small Skipper <i>Thymelicus sylvestris</i>								
6	Large Skipper <i>Ochlodes sylvanus</i>			✓			✓	✓	
7	Large Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus alveus</i>				✓		✓	✓	
8	Oberthür's Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus armoricanus</i>						✓	✓	
9	Safflower Skipper <i>Pyrgus carthami</i>								
10	Southern Grizzled Skipper <i>Pyrgus malvoides</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
11	Red-underwing Skipper <i>Spialia Sertorius</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
12	Lulworth Skipper <i>Thymelicus acteon</i>					✓			
13	Brown Argus <i>Aricia agestis</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
14	Provençal Short Tailed Blue <i>Cupido alceas</i>								
15	Holly Blue <i>Celastrina argiolus</i>					✓	✓		
16	Small Blue <i>Cupido minimus</i>		✓	✓				✓	
17	Osiris Blue <i>Cupido osiris</i>		✓					✓	
18	Mazarine Blue <i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>		✓				✓	✓	
19	Green-underside Blue <i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
20	Lang's Short-tailed Blue <i>Leptotes pirithous</i>								
21	Silver-studded Blue <i>Plebejus argus</i>							✓	
22	Geranium Argus <i>Aricia eumedon</i>								
23	Escher's Blue <i>Polyommatus escheri</i>								
24	Amanda's Blue <i>Polyommatus amandus</i>						✓	✓	
25	Adonis Blue <i>Polyommatus bellargus</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
26	Turquoise Blue <i>Polyommatus dorylas</i>								
27	Common Blue <i>Polyommatus icarus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
28	Chapman's Blue <i>Polyommatus thersites</i>		✓		✓			✓	
29	Chequered Blue <i>Scolitantides orion</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			
30	Small Copper <i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
31	Violet Copper <i>Lycaena helle</i>				✓				
32	Purple-shot Copper <i>Lycaena alciphron</i>								
33	Purple-edged Copper <i>Lycaena hippothoe</i>								
34	Sooty Copper <i>Lycaena tityrus</i>			✓			✓	✓	
35	Green Hairstreak <i>Callophrys rubi</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
36	False Ilex Hairstreak <i>Satyrium esculi</i>								
37	Sloe Hairstreak <i>Satyrium acacia</i>								
38	Blue-spot Hairstreak <i>Satyrium spini</i>								
39	Cardinal <i>Argynnis pandora</i>		✓			✓	✓		
40	High Brown Fritillary <i>Fabriciana adippe</i>								
41	Dark Green Fritillary <i>Speyeria aglaja</i>								
42	Provençal Fritillary <i>Mellicta dejone</i>		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
43	Weaver's Fritillary <i>Boloria dia</i>	✓		✓	✓		✓		
44	Pearl-bordered Fritillary <i>Boloria euphrosyne</i>			✓	✓		✓	✓	
45	Marsh Fritillary <i>Euphydryas aurinia</i>		✓	✓		✓			
46	Spanish Fritillary <i>Euphydryas desfontainii</i>								
47	Queen of Spain Fritillary <i>Issoria lathonia</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
48	Heath Fritillary <i>Melitaea athalia</i>								
49	False Heath Fritillary <i>Melitaea diamine</i>					✓		✓	
50	Marbled Fritillary <i>Brenthis daphne</i>								
51	Lesser Marbled Fritillary <i>Brenthis ino</i>								
52	Glanville Fritillary <i>Melitaea cinxia</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Spotted Fritillary <i>Melitaea didyma</i>		✓	✓		✓			
54	Meadow Fritillary <i>Melitaea parthenoides</i>						✓	✓	
55	Knapweed Fritillary <i>Melitaea phoebe</i>	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
56	Small Tortoiseshell <i>Aglais urticae</i>				✓		✓	✓	
57	Large Tortoiseshell <i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>								
58	Map <i>Araschnia levana</i>							✓	
59	Comma <i>Polygonia c-album</i>				✓			✓	
60	Peacock <i>Inachis io</i>								
61	Southern White Admiral <i>Limenitis reducta</i>					✓			
62	White Admiral <i>Limenitis camilla</i>								
63	Camberwell beauty <i>Nymphalis antiopa</i>					✓			
64	Red Admiral <i>Vanessa atalanta</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
65	Painted Lady <i>Vanessa cardui</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
66	Spanish Festoon <i>Zerynthia rumina</i>		✓			✓			
67	Iberian Scarce Swallowtail <i>Iphiclidides feisthamelii</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
68	Swallowtail <i>Papilio machaon</i>	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
69	Apollo <i>Parnassius apollo</i>			✓					
70	Clouded Apollo <i>Parnassius Mnemosyne</i>			✓				✓	
71	Orange Tip <i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
72	Provence Orange Tip <i>Anthocharis euphinoides</i>	✓		✓	✓				
73	Black-veined White <i>Aporia crataegi</i>					✓			

	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
74	Berger's Clouded Yellow <i>Colias alfacariensis</i>			✓		✓			
75	Clouded Yellow <i>Colias crocea</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
76	Cleopatra <i>Gonepteryx cleopatra</i>					✓	✓	✓	
77	Brimstone <i>Gonepteryx rhamni</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
78	Wood White <i>Leptidea sinapis</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
79	Large White <i>Pieris brassicae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
80	Green-veined White <i>Pieris napi</i>	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
81	Small White <i>Pieris rapae</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
82	Southern Small White <i>Pieris mannii</i>					✓			
83	Western Dappled White <i>Euchloe crameri</i>	✓	✓			✓			
84	Bath White <i>Pontia daplidice</i>		✓	✓		✓			
85	Duke Of Burgundy <i>Hamearis lucina</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
86	Pearly Heath <i>Coenonympha arcania</i>					✓	✓	✓	
87	Dusky Heath <i>Coenonympha dorus</i>								
88	Small Heath <i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
89	Large Wall <i>Lasiommata maera</i>	✓	✓	✓					
90	Wall <i>Lasiommata megera</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
91	Spanish Gatekeeper <i>Pyronia bathseba</i>	✓	✓			✓			
92	Meadow Brown <i>Maniola jurtina</i>								
93	Western Marbled White <i>Melanargia occitanica</i>		✓			✓			
94	Iberian Marbled White <i>Melanargia lachesis</i>								
95	Speckled Wood <i>Pararge aegeria</i>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
96	Grayling <i>Hipparchia semele</i>					✓			
97	Bright-eyed Ringlet <i>Erebia oeme</i>								
98	De Prunner's Ringlet <i>Erebia triaria</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
#	Baton Blue <i>Pseudophilotes baton</i>	✓							
#	Long-tailed blue <i>Lampides boeticus</i>					✓			
#	Two-tailed Pasha <i>Charaxes jasius</i>					✓			
	Daily total:	27	34	42	37	44	42	46	
	Running total:	27	42	52	57	69	72	75	

Galleries

All images that follow were kindly shared by tour participants



Images © Harry



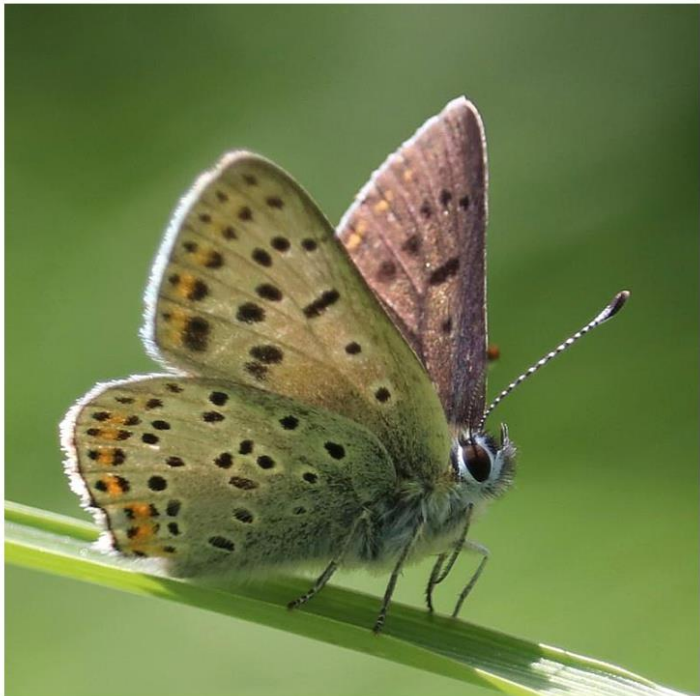
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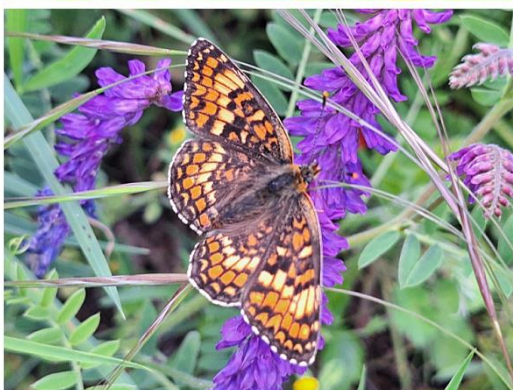
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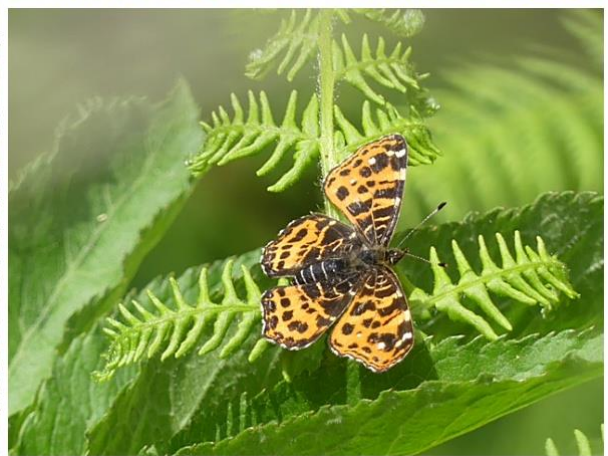
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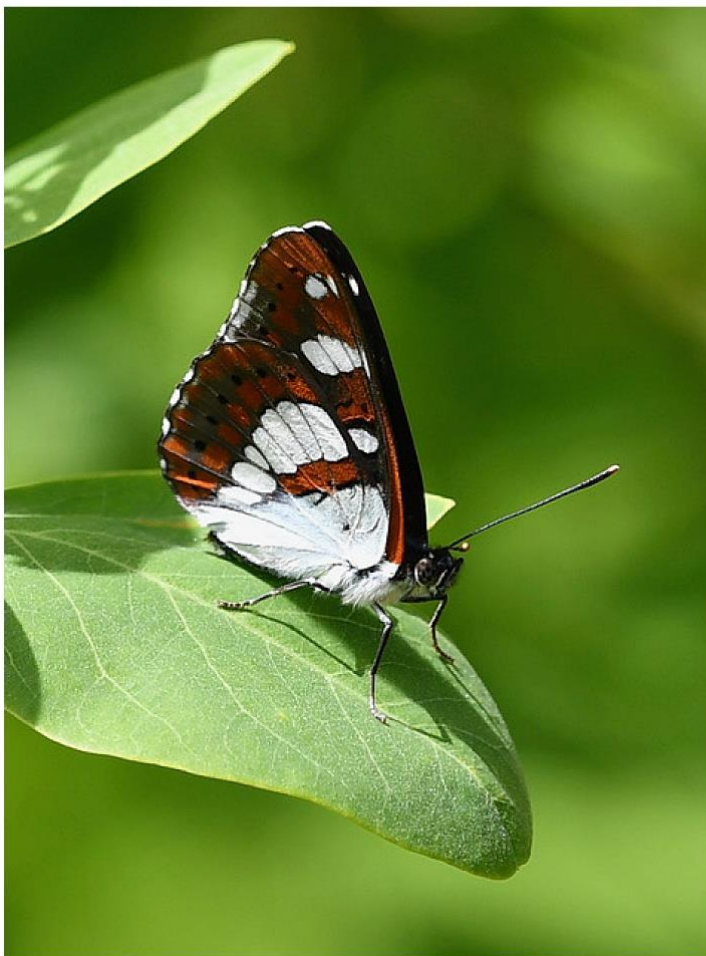
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