Spring Butterflies of Marvellous Morocco

Mariposa Nature Tours trip report 9th – 16th May 2026



Tour leaders David Moore & Michele Viganò

Trip report by David Moore

(Images, clockwise from top left: Allard's Silver Line © Allan; Fatma's Bavius Blue © Harry; Donzel's Silver Line *f. monticola* © Harry; Vogel's Blue © Andrew D)

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Introduction

This inaugural tour to the Middle Atlas in Morocco was designed to take in some of the butterfly species that are either endemic to this part of north Africa or are seldom seen in Europe.

The base for the week was in Azrou, about 20km from Ifrane.

Joining us for the tour were Andrew L, Julian, Harry, Jim, Allan, Andrew D, Mike and Arnet.

What follows is a daily diary for the week, followed by species lists and galleries.

Day 1, 9th May

Arrivals day was largely trouble-free, with Arnet having arrived from Canada prior to the tour and everybody else on the same flight from Stansted to Fez.

The journey from Fez to Azrou was on good quality roads, but punctuated by slow moving vehicles and traffic police, meaning that it took over two hours to arrive at the first butterfly site of the week, a rough track to the north west of Azrou with some scrubby land on each side, and a river.

Almost immediately, the guests spotted a small lycaenid, which turned out to be False Baton Blue *Pseudophilotes abencerragus*. Other species of interest found in the next hour or so were False Marbled Skipper *Carcharodus stauderi*, Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*, Cardinal *Argynnis pandora*, African Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea punica*, and Eastern Dappled White *Euchloe ausonia*. There were also several Southern Brown Argus *Aricia cramera*, which have notably larger orange lunules than their Spanish counterparts.


False Baton Blue © Andrew L

Toes having been dipped into the water, the group headed to their accommodation for the week, a newly built hotel on the outskirts of the town which had ten comfortable bedrooms.

Day 2, 10th May

The morning dawned sunny and after a breakfast which seemed to rather resemble a Greek meze, with various offerings appearing in rather laboured succession, the group headed up the mountain road leading to Col du Zad.

This part of Morocco is heavily overgrazed, mainly by goats, but en route to the col there is a section of the hillside that is fenced off, preventing livestock from decimating the vegetation. We humans were able to enter by lifting the wire and ducking under and having crossed into a different landscape where flowers were growing extensively, the butterflies suddenly appeared.


Lorquin's Blue © Harry

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There were several diminutive Lorquin's Blue *Cupido lorquinii* flying in the gully immediately up from the fence, and amongst the other lycaenids was a striking male Spotted Adonis Blue *Polyommatus punctifera*, along with a handful of another endemic, Martin's Blue *Kretania martini.*

However, the best moment was when David suddenly noticed a copper-coloured butterfly, but this was not one of the coppers – instead, it was a silver line, one of the highly coveted species in this part of the world.

Several more were found nearby nectaring from low-growing, blue flowers, and they proved to be extremely approachable, seemingly intent on feeding and ignoring this throng of human beings who were so excited by their presence.



There was some doubt initially as to the identity of this species. Donzel's Silver Line *Cigaritis zohra* is not recorded at this location whilst Allard's Silver Line *Cigaritis allardi* is rather larger and brighter, with longer tails.

David requested an ID from the preeminent authority on Moroccan butterflies, Michel Tarrier, who replied that it was the *monticola* form of Donzel's Silver Line, although this taxon is separately known also as Moroccan or Riley's Silver Line. Whichever name suits, it was an excellent and welcome find.



Further up the slope there were more interesting butterflies on the wing, chief amongst them being Sooty Orange Tip *Zegris eupheme*, something of a rarity in Iberia but far commoner in north Africa.

The group bumped into a couple of Flemish butterfly enthusiasts on the way out, but they decided to follow when they learned that the next site on the agenda was where Fatma's Bavius Blue *Pseudophilotes fatma* had been found during the Mariposa recce here in 2025.

Cue much anticipation upon arrival at this relatively verdant site off the main road, and this was not misplaced as within ten minutes one was spotted, causing everyone to rush over to photograph this uber-rarity.



A little further down this road was another exciting find in the form of Aetherie Fritillary *Melitaea aetherie*, whilst Mazarine Blue *Cyaniris semiargus* was another newcomer for the trip.

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Several additional Sooty Orange Tip were sighted too, with the day count being 28 and the aggregate total 33 after one and a half days in the field.

Day 3, 11th May

First stop today was at fairly damp, grassy site on the road to the village on Ain Leuh. The main target here was Aetherie Fritillary, but numbers were nowhere near those seen the previous year, possibly due to the wet winter and spring in the Middle Atlas, which had undoubtedly led to later emergences for many butterfly species.



This was reinforced by the surprise sighting of several Provence Hairstreak *Tomares ballus*, some of which looked in excellent condition. There was also Spanish Festoon *Zerynthia rumina* in equally presentable condition.

The rest of the day was centred around Spanish Fritillary *Euphydryas desfontainii*. A relatively brief stop was made along the main road leading to Ifrane, where another fence protects the sensitive habitat from the marauding livestock.

It didn't take long for the target species to be seen, with double figure numbers eventually being recorded. Another newcomer for the week here was Bath White *Euchloe daplidice*.

Lunch was taken in the parking area, much to the satisfaction of three shepherds' dogs who all appreciated the titbits offered to them.



It was only a 15 minute drive to the next site, a sheltered hillside with plenty of flowering plants. Here again Spanish Fritillary abounded, along with plentiful Lorquin's Blue and smaller numbers of False Baton and Spotted Adonis Blue.

Cleopatra *Gonepteryx cleopatra* and Comma *Polygonia c-album* also made their bows for the week at this site, whilst Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus armoricanus* was identified in the company of the more common Rosy Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus onopordi*.

It had been a highly productive day, with the nine new species taking the week's total to 41.

Day 4, 12th May

Today involved the longest journey of the trip, south-eastwards towards the semi-desert area at Tizi-Tazouguart. Upon arrival, there didn't look to be a great deal to attract general butterflies, but there were a few desirable habitat specialists on the slopes of these arid hills.

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The first to appear was very distinctive, the delicate and unusually coloured Greenish Black Tip *Euchloe charlonia*. This individual readily settled allowing the group to take images, but subsequently those seen later reverted to type by continually flying across the slopes, rarely stopping.

There were two more species of interest on this slope. Many in the group headed higher up and were rewarded with African Grayling *Hipparchia algirica*. There was also a small lycaenid which caused identification issues. After some scrutiny, it was established that it was the *ungemachi* form of Martin's Blue, visibly smaller than the nominate form found more widely in the higher mountains.



The group then moved to a site around 1km down the road, which was more level than the earlier hillside and was replete with stipa grasses. Not a great deal was flying here, although there were a few lycaenids that were a strikingly deep blue colour. The underside pattern gave them away – Black-eyed Blue *Glaucopsyche melanops*.

On the other side of the road in a gully, there was a damp area and there were several butterflies attracted to the moisture here. To everybody's surprise, there were a handful of Chapman's Green Hairstreak *Callophrys avis*, present here, identifiable via the stronger white 'streak' and dull orange extending down the front of the antennae.

During lunch, some of the group made their way further up the roadside, whereupon a pleasant surprise was forthcoming. A small, pale butterfly was flying strangely and erratically, leading the guide to believe that it was possibly Desert Orange Tip *Coloris evagore*. Following it along the roadside, it soon became apparent that there was a colony here, as several butterflies were flying around the caperberry growing along the steep bank, although getting images of them wasn't easy as this is a flighty species at the best of times.



One last stop was made, about 2km back along the road the group came in. By now, the wind had picked up and cloud was approaching, but for those who made the effort to walk up the track to the top of the hill, a significant reward was on hand in the form of Desert Swallowtail *Papilio saharae*.

Given the arid landscape, today was very much one for habitat specialists. Only 23 species were seen, but six of them were new, making the collective total 47.

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Day 5, 13th May


Vogel's Blue © Harry

The main site today was at the very summit of Col du Zad. Getting there involved an off-road drive up a forestry track which the minibus couldn't handle, so this vehicle was left on a wide bend about halfway up, and Miki's Dacia Duster, with excellent ground clearance, made three shuttle journeys to get everybody up to the rocky knoll at the top.

Andrew D was among the first group up there and he called out a False Baton Blue…and then thought he had seen another. David locked onto this butterfly and was stunned to find, once it settled, that it was Vogel's Blue *Maurus vogelii*, the iconic and phenomenally rare Moroccan endemic.


Vogel's Blue © Allan

Several more were subsequently seen, all flying in a small area where the larval foodplant, storksbill, was flourishing in the crevices amongst the rocks.

Having made the rather hair-raising journey to the top, it was reassuring to be able to guarantee that everybody in the group would be able to see, study and photograph this precious little lycaenid, and many stayed in this area for over an hour, watching them settle occasionally on flowers and interact.

In the lightly wooded area where the Dacia had been parked, a couple of Moroccan Orange Tip *Anthocharis belia*, were seen flying around the slope, but sadly neither settled.

Another welcome newcomer was Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros*, seen briefly busying itself around the pine trees before disappearing.


Iberian Scarce Swallowtail © Andrew D

In the afternoon, the group headed for a hillside about 500m from the hotel. Unsurprisingly, there was a fair amount of hilltopping going on, with Swallowtail *Papilio machaon* and the week's first Iberian Scarce Swallowtail *Iphiclides feisthamelii* being the main protagonists.

Another notable find up here was Spanish Marbled White *Melanargia ines,* with several active amid the good numbers of commoner species such as Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea* and Bath White *Pontia daplidice*.

The half dozen new species seen on this highly enjoyable day broke the half-century barrier for the collective total, which was now 53.

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Day 6, 14th May



First stop this morning was at a series of orchards on the outskirts of the village of Ain Leuh. The grass amongst these orchards was extremely verdant and there were plenty of butterflies active, amongst them Iberian Scarce Swallowtail, Southern Brown Argus, Spanish Marbled White, and even a Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*, which was a first for the trip.

Another newcomer was Lang's Short-Tailed Blue *Leptotes pirithous*, spotted by David and Julian close to the entrance to the track.

On the way back, the group stopped once again at the main Aetherie Fritillary site, and indeed several were found, but they were outnumbered by many wonderfully fresh Cardinal, which seemed to monopolise practically all the thistles.



Once again, a number of Provence Hairstreak were recorded, along with more Spanish Festoon.

No trip to this part of Morocco would be complete without visiting the colonies of semi-tame Barbary Macaque, so time was set aside to do this, although the clearings in the cedar forest also attract plenty of butterflies, chief amongst which is Spanish Fritillary. This species tends only to be found in small numbers in Europe, but there were hundreds of them at this site, almost to the point of distraction.



Some of the group decided to continue their pursuit of butterflies by visiting the hillside close to the hotel on the way back. Once again, there were the usual suspects hilltopping but one particularly good find was a colony of the beautiful Allard's Silver Line, tucked into a small area on the sheltered side of the hill.

Day 7, 15th May

The last full day began with another search for Atlas Blue *Polyommatus atlantica*, at the same site on the road towards Col du Zad that had been visited on the first full day.

This ultimately proved fruitless, with the belief that the late season this spring meant that this species had yet to emerge. However, the group enjoyed several more Moroccan/Riley's Silver Line, Sooty Orange Tip, and Lorquin's and Spotted Adonis Blue, with the added bonus of the week's first Berger's Clouded Yellow *Colias alfacariensis*.

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The cloud had built by lunch time and didn't look like it was going to clear, so a decision was made to go lower in altitude, back to the hillside near the hotel so that those who had not seen Allard's Silver Line the previous afternoon could do so.

Once again, on the downslope on the far side, the group found the butterflies, some of which were in immaculate condition, with David commenting that he had never seen a more beautiful underside pattern on any butterfly. It was a wonderfully satisfying way to round of what had been a spectacularly productive and enjoyable week.

Footnote and acknowledgements

The journey back to Fez airport went without incident, although the weather was cloudy with a little rain en route. All guests were able to check-in in good time to catch their return flights.

Mariposa would like to thank all participants for their company and their contribution during the week. On the whole, Morocco does not have the infrastructure that we are used to in Europe, but journeys were largely problem free and all the intended sites on the itinerary were visited.

There were some spectacular high points, with Vogel's Blue, the two species of Silver Line and Fatma's Bavius Blue being undoubtedly the most notable, although the large numbers of Spanish Fritillary were equally welcome.

The only slight disappointment was the absence of Atlas Blue, which had likely not yet emerged due to the late season brought about by the cool and wet spring in this area.

A total of 57 species were recorded, which was excellent for the first half of May. Morocco is not especially butterfly-rich in comparison to most countries in southern Europe, but at this time of year it offers an experience that is both different and rewarding, and the week here was a memorable one.

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	SPRING BUTTERFLIES OF MARVELLOUS MOROCCO 9 – 16 MAY 2026								
	Species name	**Day 1**	**Day 2**	**Day 3**	**Day 4**	**Day 5**	**Day 6**	**Day 7**	**Day 8**
	Butterflies								
1	Rosy Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus onopordi*	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
2	False Marbled Skipper *Carcharodus stauderi*	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	
3	Lulworth Skipper *Thymelicus acteon*								
4	Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*								
5	Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris*								
6	Southern Brown Argus *Aricia cramera*	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
7	Lang's Short-tailed Blue *Leptotes pirithous*						✓		
8	Long-tailed Blue *Lampides boeticus*	✓	✓	✓		✓			
9	Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*								
10	Lorquin's Blue *Cupido lorquinii*		✓	✓		✓		✓	
11	Mazarine Blue *Cyaniris semiargus*		✓					✓	
12	Fatma's Bavius Blue *Pseudophilotes fatma*		✓						
13	False Baton Blue *Pseudophilotes abencerragus*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
14	Vogel's Blue *Maurus vogelii*					✓			
15	Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
16	Chapman's Blue *Polyommatus thersites*		✓	✓		✓		✓	
17	Amanda's Blue *Polyommatus amandus*								
18	Spotted Adonis Blue *Polyommatus punctifera*		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
19	Atlas Blue *Plebicula atlantica*								
20	Martin's Blue *Kretania martini*		✓		✓	✓		✓	
21	Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
22	Purple-shot Copper *Lycaena alciphron*								
23	Allard's Silver Line *Cigaritis allardi*						✓	✓	
24	Donzel's Silver Line *Cigaritis zohra f. monticola*		✓			✓		✓	
25	False Ilex hairstreak *Satyrium esculi*								
26	Moroccan Hairstreak *Tomares mauretanicus*								

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	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
27	Provence Hairstreak *Tomares ballus*			✓			✓		
28	Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi*		✓	✓		✓		✓	
29	Chapman's Green Hairstreak *Callophrys avis*				✓				
30	Moroccan High Brown Fritillary *Fabriciana auresiana*								
31	Dark Green Fritillary *Speyeria aglaja*								
32	Cardinal *Argynnis Pandora*	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
33	Queen of Spain Fritillary *Issoria lathonia*	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
34	Glanville Fritillary *Melitaea cinxia*		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
35	African Knapweed Fritillary *Melitaea punica*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
36	Spotted Fritillary *Melitaea didyma*								
37	Aetherie Fritillary *Melitaea aetherie*		✓	✓			✓		
38	Spanish Fritillary *Euphydryas desfontainii*			✓			✓		
39	Red Admiral *Vanessa Atalanta*	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
40	Painted Lady *Vanessa cardui*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
41	Large Tortoiseshell *Nymphalis polychloros*					✓			
42	Comma *Polygonia c-album*			✓					
43	Spanish Festoon *Zerynthia rumina*			✓		✓	✓		
44	Swallowtail *Papilio Machaon*		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
45	Iberian Scarce Swallowtail *Papilio feisthamelii*					✓	✓		
46	Large White *Pieris brassicae*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
47	Small White *Pieris rapae*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
48	Green-veined White *Pieris napi*								
49	Cleopatra *Gonepteryx Cleopatra*			✓	✓	✓	✓		
50	Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*	✓		✓		✓			
51	Berger's Clouded Yellow *Colias alfacariensis*							✓	
52	Clouded Yellow *Colias crocea*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
53	Bath White *Pontia daplidice*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
54	Eastern Dappled White *Euchloe ausonia*	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
55	Portuguese Dappled White *Euchloe tagis*					✓			
56	Green-striped White *Euchloe belemia*								
57	Sooty Orange Tip *Zegris eupheme*		✓			✓		✓	
58	Greenish Black Tip *Euchloe charlonia*				✓				

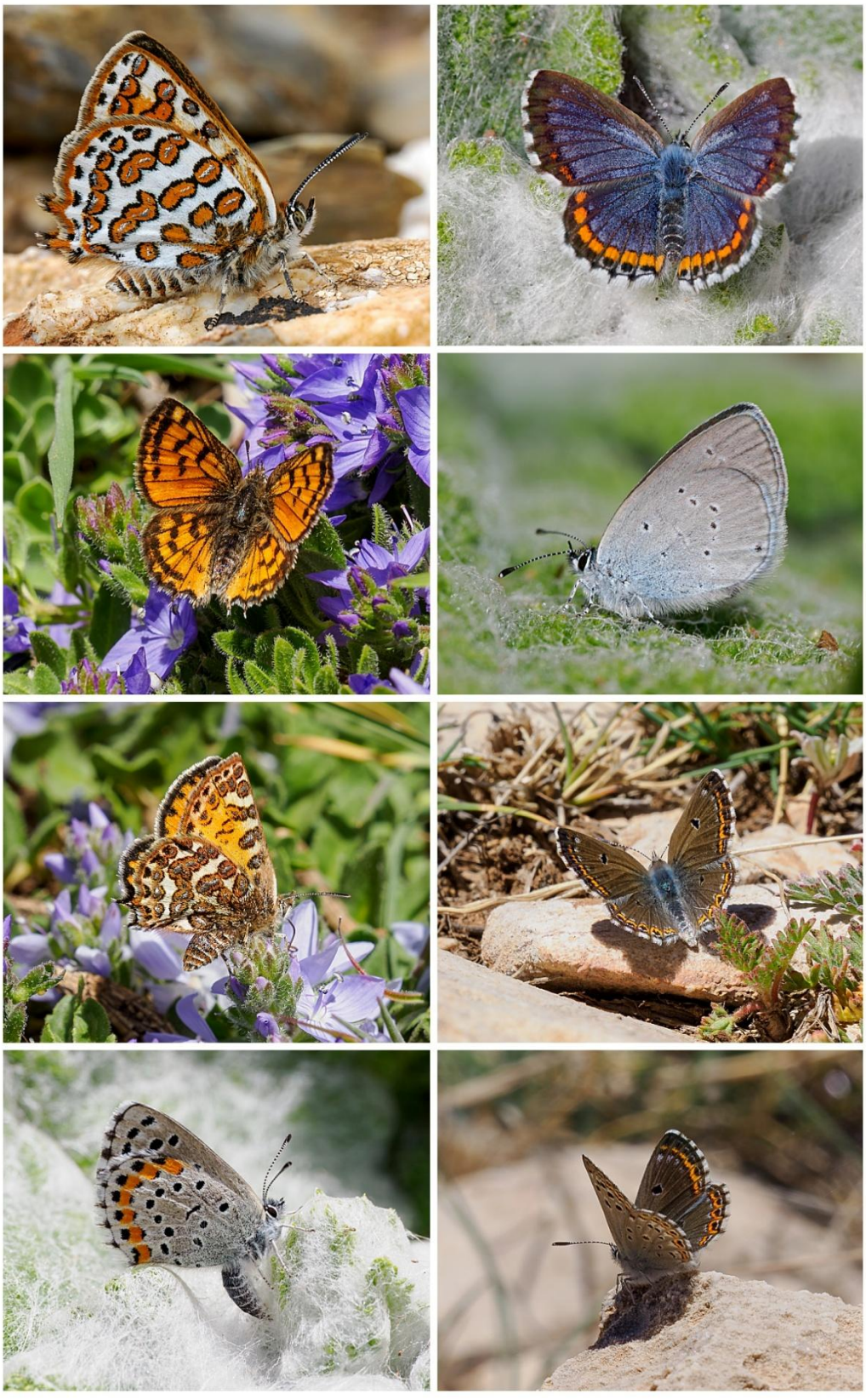
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	Species name	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8
59	Moroccan Orange Tip *Anthocharis belia*					✓			
60	Desert Orange Tip *Colotis evagore*				✓				
61	Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* ssp *lyllus*	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
62	Vaucher's Heath *Coenonympha vaucheri*								
63	Wall *Lasiommata megera*		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
64	Spanish Gatekeeper *Pyronia bathseba*								
65	Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
66	Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*						✓		
67	Moroccan Marbled White *Melanargia lucasi*								
68	Spanish Marbled White *Melanargia ines*					✓	✓	✓	
#	Moroccan Red-underwing Skipper *Spialia ali*		✓					✓	
#	Oberthur's Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus armoricanus*			✓					
#	False Mallow Skipper *Carcharodus tripolinus*		✓		✓	✓			
#	Desert Swallowtail *Papilio saharae*				✓				
#	African Grayling *Hipparchia algirica*				✓				
#	Black-eyed Blue *Glaucopsyche melanops*				✓				
	Daily total:	17	28	34	23	39	28	31	
	Running total:	17	33	41	47	53	56	57	

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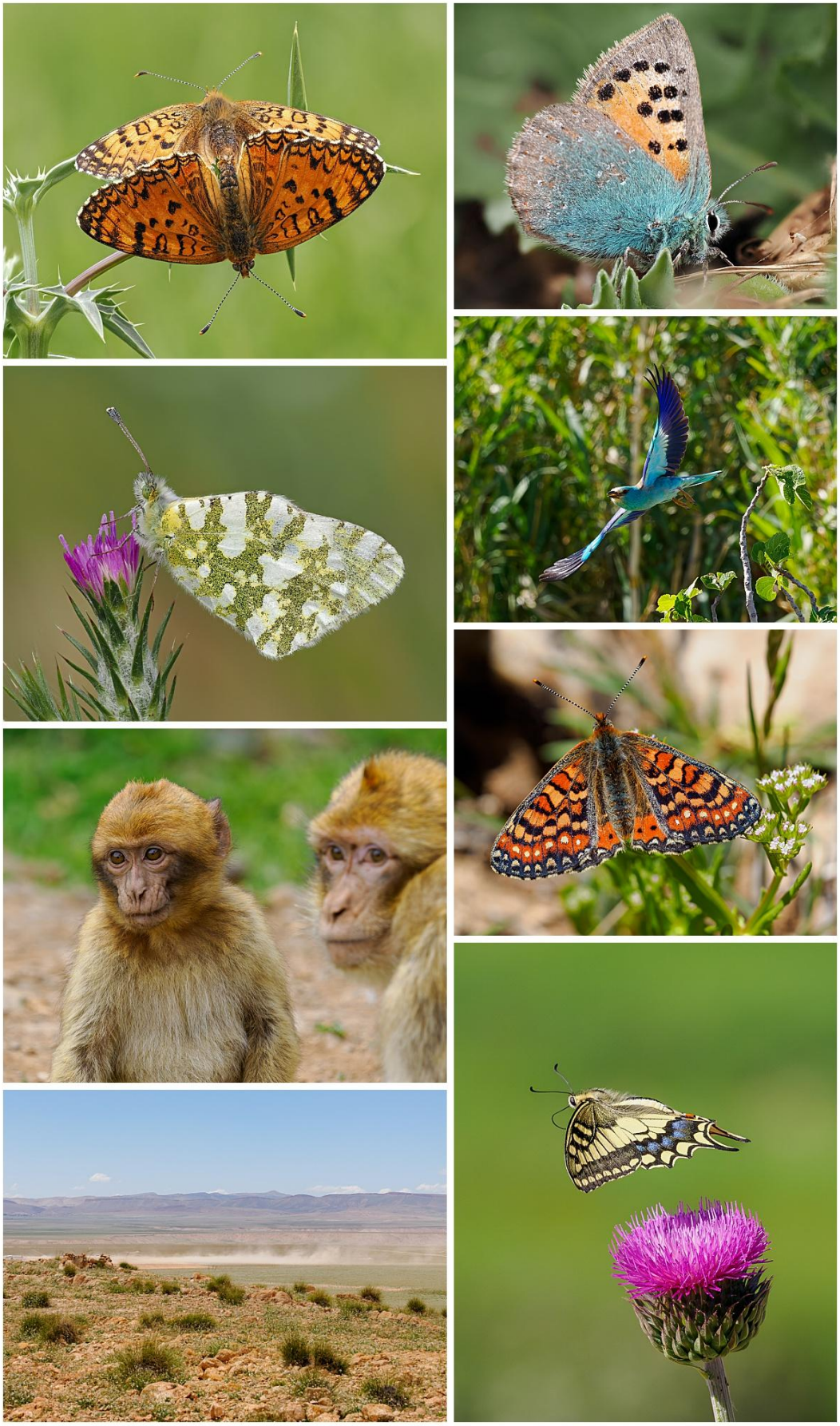
Guest Galleries

All images that follow were kindly shared by tour participants



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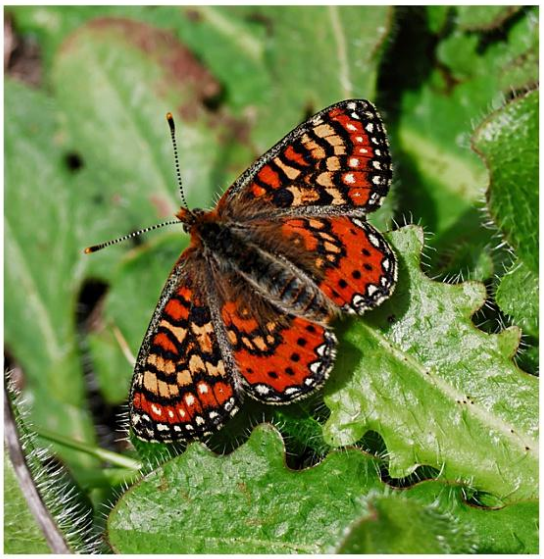
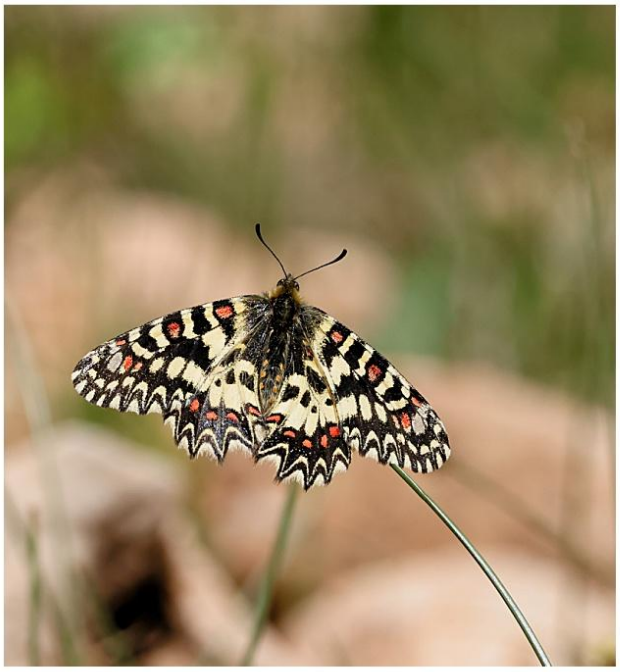
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And finally… If you liked the sound of Spring Butterflies of Marvellous Morocco, both our 2027 and 2028 tours are already fully booked – but rest assured, we'll be announcing dates for 2029 later in 2027. Meanwhile, we've a further selection of wonderful butterfly tours with availability remaining on them in 2027 – full details can be seen on our website's handy tour calendar. Naturally, all of them generate a donation to support the brilliant, science-led conservation work of Butterfly Conservation Europe.

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