

Tripreport Sweden´s Butterflies 9-15:th of July 2009

Thursday the 9:th of July

Arrival at Västerås airport. Windy, grey skies and rain in the air isn't exactly the weather you wish to be greeted by on a butterfly holiday. But that's the conditions we got in Västerås on arrival of the first "Sweden's Butterfly"-trip.

Anyway we took a short drive to the island Ängsö where at least some possibilities of birds and plants stood on the menu, together with welcoming hot drinks and sandwiches.

A look over the adjacent wetland does not produce much more than some **Tufted Ducks** and **Goldeneyes** with ducklings. As we walk along the road we start to find interesting things though, a dead Grass snake is soon followed by another and another and within some 100 meters we see more than 10 dead Grass snakes, most of them baby snakes, but some bigger, adult ones too. As we talk about what could have brought them together in such amounts that they all had been traffic-killed (which they obviously were) another dead animal catches our attention; a dragonfly, that we believe to be a **Small Pincertail**. (which also proves to be right).

A walk through the impressive alleys around the medieval Ängsö castle takes us down to the shoreline of the big Lake Mälaren. After a while we find 2 soaring **White-tailed Eagles** in the distance. A bit far away but still viewable. In shelter from the wind **Yellow Shell** moths are rather numerous along the path.

Friday the 10:th of July

A nightmare sight meet our eyes as we get up and rain is still pouring down over breakfast. Hope seems far fetched, but local weather knowledge steps in and a quick decision is made to swap days in the itinerary and go south of Lake Mälaren to a good site and hopefully better weather. Selaön (Sweden's 2:nd biggest inland lake island!) with its iron-age burial mounds is a well-known butterfly site and this time of the year the **Large Blue** flies here.

One of their local patrons, young, dedicated and skillful Björn Carlsson meets us and tells about the newly found site for the butterflies and the conservation and management project around them and as we walk up the ridge, sun breaks the cloudcover and butterflies immediately start to fly.

We feel relieved that this day seems to be not even half as bad as we expected. Within a short time several species of Fritillaries are spotted; **Dark Green-**, **High Brown-**, **Heath-**, and **Small Pearl-bordered**.

It doesn't take long till the first **Large Blue** is found and soon several are flitting around among us, offering photographic challenges as they pose – often just briefly though – on their blooming hostplants Hill thymes.

Graylings, **Ringlets**, **Small-** and **Pearly Heath** show too. By that time it has even got a bit hot in the sun, so we find some shade where we can enjoy a nice picnic lunch and some refreshing cold drinks.

After lunch we just move a little bit up the hilltop to keep enjoying the butterflies. Here even more Large Blues are flying and plenty of Fritillaries, especially High Browns seem numerous. The first **Burnet Moths** (Six-spots) are also found and pose well on flowers. We soon find ourselves in the exact circumstance you want to be on

a real butterfly excursion, surrounded by great and many butterflies on a nice site, in great weather and with plenty of time at our hands to enjoy, explore and take pictures.

After a while we move down the hillside to a slightly more vegetated grass area. Here **Mazarine Blues, Essex-** and **Large Skippers, Small Tortoiseshell, Queen of Spain Fritillary** and not the least – **Scarce Coppers** are found. Of the latter a brilliant, fresh, almost fiery orange male poses well for the cameras.

Among dayflying Moths we find Large Yellow Underwing, Blackneck, Light Emerald and the beautiful little Purple barred moth *Lythria rotaria*.

Today we are also followed by a reporter from a regional magazine.

Since skies are clear even on the north side of the lake, we revisit Ängsö and it's deciduous open landscape to try and find Poplar Admirals along the small gravel roads. Even if butterfly activity is still pretty good in the afternoon, no more remarkable finds are made than some **Large Wall Browns** and several of today's previously seen butterfly species. Among Dragonflies, **Yellow-winged Darter** is identified. A male **Red-backed Shrike** poses in a juniper for a while.

Saturday the 11:th of July

The Baltic coast is just a 2 hour drive northeast of us and a well-known butterfly area. Here we meet famous lepidopterist Göran Sjöberg, one of the initiators of a forest track known as "the Butterfly road". The area is the southern limit for several northern butterfly species like Large Grizzled Skipper and Silvery Argus. The ground is partly chalk rich here, which attracts a rich flora and subsequently a big variety of Butterflies.

The area has been exposed to a lot of rain lately so the usually dry, easy walked track is flooded to the extent that we have to drive parts of it in our vehicles instead of walking, a real safari experience.

And it *is* a good butterfly safari. The flowering roadsides are teeming with butterflies of many species. 7 species of Fritillaries, including **False Heath-**, **Heath-**, **Silver-washed-**, **High Brown-** and **Dark Green**. 7 species of Blues including **Cranberry-**, **Amandas-**, and **Mazarine Blue, Northern Brown-** and **Silvery Argus**.

Arran Browns are also among the charismatic butterflies along this road, flying in good numbers this year. (but not the year to come, since they have a 2 year life-cycle.)

We roam about to explore and photograph, as Göran uses the net to find us some of the Silvery Argus for close-up views and photography, or locate a plant or another butterfly to show us.

The **Large Grizzled Skipper** is the last of the target species to be located and even this species is obliging enough to provide excellent pictures. We also get a second go on another astonishing male **Scarce Copper**.

Among Dragonflies we see **Brown Hawkers** and **Downy Emerald**. **New Forest Burnet Moth** is definitely the Moth of the day.

After a full day's butterflying including another tasty picnic lunch and all in great weather, under excellent expert guidance, and a total of some 24 butterfly species, we head back towards Sätra Brunn.

But a flock of 25 **Wood Sandpipers** on a flooded roadside pasture makes us stop for a second and by the bridges of Gysinge a tiny sightseeing site with a shopstop is carried out. But only the bravest ones dare to be outside for long. This river lowland area is very flooded this year and totally infested with mosquitos.

Even the brave don't stand many minutes outdoors, and bear in mind; people actually live here!

Sunday the 12:th of July

Lovely weather again and after a slightly earlier start (08.30) we make a detour through another Poplar Admiral area, but without any luck. A few birds including a pair of **Common Cranes**, some **Black Terns**, **Common Snipe** and **Black-headed Gulls** are seen along the wetlands of the Black River Valley.

At Källvik we start our Butterfly-watching on foot and under the guidance of enthusiastic and knowledgeable lepidopterist Janne Sjöstedt. It doesn't take long until he disappears into the grasslands to come back the next minute with an Apollo and several different Fritillaries in his large net.

The **Apollo** is of course a real scene-stealer and as always an impressive butterfly, but this one also a very fresh and beautiful looking male. To many known as a high altitude species, but in Sweden known from coastal areas with rocky or dry grasslands with plenty of flowers.

It stays on the nearby flowers and thistles for a long time, offering excellent views and photage.

Queen of Spain Fritillary was another of the butterflies caught in the net. **Meadow Browns** have not been seen previously on the trip but here they are numerous, as are **Graylings**, **High Brown– Dark Green–**, and **Silver-washed Fritillaries**. We also see the first **Painted Ladies** of the trip.

A couple of interesting plants are also seen along the walk; **Field Cow wheat** and **Butterfly Orchid**.

Birds on the site include a singing **Marsh Warbler**.

But Janne has a 2:nd site in mind for us this day. It combines well with the need of a lunch, because there are some tables and benches to sit on in the shade. Smoked salmon on crisp bread with horse radish, creme fraiche and cold beer or cider is exactly the kind of treat we need for another couple of hours of butterfly-watching.

As Daniel cleans up the mess after us, Janne leads the group down to the sunny slopes of Långmaren to look for **Niobe Fritillaries**. It doesn't take him long to find some and to teach us how to separate them from the also present and rather similar High Browns. We can also enjoy some **Northern Brown Argus**, **Arran Browns**, **Small Tortoiseshell** and 3 species of Burnet Moths, including one new species for the trip: **5-spot Narrow-bordered Burnet Moth**.

On our walk around the beautiful old time rural landscape Janne finds us a nice little female **Rattle Grasshopper** (*Psophus stridulus*). One of Europe's rarest insects, known to have disappeared from most western European countries in modern times, but remaining a stronghold population on some of the sites we have been visiting here in the province of Södermanland.

Today's Dragonfly encounter is a traffic-injured **Black-tailed Skimmer** that is taken into our custody for treatment, though it doesn't seem to get any better.

A soaring **White-tailed Eagle** is probably the highlight bird of the afternoon. That puts the end to the daytime session and we head towards Trosa stadshotell for check-in and some rest.

After a lovely evening walk to the restaurant downtown picturesque little town of Trosa, we head out to meet Janne again. We are looking forward to a Moth-night on the same site as we did butterflies this afternoon. On our way there – 2 grazing elk are seen along the road. Even if they still are juvenile animals from last year's brood, they are strikingly impressive in size.

At dusk a pale canvas is hung up at the forest edge and mercury lamps are lit. A short walk as light gets dim, becomes our opportunity to bait the roadside for tomorrow's potential Poplar Admirals. The bait used this time is a can of the Swedish delicacy "Surströmming"... fermented or in fact rotting fish! It really smells. **Woodcocks** are roding above us and Janne picks up a singing **Nightjar** in the distance.

After an intense and exciting 3 hour Moth-session, we have an impressive list of no less than 68 identified species of Moth.

Among them impressively large **Northern Oak Eggars, Poplar-** and **Pine Hawk Moths**, and charismatic **Pine Tree Lappet, Bufftip, Green Arches, Coxcomb** – and **Pebble Prominent, Figure of 80, True Lover's Knot, Peach Blossom, Beautiful Hook-tip**, 4 species of **Lutestring** Moths and many, many more. (see separate list of species)

Monday the 13:th of July

After such a late night out, it's nice to be able to enjoy a lazy, wonderful hotel breakfast on the sunny veranda to splendid Stadshotellet in Trosa.

As we return to check the butterfly-baits at Långmaren, we find a sitting **Northern Oak Eggar** in a small forest clearing. It offers unique and great photographic opportunities in daylight for some minutes before it starts vibrating its wings and finally takes to the air like a giant Fritillary.

At the same time another **White-tailed Eagle** is found soaring the thermals above us. When it comes to the rotting fish bait a **Silver-washed Fritillary** seems to be the only one attracted.

The countryside along the Trosa coast is beautiful and lush, but soon enough we are back out on the mainroad to reach our next target – the oak forests of Bjärka Säby, well known for its mainland stronghold of Woodland Brown.

A butterfly species adapted to a landscape created by wild herds of grazing Ouros cattle some 50 million years ago. Today they need help from livestock and manmade management efforts to recreate a semiopen landscape among deciduous trees and Hazel bushes.

Even if we lack success to find this species today, we finally encounter one the most sought after Butterflies of the trip – **The Poplar Admiral!**

A large female is soaring around the trees in the semiopen forest glades and even if it never comes down on the ground it descends to just a few meters above us and perches repeatedly on branches, offering good views in bins.

As the Woodland Brown search keeps on, we eventually stumble across another rare and hard to see species; a **Hornet Clear-wing!** A case of mimicry! A butterfly... or in fact a moth, in disguise, posing as a hornet. An absolutely amazing animal. It poses willingly for a while on a stump along the roadside.

Eventually clouds gather and we have to head on to our night quarters. Rain pours down as we have to walk some 700 meters to the forest cabins of "the Eremitage", and even if some of us are confused and slightly uncertain how it's going to be spending the night without electricity and hence having to light parafin lamps to get the necessary light in your hut, the dinner is lovely and the wine and beer ease up the tension as we go through the specieslist and enjoy the handpicked wild strawberries served on a panacotta for dessert.

The little gathering of log cabins lies in a forest clearing, are individually designed and handmade! Some have grass on the roof, others have copper roofs, the insides might be simple, but these cabins are new, clean and the beds are as comfortable as on

any 3-star hotel. All in all the accommodation is an experience. The brave use the bathhouse with sauna this night and the bravest – Mary... again – even volunteer to sleep in the tree house, some 5 meters up in a large Aspen tree!

Tuesday the 14:th of July

As we wake up and look around – today in lovely weather – we realise what beautiful surroundings we are in. And as we walk down the yesterday so grey and rainy path, we start to see that this landscape is probably very interesting for butterflies and plants, since it's actually farmed the way they did some 100 years ago.

So we walk down to the lake where Håkan's latest house is standing. A big house for plenty of people to gather in. Here we're served a delicious breakfast with fresh bread and perfectly boiled eggs, kaviar and cloudberry youghurt.

Just a few steps to the lake where immaculate summer plumaged **Black-throated Divers** are posing really close on the calm morning mirror surface.

At the ridge Omberg just around the corner, we start today's excursion with meeting up with the skilled butter-, dragonfly and plant-guide Kjell Antonsson.

Together we walk the hillside meadows to reach a point where the view over the landscape is absolutely stunning.

We see **White-letter Hairstreaks** on the way up and among plentyful of **Six Spot Burnett Moths**, a pair of mating **Dark Green Fritillaries** is found, allowing us close range photography. It comes to my mind that I've seen more mating Fritillaries on this trip alone than altogether in my life before this.

Sparrowhawk, Osprey and Marsh Harriers are seen soaring or flying past. Not strange since 2 impressive lakes lie on both sides of the high Omberg ridge. In view we have shallow, reed-fringed lagoonlike Lake Tåkern, with 50+ pairs of Bitterns, Marsh Harriers, Great Reed Warbler and other good birds. But for better or worse, that's not in focus right now.

Kjell Antonsson brings us along to his cottage and garden nearby the lake down in the adjacent lowlands. Here we find ourselves among impressive garden plants and loads of Dragonflies flying around. Most of them we can identify are **Brown Hawkers**, but this area is known for plenty of Aeshna species and many of them do turn up in his garden, as do also a bunch of damselflies. We don't get much success with them but some Large- and Small Whites, the first **Brimstone** for the trip and a beautiful as well as interesting dayflying moth is brought in; a "**Peatbog Carpet**" (*Arichanna melanaria*). When flying it resembles a butterfly, with leopard-like patterned forewings and bright red underwings.

It even rests on James's hand for a while, enabling us to take some pictures.

On the way back north we take a slight but very worthwhile detour to drop in at Munkhyttan Butterfly reserve outside Lindesberg. A reserve to protect the Scarce and Marsh Fritillaries especially. However they are most likely to be over by this time of the year, we still make an attempt and hope to find some other good species.

And we don't get emptyhanded; a couple of new species for the trip are found including **Moorland Clouded Yellow** and **Cranberry Fritillary**.

Beautiful Demoiselle Damselflies are seen along the little river we walk alongside for a while. Large, blue Hawkers are also seen, but never close enough to be identified. Though we know that several interesting Scandinavian species are to be found here.

After dinner this last night of the trip, we make a short evening excursion to nearby Lake Fläcksjön and the charismatic viewpoint Näsklippan. A stone hill by the lake,

overviewing the wetlands. Here we enjoy a cup of good local wine as we enjoy the sunset and look at plentiful of **Black Terns** and other wetland Birds. On the way back we stop briefly to listen at a singing **River Warbler** in the willows by the lake.

Wednesday 15:th of July

The first observation of this last and brilliant, sunny day is a soaring **Honey Buzzard** over the hotel.

We set off to the coniferous areas nearby, which were meant to be explored on day 2, when it rained here. Now we get just a taste of it, since that's all time permits, but we start with looking at a lake where we find a pair of **Black-throated Divers** with a chick.

A short walk on the pinefringed lakeside track gives plenty of **Cranberry Blues**, some Fritillaries and **Moorland Clouded Yellows**.

A **Wood Tiger Moth** is found just on the very track and soon we have to rescue it from getting run over by an approaching car. It's a colourful little creature and it poses well for our cameras.

We use our van to move to a good nearby sight for today's picnic lunch, a calm, sunny clearing, where we find more Moorland Clouded Yellows and a first for the trip; a **Large Heath**, a typical butterfly for boggy pineforests in the area.

However that's about all we have time for since it's time for check-out and departure.

During the week, we saw a good part of central Sweden, from the coniferous Bergslagen area to Uppland, the Baltic coast around Trosa and the spectacular Omberg ridge by Lake Vättern. Lots of clean, unexploited, practically unpopulated nature areas. We also got to meet a handful of Swedens' most knowledgeable lepidopterists, who also proved very skilled and enthusiastic when it came to sharing their knowledge with others. Altogether 46 species of Butterflies were seen, at least 77 species of Moth.

Daniel Green