

Notes on Two Visits to Europe during 1977: Provence and Lake Garda

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(1) Provence

I paid my fourth visit to the Mont Ventoux area of Provence in the spring of 1977, reaching St. Pierre des Vassols by car on 19th May. I once more stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Leonard McLeod who were my kind hosts for the next ten days, but the weather conditions and the lepidoptera population were very different from those of early June, 1976 (*vide Ent. Rec.*, 89: 108-109). In fact Provence was experiencing one of its worst spring periods. The butterflies seem to have suffered, since as soon as I revisited some of the low-level localities of my 1976 trip, I was able to assess what a late season it was with an amazing dearth of insects. The first two days were dull and rainy. However, when my host accompanied me to one of these spots on 21st May he was lucky enough to see a fresh female of *Iolana iolas* Ochs. at rest on its foodplant, the bladder senna (*Colutea arborescens*). Later we found a number of ova laid on the flower sprays. An insect which proved abundant and not seen in 1976, was *Euphydryas aurinia* Rott. in its handsome form *provincialis* Bdv. The 22nd was the best day of my stay when the first *Euchloe tagis bellezina* Bdv. appeared, together with *Anthocharis euphenoides* Staud., *Melitaea cinxia* L., *M. phoebe* D. & S. and *M. didyma* Esp., but all were very sparse as was also *Lysandra bellargus* Rott. There was a great paucity of blues. A newcomer to the area was *Melanargia occitanica* Esp., but equally scarce and difficult to follow on the rough terrain. Other species seen during the next four days included *Zerynthia rumina* L., *Limenitis reducta* Staud., *Maniola jurtina* L. and *Lysandra hispana* H.-S., with a fair number of *Colias australis* Verity. On the 27th I revisited the Gorges de la Nesque which was singularly unproductive compared with previous years. *Clossiana euphrosyne* L. was still flying there. En route back I met my host on our customary ground where he found another female *I. iolas* well past its best. My last two days, the 28th and 29th, were more propitious, with a few more *E. tagis* and a host of *Aporia crataegi* L. just emerged. I recorded only 32 species of butterflies before flying back to England late on 29th May after a pleasant but none too profitable trip. A curious phenomenon had been the defoliation of quite a large number of cherry trees in the local orchards by hordes of larvae of *Nymphalis polychloros* L., of which my host had many just pupating and some already in the chrysalis state. I have never heard of this fine butterfly becoming a potential pest.

(2) Lake Garda

My later Continental trip took me to Lake Garda in Northern Italy, which I reached by hired car from Milan on 26th July, and put up in the very comfortable and well-

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appointed Eurotel in the small town of Garda. The purpose of the visit was to explore and sample the slopes of Monte Baldo which dominates the eastern side of this large lake, possibly Europe's biggest with a length of nearly 50 miles. The next day proved fine when I travelled to the eastern side of the mountain, via Caprini and Ferrara, to an area recommended by Dr. L. Higgins. But in spite of the warmth it was soon apparent that here again the season was not only very late but that there was a great paucity of lepidopterous life. There were a few late *Plebeius argus* L. and some *Erebia euryale* Esp., only just appearing in the form *adyte* Hübn. Hardly anything else was on the wing and when I surveyed some fields above Garda, full of flowers and other luxuriant growth, they were virtually barren of insects. Only one or two *Lysandra bellargus* Rott. and *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. were seen, with a single *Colias croceus* Fourc. The next four days were very unsettled and it was not until 1st August that I ascended the northern end of the mountain by cable car to find almost a gale blowing and nothing moving. However, the 2nd proved much more favourable when I motored to Prada at 2,000 ft. and made a hazardous ascent to 6,000 ft. by a chair lift. I then started walking up a gentle uphill path with grassy slopes on either side. It was not long before many *E. euryale* began flying in the warm sunshine, also *E. medusa hippomedusa* Ochs. with a few of the peculiar small satyrid which has been named *Coenonympha tullia italica* Verity, though it is no larger than *C. pamphilus* L. and lives at high levels on mountainsides. The only blue seen was a fine richly-coloured male of *Cyaniris semiargus* L. After an hour's uphill walk the screes slopes appeared, and here were the first *Erebia gorge* Hübn. in the form of *triopes* Speyer, a large and very striking insect. An English lady who with her husband accompanied me on the trek, spotted a pair of *E. gorge* in cop. in the pathway. All specimens seemed very fresh and only just emerged. I had hoped to continue on the rocky and tortuous route to near the Telegrafo at the summit of Monte Baldo at 7,500 ft. The screes at this altitude are the home of the most handsome form of *Erebia pluto* de Prunner f. *nicholli* Oberthur, with its large ocellated spots on the upperside, confined to this region, but the clouds started to descend on the summit and we had to beat a retreat to lower levels. 3rd August proved another warm day when I revisited the eastern face at near 4,000 ft., but though *E. euryale* was more numerous, there was no sign of *E. ottomana balcanica* Rebel and of *E. stiriensis* Godart. Both species are resident in this region, but were quite likely not yet on the wing in the late season. I made two more ascents by the chair lift on the 4th and 6th, but on both days it became overcast soon after reaching the high ground. A few more *E. gorge* were seen and some fresh *Boloria pales palustris* Frühstorfer, but as already emphasised butterflies were far from numerous even at these high levels. I returned to England on 7th August somewhat empty-handed after an enjoyable, but entomologically disappointing, sojourn in this delightful part of Italy.



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