

Provence Revisited: late August 1975

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During the latter half of July 1973, General Sir George Johnson and I visited Provence in southern France, mainly in search of *Erebia scipio* Boisd. (*vide Ent. Rec.*, **86**: 49-53). It had always been my intention to revisit this grand region at a later date with the object of finding its near relative *Erebia neoridas* Boisd. This species is the last of this large genus to appear on the wing, nearly always during the latter part of August. It had hitherto always eluded me.

Mr. Leonard McLeod who lived in the vicinity of Mont Ventoux during the summer months and whom we met in 1973, once more extended an invitation to me to try my fortune at this later period. Accordingly I set out by plane on August 21st, reaching Marseilles airport in the early afternoon where I picked up a very roomy Peugeot and was soon speeding along the autoroute northwards, reaching the attractive small town of Carpentras the same evening. Here I put up at the spacious Hotel du Fiacre with its Louis XV furniture. This was to be my base for the subsequent week. But I was greeted with a very heavy thunderstorm and deluge which broke up the fine and long hot spell. However, though the morning of the 22nd broke dull, the afternoon was fine so that I was able to revisit a lot of the ground we had surveyed two years previously as well as a new area of Mont Ventoux to the north of this fine mountain. After lunching at the small town of Malaucène, I took the steep road up to the ski-lift ground lying to the north of the main ridge. It was not long before I saw what was obviously an *Erebia* which on capture turned out to be *E. neoridas* flying among some of the short grass slopes. Both sexes were on the wing and some had obviously been out for about a week. I then ascended to the summit of Mont Ventoux at 6,500 ft. and looked over some of the white screes in the hope of seeing some late female *E. scipio*, but none was forthcoming, though the insect had been quite plentiful a few weeks earlier. On descending through the forest on the southern side, I came across another grassy bank which also produced *E. neoridas*, a few *Arethusana arethusana* D. & S. and late *Melanargia galatea* L.

On August 23rd, after a delay owing to car trouble, I joined Mr. McLeod and his family on Mont Ventoux. After lunching at a restaurant in the ski-lift area we made our way to the summit in very fine though windy conditions, but nothing was on the wing on the high screes. We then made our descent by a very winding road that turns back beneath the summit where a few *E. neoridas* were flying, but they became increasingly plentiful on the borders of the road that leads from the south side up to the higher ground. Flying with this insect on the rough banks was *Hyponephele lycaon* Kühn, both sexes, also several *Colias australis* Verity, some worn female *Satyrus*

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ferula Fab. and many *A. arethusa*. *Lysandra coridon* Poda and *Heodes phlaeas* L. were also on the wing. The following morning of August 24th was very fine when I revisited the Gorge de la Nesque which had proved so productive in 1973. And I was not to be disappointed. About half way along the road above the gorge some white scabious was alive with butterflies, mainly *L. coridon*, but with quite a number of *Lysandra bellargus* Rott. Another feature was the appearance of several *Limenitis reducta* Staud., quite fresh at this late date which seemed to indicate a second brood. Both *Papilio machaon* L. and *Iphiclides podalirius* L. were still on wing, as also were *Fabriciana adippe* D. & S. and *Issoria lathonia* L., and a very small specimen of *Melitaea didyma* Esp. A small glade by the side of the road which had been very prolific in 1973 again provided many species. The large Satyrids were represented by *Hipparchia fagi* Scop., *Satyrus actaea* Esp. and *Brintesia circe* Fab. Among the Lycaenids were a very small male *Plebicula dorylas* D. & S. (possibly representing a late brood), *Heodes tityrus* Poda and *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. The two species of Skipper noted were *Pyrgus foulquieri* Oberthur and *Hesperia comma* L. A fine *Colias croceus* Fourc. f. *helice* Hübn. was secured and several of what appeared to be *Colias hyale* L. It was altogether a most productive day.

The next two days were spent on the slopes of Mont Ventoux in very fine weather, especially on the 26th when the border of the road leading up towards the southern slopes was alive with *E. neoridas* at about 3,000 ft. and I also saw it on the edge of the high screes at nearly 6,000 ft. It was also abundant along all the routes at the appropriate level together with some fine *H. fagi*, a few *Hipparchia alcyone* D. & S. and *H. semele* L. Among new species noted were *Mellicta athalia* Rott., *Pyrameis cardui* L., *Aglais urticae* L., *Coenonympha pamphilus* L., and *C. dorus* Esp. But an interesting record was seeing a male *Thecla betulae* L. feeding at a flowerhead, a species seldom seen on the wing. In fact this was a new record for Mr. McLeod's list for the area. A few *Gonepteryx cleopatra* L. were still flying on the mountain's slopes. But my last day for collecting in that delightful region was marred by having had my hired Peugeot car stolen from a public car park by night with the loss of a good deal of entomological equipment. However, I was able to get a new car the same day from Avignon and on the 28th sped down to the autoroute to Marseilles airport where I embarked on a plane that afternoon and was back in London two hours later after what had proved a most rewarding brief reacquaintance with this grand part of southern France.

Altogether 38 species of butterflies were observed between August 21st and 28th, as well as a good many *Callimorpha hera* L.



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