

Some Butterflies in France, 1968

By Major-General Sir GEORGE JOHNSON, K.C.V.O., C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.

I was fortunate in being able to spend five weeks in France from 23rd June to 27th July 1968, and carried out quite an extensive tour. I collected in the Vosges around Contrexeville, near Grenoble, in the Massif Centrale, and finally in the Hautes Alpes centred on Briançon.

My wife and I flew with our car from Lydd to Le Touquet on 23rd June and motored south east to Contrexeville which we made our centre until 1st July. This little town, once a prosperous Edwardian watering place seemed now rather deserted and depressed. There are many beautiful deciduous forests within easy reach. We explored many of them by car and on foot in search of *Limenitis populi* E., *Euphydryas maturna* L. and *Pararge aethina* Scop., our main objectives in this area, but results were rather disappointing.

Of *L. populi* we saw and took only two, a male and a female, both rather tattered, flying about the road in a clearing of the Fôret de Morimond, 26 Km. south west of Contrexeville. Of *E. maturna* we also caught only two, not in the best condition, in a ride in the forest on the western outskirts of Contrexeville on 29th and 30th June. *P. aethina* we did not see at all, it was probably over.

A rather marshy valley in the Fôret de Darney, 23 Km. to the south east, produced many *Brenthis ino* Rott. including a fine albino on 25th June, and on 28th June we saw and missed a fine *Apatura iris* L. sucking at a putrid grass snake which had been run over by some passing car.

On 1st July we left Contrexeville for St Martin d'Uriage on the outskirts of Grenoble. Shortly after passing through the small town of Gray (Hte. Saône) we turned down a side road for lunch and found ourselves in a wood containing much poplar and aspen. It was a very hot day and no sooner had we got out of the car than several apaturids came to investigate. Both *A. iris* and *A. ilia* Schiff. were present. My wife had a large floppy hat which seemed to interest them and she got a fresh *A. ilia form clyte*. I missed several but got one *iris*. We went on to Dole, where we had booked a room for the night, but returned next morning, which was again very hot. The apaturids were again much in evidence. My wife took another *ilia* and I secured two male *iris* in the car, which acted as quite a good trap. All were very fresh.

We went on about mid-day to St Martin where we arrived in a thunder storm. Next day, 3rd July, it was still overcast. We went to inspect a marshy area on the banks of the Isère near by, where we hoped to find *Coenonympha oedippus* Fabr., but nothing was on the wing. Next day in sunshine we returned but only succeeded in finding one of this rare butterfly. This locality is traversed by reedy ditches, dry at this time, but is much overgrown by bushes and scrub. Yellow flag, the food plant of *C. oedippus*, was not very common, on the edges of the bushy areas. It may be that the colony has been much reduced by a shortage of food plant due to encroachment by the scrub. We caught and examined numbers of *Aphantopus hyperantus* L. which much resemble *oedippus*, but with no further success.

On Friday, 5th July, we set off across the Rhone for the Massif Centrale—destination Le Rozier in the spectacular gorge of the River Tarn. Here we stayed at a very pleasant hotel until 10th July. Our main collecting

ground was on the slopes of the gorge immediately east of the close-by and rather mediaeval village of Peyreleau. Here there was plenty flying, *Agapetes galathea* L. in swarms, including many females of the form with white undersides; many *Pyronia bathsheba* Fabr. (rather worn), *Brenthis daphne* Schiff. and very dark *Maculinea arion* L. One of my objectives was the very brilliant large blue form of the female of *Meleagris daphnis* Schiff. This was scarce, probably just emerging, and we only got one female and several males. There were many flowers, the most peculiar being the lizard orchis which I have never seen so numerous before, occurring repeatedly on the slopes in groups of up to eight or nine plants.

On 10th June we moved to Langogne (Lozère), and the next day we spent on the Col de Meyrand where the very local *Erebia ottomana* H.-S. was abundant by the roadside on the north side of the pass. A nice series was soon procured. On 12th June we worked a marshy valley by the roadside just above the rather squalid little hamlet of Les Salesses, 21 Km. south west of Langogne. Here *Clossiana titania* Hübn. was common and fresh, *Mellitaea diamina* Lang. was also common and very fresh, and we took a few of *Boloria sifanica* Gr.-Gr. on the bog. *B. ino* was common, and to my surprise we noted a few specimens of *E. ottomana* which had no doubt drifted down from the slopes above.

Next day we moved westwards to the mountains of Cantal. On the way to Aurillac where we had booked rooms, we stopped at the Lioran road tunnel to investigate a meadow at the foot of a telesiege on the south-eastern side of the tunnel. Here we immediately found *Erebia sudetica* Stdgr. flying in some numbers and very fresh. It is to be hoped that this limited locality will not be interfered with further, but there were some rather ominous earth-moving machines parked nearby, which might indicate an intention to enlarge the already extensive tarmac car park. The hills here are covered with an extensive conifer forest, and we passed a road sign depicting a large stag and a warning against "Le gros gibier du Lioran". I believe that as well as deer and no doubt pig, there are a number of Corsican moufflon naturalised in the woods. Needless to say we saw none. Next day was overcast and rainy. We drove round the rather spectacular Puy Mary but nothing was on the wing.

On 15th July we started back for Grenoble but struck a patch of bad weather with fresh snow on the high tops of the Alps on 17th July. Another visit to the Isere marshes was unsuccessful.

On 18th July we moved eastwards into the Hautes Alpes, basing ourselves at Briançon where we were in search of various passes of 6000 feet or more, as well as the hot comparatively low level valley of the Durance running south from Briançon.

On the way over from Grenoble we stopped on the Col du Lautaret. Here at about 5000 feet we saw *Erebia alberganus* de Pr., *E. euryale* Esp., *E. pharte* Hübn., *Coenonympha satyrion* Esp., *Boloria pales* Schiff., *Aricia allous* H.-S., *Agriades glandon* de Pr. and *Polyommatus eros* Ochs.

At Briançon we profited from Baron de Worms's experiences in the Durance Valley in 1964.

On 19th July we motored down the valley to St. Crepin, crossed the river, and drove back over a minor road via the hamlet of Pallon on the right bank of the Durance. Insects were numerous and just on the southern outskirts of Pallon we found a roadside ditch with water, with many blues at the water and damp earth. The most interesting were

many *Agrodiaetus damon* Schiff. and a few *Meleagris daphnis*. In a meadow just above we got one female *damon* and many more males.

Twentieth and 21st July we devoted to a search for *Erebia aethiopellus* Hfmg. The first day we went to the Col d'Izoard about 18 Km. south east of Briançon, and on the second to the Col d'Allos 104 Km. to the south. Above the tree line on both passes there were a few of a small *Erebia* on grass at the edge of screes which appeared to me to be *Erebia gorge* Hübn. Fortunately I took a small series and on returning to England all but one were identified as *E. aethiopellus* which I thought I had failed to find. Other insects at this altitude (5000-6000 feet) included *Colias phiconome* Esp., *Oeneis aello* Hübn. (one only on Col. d'Izoard), a few *E. pluto* de Pr. on the screes, *E. cassioides* Hohenwarth, *E. euryale*, *E. alberganua*, *E. epiphron* Knoch., *E. gorge*, *Albulina orbitulus* de Pr. (one only on Col. d'Allos), worn *Eumedonia chiron* Rott. and some *Mellicta varia* Meyer Dür. both on the Col d'Allos.

On 22nd July we made an expedition to the Col de Mont Cenis to try for *E. montanus* de Pr. at a spot where I had seen a few in 1966. We failed to find it, I suppose it was too early. *P. eros* was not uncommon, and we took a female *E. pluto* some way from any scree.

On 23rd July, our last day at Briançon, we went up the Argentière valley and worked some of the juniper-covered slopes above Ailefroide. Here our most interesting captures were a few *Aricia nicias* Meig., a new insect to me.

On 24th July we started back for the Channel in rather dull weather, reaching Lydd on 27th July.

We had, on the whole, a very successful trip, and considering the generally poor summer experienced this year, we lost very few days from lack of sun. The student riots and strikes in May seemed to have frightened most foreign tourists and we had the country very much to ourselves (apart from the French!). This was nice for us but most unprofitable to all the hoteliers.

I am much indebted to Mr. R. F. Bretherton for his help in advising on localities in the Massif Centrale for *E. ottomana*, *E. sudetica* and *C. titania*.

Castlesteads, Brampton, Cumberland. 30.x.1968.

Isle of Canna Report for 1968

By J. L. CAMPBELL

The season opened with a severe blizzard on April 2, producing snow three or four inches deep, with much drifting. The moth trap could not go into action until April 9; between then and April 17, when I had to leave the island for five weeks, it produced the usual spring species, *Dasypolia templi* Thunbg., *Cerastis rubricosa* Schiff, *Orthosia gothica* L., *O. stabilis* Schiff., *O. incerta* Hufn., *Xylena vetusta* Hb., *Xylocampa areola* Esp., *Earophila badiata* Schiff. and *Nyssia zonaria* Schiff.

From the 20th of May the summer was the most glorious anyone in the Hebrides could remember for sustained hot calm sunny weather—a fact which the B.B.C. weather reporters appeared to be most reluctant to admit until a state of actual drought had been reached in mid-August. I returned to Canna on May 22. There were brief spells of rain at the



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