

Conservation Visit Zdanice, Czech Republic 20th October – 5th Sept 09



Here we all are, ready to leave this small south Moravia town of Ždánice in the Czech Republic. (I'm the old bearded sad one to right of Zuzana and in front of Nigel Spring just in case you were wondering).

The few words that follow are a brief report attempting to document why I came, what I saw and what I brought away with me. Not easy but here goes:

I am 57 years old and until recently had been running my own computer consultancy business in the UK. My passion has always been conservation & wildlife so the trip to Zdanice was for me an opportunity to meet like minded people with a similar passion.

I had no preconceived expectations before setting out on this expedition; having an open mind about things I find can protect me from the curved balls that life sometimes throws at you. What I experienced was something very magical that only happens once in a lifetime. The abundance and diversity of both wildlife and plant species was beyond anything I had previously encountered. The people I shared this experience with quickly became "family" and everything went exceptionally smoothly thanks to the organisational skills and dedication of the people who looked after us.

The European Conservation Action Network (EuCAN) trip to Zdanice began in London on Thursday 20th August 2009 and returned safely on Saturday 5th September 2009. In total there were thirteen volunteers from the UK but a number of local conservation experts and helpers joined us in Zdanice like David Novotny and Zuzana Veverkova. Our host and mentor was Nigel Spring with Kathy Henderson doing a lot of the "heavy lifting" behind the scene.

The purpose behind the project was to improve a small area of grassland in Zdanice, commonly referred to as 'Butterfly Valley'. Using an assortment of various tools like chainsaws, brush-cutters, loppers and hand saws to cut down scrub and invasive species such as Robinia (originally planned as a nectar source for bees in the local area) and Canadian Goldenrod:

Robinia

Canadian Golden Rod



Zdanice was once agricultural land made up of grazing meadows and crop fields. This led to the loss of vital butterfly habitats including woodland glades and species-rich grasslands. Grassland is very important in this area because there are many endangered species of butterflies that depend upon the habitat.

I have to admit I know very little about butterflies and although they are all very pretty the fleeting glimpses one get in the brief UK summer had never inspired me to grab a reference book in an effort to establish what type it was. It was either a red spotty one or cabbage white anything in between was missed. All this changed on the very first day when we visited butterfly valley.

From the accommodation to butterfly valley was a short 10 min journey in the white volunteer's bus but on this first trip to the valley we walked. It was not a particularly large field on the valley side an area of possibly one hectare cleared the year before by the first year volunteers. What hit me first was the numbers of different types of butterflies possibly fifteen or more. The excitement displayed by the group was electrifying as each species in turn was spotted and identified. It was like Christmas "look over here there is a...." and "I haven't seen one of these for years...." or "wow look at this!" drifting across the field. I guess I got caught up in the excitement of the moment and started to see butterflies in a different light, I guess this could have been the turning point for me.



Butterflies are not only beautiful insects that flutter by on a hot summer day they are an indicator species intertwined with nature itself something I was completely unaware of. It was the Alcon Blue one of those beautiful butterflies we spotted on that first day that got me thinking:

Some butterflies have special adaptations in order to provide their young with the best chance of survival, such as the Alcon Blue (*Maculinea alcon rebeli*).

The female of this species lays her eggs on flower buds of Cross Gentian (*Gentiana cruciata*).



Once the eggs hatch the caterpillar becomes cannibalistic and eats its siblings, then feeds on the seeds of Gentian. Only one caterpillar can survive in each seedpod of the flower, and it produces the same chemical pheromones which ants produce. This makes the adult ants believe the caterpillar to be ant larva, so they carry it to their anthill and feed it as though it is one of their young. In some species of Large Blues, the caterpillar is parasitic so it feeds on ant larvae in the anthill. The caterpillar then survives here for up to two years until it eventually develops into a butterfly.

All this going on beneath my feet and I was unaware of it happening. Nature and its fragile balance Take out just one small link and the resulting damage can be catastrophic.



Threats to butterflies also come from predators which feed on eggs, caterpillars, pupae and adults. Predators that prey upon them include other insects, for example Praying Mantis (*Mantis religiosa*), small mammals and birds. The Praying Mantis has a very clever technique for catching unsuspecting butterflies. It camouflages well in grassland and has a highly mobile head which turns to face movement. When its prey comes within easy reach, its two front legs shoot forwards and grasp the prey which is then devoured

On the first Sunday we went with David and Zuzka to meet up with Karel Šimeček of the Czech Ornithological Society in Kyjov, Arriving at our destination, the Mutenice fish ponds, we were greeted by a flock of Bee Eaters a prelude to a memorable day of bird watching We met up with George Candle a bird ringer who had a dozen bagged birds to show us. Amongst the birds he caught was a Kingfisher, Green woodpecker, Blackcaps, Redbacked shrike, warblers and the best treat of all, a Little Bittern:



On the same day we also watched a couple of Ospreys catching fish and a pair elusive Black Storks flying over the trees.

Birds were not the only species on the menu that day:



Grass snakes, fire bellied toads, sand lizards and a baby tree frog (above).

On the way back to our accommodation we had time to look for Sousliks (European Ground Squirrels) at Kyjov air field. We saw lots of holes but unfortunately not their occupants.

On the Monday we started the practical conservation work we had come to do. For the two weeks we were there it was hot and dry with temperatures reaching into the high 20's and low 30's. This meant starting early and finishing when the sun was at its hottest. Trying to get on site by 8am each morning was not always easy and by 2pm we were all pretty tired but everyone felt a great sense of achievement each and every day.



The Entomologists in our group helped considerably identifying the various groups, Latin names and then being able to translate and explain things about the species into English terminology. I was amazed at the level of knowledge everyone had in the group. To ask a question about almost anything relating to the wildlife and to be guaranteed an answer is an experience in itself.



It's amazing that when you just want to go curl up and rest there is always so many other activities going on to stop you.

In addition to the practical work that was undertaken each day. Festivals, concerts, wildflower walks, bike rides, excursions, parties and if you wanted to camp out with the goats by the open fire, that could be arranged too.



Entertainment and activities in abundance:



The local Histopedal festival held each year was great fun. The Mayor, Mr Miroslav Procházka, made a speech explaining enthusiastically to the crowd what we were doing here and presented Nigel with the Histopedal cup. Everybody enjoyed the evening dance at which most of the locals, young and old made an appearance.

So what did I take away with me?

- A greater understanding of just how fragile the balance of nature can be and a greater determination to do what I can to promote a better understanding to those who cannot see this
- The knowledge that there are like minded people who care about looking after the environment and there are people out there like Nigel Spring who can inspire people to do something that really counts.
- My first Butterfly guide book.

I saw more species in two weeks than I expect to come across in a lifetime. The scores on the doors were 47 different butterflies, over 60 different moths, 8 amphibians, 6 reptiles and 15 mammals (all listed at the end of this report)

I can honestly say that this was a once in a lifetime experience for me the memory of which I will always cherish. It has shown me that there are people out there who do care. My thanks to everyone for making this wonderful experience a reality.

My two days voluntary work will be restoring a butterfly reserve at Knowle Hill, Kenilworth at which I am a voluntary warden.
Richard Bones

The European Conservation Action Network was established in 2007 by The Kingcombe Trust, a charity based at The Kingcombe Centre in west Dorset, dedicated to conservation and environmental education (Reg. Charity no. 1054758), in association with the Dorset Branch of Butterfly Conservation. The project is funded through the Leonardo da Vinci section of the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme and has partners in France, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland.

Further information can be obtained from www.kingcombecentre.org.uk or from:

Nigel Spring
tel: 0044.1963.23559;
email: nigelsspring@yahoo.co.uk

Butterfly List for Eucan visit to Ždánice in Czech Republic
August 21st – Sept 5th 2009

Skippers – Hesperidae

Large Skipper	Ochlodes sylvanus
Silver-spotted Skipper	Hesperia comma

Whites - Pieridae

Wood White	Leptidea sinapis
Large White	Pieris brassicae
Small White	Pieris rapae
Green-veined White	Pieris napi
Bath White	Pontia edusa
Pale/Berger's Clouded Yellow	Colias hyale / alfacariensis
Eastern Clouded Yellow	Colias erate
Clouded Yellow	Colias crocea
Brimstone	Gonepteryx rhamni

Blues, Hairstreaks and Coppers – Lycaenidae

Purple Hairstreak	Quercusia quercus
Silver-studded Blue	Plebejus argus
Reverdin's Blue	Plebejus argyrognomon
Common Blue	Polyommatus icarus
Short-tailed Blue	Everes argiades
Eastern Short-tailed Blue	Everes decoloratus
Adonis Blue	Lysandra bellargus
Chalkhill Blue	Polyommatus coridon
Small Blue	Cupido minimus
Meleager's Blue	Meleageria daphnis
Holly Blue	Celastrina argiolus
Mountain Alcon Blue	Maculinea alcon rebeli eggs
Brown Argus	Aricia agestis
Small Copper	Lycaena phleas
Sooty Copper	Lycaena tityrus
Scarce Copper	Lycaena virgaureae

Fritillaries, Admirals, Emperors, Browns etc - Nymphalidae

Painted lady	Vanessa cardui
Red Admiral	Vanessa atalanta
Peacock	Inachis io
Map	Araschnia levana
Comma	Polygonia c-album
Small Tortoiseshell	Aglais urticae
Weaver's (Violet) Fritillary	Boloria dia
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	Boloria euphrosyne
Heath Fritillary	Mellitaea athalia
Nickerl's Fritillary	M. aurelia larvae
High-Brown Fritillary	Argynnis adippe
Silver-washed Fritillary	Argynnis paphia
Queen of Spain Fritillary	Issoria lathonia
Speckled Wood	Pararge aegeria
Great Banded Grayling	Brinthesia circe
Small Heath	Coenonympha pamphilus
Chestnut Heath	Coenonympha glycerion
Meadow Brown	Maniola jurtina
Dryad	Minois dryas

Swallowtails - Papilionidae

Swallowtail

Papilio machaon

Moth List for Eucan visit to Ždánice in Czech Republic August 21st – Sept 5th 2009

Angle Shades	<i>Phlogophora meticulosa</i>
Barred Hooktip	<i>Watsonalla cultraria</i>
Beautiful Hook Tip	<i>Laspeyria cexula</i>
Blood Vein	<i>Timandra comae</i>
Bright-line Brown Eye	<i>Lacanobia oleracea</i>
Broad Bordered Yellow U/W	<i>Noctua fimbriata</i>
Buff Tipped Moth	<i>Phalera bucephala</i>
Burnet Companion	<i>Euclidia glyphica</i>
Burnished Brass	<i>Dia chrysia christitis</i>
Clay	<i>Mythimna ferrago</i>
Clouded Buff	<i>Diacrisia sannio</i>
Common Carpet	<i>Epirrhoe alternata alternata</i>
Common Rustic	<i>Mesapamea secalis</i>
Common Swift	<i>Hepialus lupulinus</i>
Common Wainscot	<i>Mythimna pallens</i>
Delicate	<i>Mythimna vitellina</i>
Dewick's Plusia	<i>Macdonnoughia confusa</i>
Elephant Hawk Moth	<i>Deilephila elpenor</i>
Essex Emerald	<i>Thetidia smaragdaria</i>
Flame Shoulder	<i>Ochropleura plectra</i>
Flounced Rustic	<i>Luperina testacea</i>
Four-spotted Footman	<i>Lithosia quadra</i>
Fox Moth	<i>Macrothylacia rubi</i>
Gothic	<i>Naenia typica</i>
Green Carpet	<i>Colostygia pectinataria</i>
Grey Tortrix	<i>Cnephasia stephensiana</i>
Heart & Dart	<i>Agrotis exclamationis</i>
Hummingbird Hawkmoth	<i>Macroglossum stellarum</i>
Large Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua pronuba</i>
Latticed Heath	<i>Chiasma clathrata clathrata</i>
Lesser Broad bordered Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua janthina</i>
Lesser Yellow Underwing	<i>Noctua comes</i>
Light Emerald	<i>Campaea margaritata</i>
Lydd Beauty	<i>Peribatodes ilicaria</i>
Oak Hook-tip	<i>Drepana binaria</i>
Orange Swift	<i>Hepialus sylvina</i>
Pale Eggar	<i>Trichiura crataegi</i>
Pine hawkmoth	<i>Hyloicus pinastri</i>
Plain Clay	<i>Eugnorisma depuncta</i>
Ruby Tiger	<i>Phragmatobia fulginosa fulginosa</i>
Scarce Bordered Straw	<i>Helicoverpa armigera</i>
Setaceous Hebrew Character	<i>Xestia C-nigrum</i>
Shaded Broad-bar	<i>Scotopteryx chenopodiata</i>
Silver Y	<i>Autographa gramma</i>
Silvery Gem	<i>Eucarta virgo</i>
Six-striped Rustic	<i>Xestia sexstrigata</i>
Snout	<i>Hypena proboscidalis</i>
Square Spot Rustic	<i>Xestia xanthorapha</i>
Straw Dot	<i>Rivula sericealis</i>

Turnip Moth
Vapourer
Vine's Rustic

Agrotis segetum
Orygia antiqua
Hoplodrina ambigua

White-Point
Yellow Shell

Mythimna albipunctata
Camptogramma bilineata bilineata
Crambus perlilla

Rush Veneer
scarce reticulated migrant micro
Mother of Pearl
pink and brown micro
geometrid thorn group, crumpled wings
Noctuid

Pyrausta purpuralis
Nomophilla noctuella
Diasema reticulata
Pleuroptya ruralis
Oncocera semirubella
Artioria euonymaria

Agriphila latistria

SPECIES LIST FOR EUCAN VISIT TO ŽDÁNICE, CZECH REPUBLIC
August 19th – September 5th 2009

Amphibians

Common Toad
Common Frog
Agile Frog
Moor Frog
'Green Frog'
Green Tree Frog
Fire-bellied Toad
Green Toad

Bufo bufo
Rana temporaria
Rana dalmatina
Rana arvalis
Rana ridibunda group
Hyla arborea
Bombina bombina
Bufo viridis

Reptiles

Grass Snake
Adder
Slow Worm
Sand Lizard
Red-backed Sand Lizard
Common Lizard

Natrix natrix
Vipera berus
Anguis fragilis
Lacerta agilis
Lacerta agilis argus
Lacerta vivipara

Mammals

Roe Deer
Wild boar
Red Fox
Hedgehog
Rabbit
Harvest Mouse
Bank Vole
Wood Mouse
Shrew sp
Red Squirrel
Mole
Suslik
Muskrat
Pine marten
Pipistrelle Bat

Capreolus capreolus
Sus scrofa diggings and tracks
Vulpes vulpes
Erinaceus europaeus
Oryctolagus lagopus
Micromys minutus
Clethrionomys glareolus
Apodemus sylvaticus
Sorex sp
Sciurus vulgaris
Talpa europaea
Spermophilus citellus
Ondatra zibethicus
Martes martes
Pipistrellus pipistrellus