



# A closer look at the Dordogne

**David Simpson** provides holiday accommodation near Bergerac. Here he describes what south west France has to offer

**Above:** Black-veined White. **Below:** Spotted Fritillary, common in summer meadows.

The growth of nature travel opens up fantastic opportunities. Some have bypassed destinations on our doorstep in favour of more exotic hotspots, but popular family holiday destinations like the Dordogne deserve a closer look.

This stunning region in the south west of France lies at a crossroads of different habitats. A substantial area is limestone country, with gentle hills and meadows set among oak forests. In the west, arable plains and pine forest are interspersed with heathland and ponds, while on the north-east fringe are the volcanic foothills of the Massif Central. Throughout are clean, cool rivers, with the River Dordogne and its many tributaries adding to the range of wetland habitats.

France has a strong rural tradition and this, combined with a population density of less than half that of the UK,

has helped to maintain a countryside rich in wildlife.

Butterflies are abundant with around 110 species recorded. Fields teeming with butterflies are a common sight throughout the summer months. Many enthusiasts come here to see the many wetland species which are now threatened throughout Europe. The False Ringlet and Scarce Large Blue can be found in the north-west, while the Large Copper is found in a number of sites throughout the region. Visitors also have the chance to track down the Large Chequered and Chequered Skippers which have colonies here, along with the Marsh Fritillary. Two other Large Blue species can also be found, the Large and Alcon Blues.

## Roadside verges

Butterflies are most frequent and diverse in the central southern part of the Dordogne. It is a pleasure to be able to stop at almost any roadside verge or meadow in summer and be surrounded by butterflies. Some are familiar UK species, some very rare at home, while others have sadly been lost from the UK list altogether. There is also a scattering of more exotic species. Common and Scarce Swallow-

tail and Black-veined White fly powerfully across a range of habitats, the Brimstone is joined by its southern cousin the Cleopatra, and Wood Whites are a very common sight as they flap lazily through woodland habitats. The Map Butterfly, with its two distinct spring and summer broods, the Large Tortoiseshell, the Southern Purple Emperor and Southern White Admiral all add to the range of colourful Nymphalids. Even the Duke of Burgundy is still a relatively common sight in scrubby margins.

In high summer, fritillaries, skippers and blues can cause interesting identification challenges for the Lepidopterist. Smaller fritillaries could be Glanville, Marsh, Small Pearl-bordered, Weaver's, Spotted, Knapweed, Heath, False Heath or Meadow. To add to this joyful confusion, the larger fritillaries benefit from the opening up of sunny clearings and glades, and present a similar puzzle. Silver-washed, Queen of Spain, Dark-Green and Marbled are just some of the larger species present.

The challenge continues with the skippers, as potential for confusion comes from the Red-underwing, Grizzled, Large Grizzled, Safflower and Oberthur's. In scrubby areas there may be any one of up to six species of hairstreak. A selection of fruit trees planted just last November soon attracted a female Brown Hairstreak, spotted egg-laying on an apricot tree.

At our home near Bergerac we have been actively managing 10 acres of forest and meadow since 2003, creating clearings and glades, restoring a small orchard and controlling the expansion of scrub into meadow areas. The works are particularly directed towards the Large Blue and Reverdin's Blue, Duke of Burgundy, Large Tortoiseshell and Brown Hairstreak. Already, we are reaping the rewards. Over 50 species have been recorded in this small area – nearly half the Dordogne list.

Fields teeming with butterflies are a common sight throughout the summer months

**Clockwise from above:** The Large Tortoiseshell is one of the first spring butterflies; The Scarce Swallowtail isn't scarce in the Dordogne; Some of the rarest species are found at wetlands like the Beune Valley; Reverdin's Blue; Large Blue.

*Find out more...*

To find out more about David's accommodation, turn to the advert on page 27

## Naturetrek Butterfly Tours



Naturetrek's spectacular butterfly tours are going strong, with new destinations being added every year. Each tour is led by an expert guide, and 10% of the price goes straight to Butterfly Conservation to help with work to preserve and protect the UK's native species. For more information call 01962 733051 or go to [www.naturetrek.co.uk](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk)

### Butterfly Conservation Dates 2008/2009

#### Argentina

Monday 2nd February – Wednesday 11th February 2009  
Cost: £1,895

#### South Africa

Friday 27th March – Sunday 5th April 2009  
Cost: £2,195

#### The Cévennes

Tuesday 2nd June – Tuesday 9th June 2009  
Cost: £985

#### Morocco

Saturday 6th June – Saturday 13th June 2009  
Cost: £1,195

#### Croatia

Sunday 7th June – Sunday 14th June 2009  
Cost: £1,295

#### Hungary

Tuesday 16th June – Tuesday 23rd June 2009  
Cost: £1,050

#### Greece: the Peloponnese & Mount Parnassos

Saturday 20th June – Saturday 27th June 2009  
Cost: £1,395

#### French Pyrenees

Wednesday 1st July – Wednesday 8th July 2009  
Cost: £985

#### La Brenne

Thursday 3rd July – Tuesday 8th July 2008  
Cost: £895  
Thursday 2nd July – Tuesday 7th July 2009  
Cost: £895

#### The Italian Dolomites

Wednesday 9th July – Wednesday 16th July 2008  
Cost: £985  
Wednesday 8th July – Wednesday 15th July 2009  
Cost: £985

#### Sweden

Thursday 9th July – Wednesday 15th July 2009  
Cost: £1,295

#### Normandy – long weekend

Thursday 10th July – Monday 14th July 2008  
Cost: £695  
Thursday 9th July – Monday 13th July 2009  
Cost: £695

#### Slovakia

Saturday 11th July – Saturday 18th July 2009  
Cost: £995

#### Sri Lanka

Saturday 18th October – Monday 27th October 2008  
Cost: £1,395  
Saturday 17th October – Monday 26th October 2009  
Cost: £1,395

N.B. 2009 dates & prices subject to confirmation

