



Dan Danahar aged 14



Eastern Baton Blue



Glanville Fritillary



Grecian Copper

“There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly.”

R. Buckminster Fuller - 1970.

I have often thought of that quote, tracing the long, winding path from a curious boy on a foreign tarmac to the director of a regional conservation body. We began as a mere whisper of an idea; with no indication of the influence, we would eventually possess.

The Sun Blessed Promised Land

The moment the wheels of the Dan-Air charter plane kissed the runway at Ioannis Kapodistrias International, a new chapter of my life began. It was 10:33 a.m. on the 5th of May 1976 and I was precisely fourteen years, six months, and six days old. Stepping off the aircraft, the air hit me—a heavy, luxurious warmth already baking under a sun that had crested the horizon with steady, golden intent. I was a passionate young naturalist, and the island of Corfu was a promised land. I felt a visceral thrill, a boyish conviction that every square metre held an undiscovered treasure. I didn't have to venture far. The very ground near our hotel teemed with life: the damp sheen of Green Toads, the slow, ancient movements of Tortoises, the watchful stillness of Terrapins, and the quick rustle of Snakes in the scrub. The small world was even more exotic: magnificent Giant Centipedes, brittle looking Stick Insects, predatory Mantids, the dizzying metallic blue flight of Carpenter Bees, and, at night, the magical punctuation of Fireflies. But it was the butterflies that held my heart, an obsession I'd cultivated the previous summer. I was mesmerised by the delicate **Green-underside Blues**, the jet fighter like behaviour of **Lulworth Skippers**, the fiery patterns of **Glanville Fritillaries**, the soaring drama of **Scarce** and **Common Swallowtails**, the quiet beauty of **Orange Tips**, and the jewel-like flash of **Green Hairstreaks**.

Then the memory that would anchor the next fifty years. My father hired a moped—a buzzing, tinny chariot—and we ventured into the island's mountainous north. There, suspended in the bright air, was a **Southern Swallowtail**. It descended, not fluttering, but gracefully gliding, a vision of deep yellow and black velvet. We stopped. We dismounted. We watched as it drew nectar from the purple crown of a thistle. It would take nearly half a century for me to realise that we hadn't just seen a butterfly; we had witnessed it at the very pinnacle of its flight season, a perfect moment in time.

The Whimsy Takes Root

The years dissolved, yet the vivid memory of that Southern Swallowtail never faded. Nearly forty years later, on April 27, 2014, I acted. I created a Facebook group for anyone who shared my fascination with Corfiot butterflies. It was a whimsy, a simple desire to write a book—a comprehensive volume with definitive distribution maps. The enthusiasm, like a gentle contagion, spread. Soon, a small but dedicated community of butterfly enthusiasts was collaborating across a digital divide.

Those early years were a blur of intense labour for me; I spent hours sharing knowledge, scrutinising photographs, and teaching members the diagnostic features that separated one species from the next. It was an investment that paid a profound dividend. Within five years, that disparate group of amateurs had become a highly competent team, able to identify most of the island's butterflies, possessing a collective and solid understanding of Corfu's lepidoptera.

The Tiger's Cry

Our shared passion for conservation was abruptly tested. The discovery of a breeding colony of the exotic Plain Tiger butterfly in the northeast was a triumph, but it was immediately followed by a crisis. The local municipality, in a routine clearing of the dried eel grass, damaged the hostplants supporting the colony. The threat to their fragile existence was immediate and stark. A wave of concerned messages flooded our group. It became chillingly clear: we could no longer be just observers. We needed a formal conservation organisation to protect Corfu's butterflies and moths. But action demands proof, and proof demands data. The path was clear: we had to encourage everyone, residents and visitors alike, to survey butterfly species across Corfu, turning observation into evidence. The age of citizen science on Corfu had begun.

To make mapping feasible, we needed a digital fortress. Bob Foreman, a biodiversity expert I knew, wrote the foundational mapping code. Steve Chesire designed a website using Bob's code, and David Shearan took those elements and forged them into a state-of-the-art biodiversity mapping system. That platform became the central loci of our community, drawing in every observation and creating a data store of great ecological value. Drawing on my thirty years as a Biodiversity Educationalist, I led the essential work of outreach. Our most visible, most effective gesture was the production and free distribution of 15,000 A1 posters that displayed every butterfly discovered on the island. This essential work was the launchpad for the Corfu Butterfly Survey (CBS), the central project that would run from the beginning of 2021 through to the end of 2025.

Beyond the Horizon

We formalized our commitment. Corfu Butterfly Conservation (CBC) was incorporated as a UK Community Interest Company on December 22, 2021. Managed by a dedicated Greek and English committee, we were now an official entity, capable of meaningful work.

Through the CBS, we unlocked deep insights into the ecology of the island's butterfly assemblages. Furthermore, our scientific work investigated the devastating effects of climate change-induced wildfires and changes in land management. We began research into the genetic diversity of the Corfiot species, seeking a window into the ancient origins of every butterfly on the island. And, triumphantly, thanks to the Rothschild Foundation, the Ionian Environmental Foundation (IEF), and the Kapodistrias Museum, we secured the funding for our own dedicated Educational Outreach Officer.

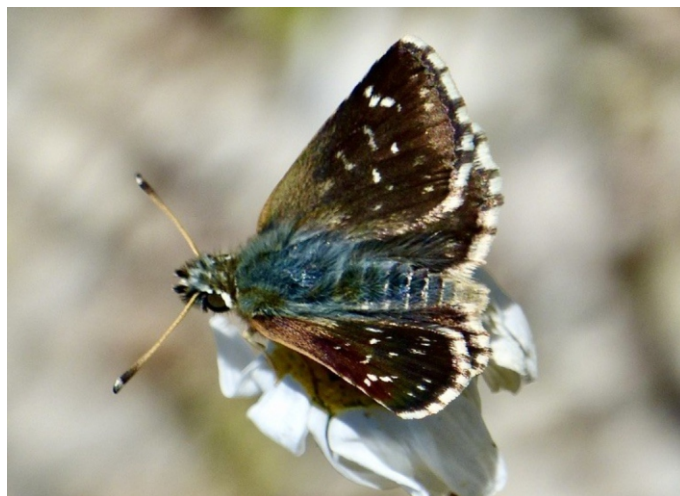
The IEF later funded a crucial study on the 2023 wildfire impact. On the final day of our fieldwork, I was joined by Dr. Simon Karythis, the IEF's executive director. He spoke with the quiet intensity of an ecologist who saw the bigger picture.



Green Hairstreak



Green-underside Blue



Hungarian Skipper



Lulworth Skipper



Millet Skipper



Orange Tip



Scarce Swallowtail



Southern Swallowtail

The IEF represents the entire Ionian region," he observed, "but so much of our work focuses here, on Corfu. It's unfortunate that no organization like CBC exists to serve all the Ionian Islands." His words hung in the air. The CBS was concluding at the end of 2025. The implication was unmistakable: the moment had arrived to expand our reach, to forge a collaborative presence across the entire region.

The Next Chapter - Ionian Butterfly Conservation.

The transition felt both inevitable and exhilarating. On November 27, 2025, we became Ionian Butterfly Conservation (IBC). With the invaluable support of Dr. Ken Elsom, who wrote more code for our website, we gained the capacity to collect data from every major island in the archipelago. Simultaneously, David Shearan rebuilt our digital infrastructure, upgrading the website to serve this wider region. We established new Facebook groups - for Lefkas, Ithaca, Kephallonia, and Zakynthos - replicating our successful grassroots model. The success we had experienced in Corfu would now inform our approach across the entire Ionian Archipelago.

Now, a new kind of change is upon us. Anne Sordinas, our Outreach Officer, and I are commencing work on the Atlas, a mammoth project that will demand our singular focus. For the good of the organization, I must relinquish the daily reins. On April 27, 2026, I will step aside as Executive Director of IBC. I will remain as Chairman of the Board, but we are actively searching for a new leader to pilot the day-to-day operations. It is a voluntary role, perfect for a passionate soul - a bright, early-career professional or a seasoned individual ready to bring their experience to bear on a rewarding challenge. We hope to find someone with dual language skills and a background in biological conservation. By the time you read this article, we hope to have narrowed our list of candidates to a select and valued few. This is a moment of immense potential for butterfly and moth conservation across the entire region.

As I reflect on this journey, I keep returning to Buckminster Fuller's words. When we were just a few people on a Facebook group, there was nothing to suggest we would become this influential, leading force. Yet, here we are, ready for the next chapter.

Dr Dan Danahar

Executive Director

Ionian Butterfly Conservation

dan@ionianbutterflyconservation.org

01 January 2026.

