

Spialia phlomidis (Herrich-Schäffer, 1845) confirmed for Bulgaria (Lepidoptera: Hesperiiidae)

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Abstract. A population of the scarce Hesperiid species *Spialia phlomidis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1845) on Mt. Alibotush (Slavyanka) in SW Bulgaria is reported. This seems to be the first definite colony of *phlomidis* in Bulgaria as the previous reports have remained unconfirmed ever since. Brief observations on the ecology and habitat of the species together with remarks on some interesting sympatric Rhopalocera and its conservation status are included as well.

Samenvatting. *Spialia phlomidis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1845) bevestigd voor Bulgarije (Lepidoptera: Hesperiiidae)

De auteur vermeldt het voorkomen van een populatie van de zeldzame *Spialia phlomidis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1845) op Mt. Alibotusch (Slavyanka). Dit blijkt de eerste zekere vermelding van de soort in Bulgarije te zijn, gezien alle vorige meldingen onbevestigd bleven. Er worden beknopte gegevens over de ecologie en het biotoop van de soort, met begeleidende soorten, gegeven en het voorkomen wordt besproken.

Résumé. Confirmation de la présence en Bulgarie de *Spialia phlomidis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1845) (Lepidoptera: Hesperiiidae)

L'auteur mentionne la présence d'une population de l'Hespéride rare *Spialia phlomidis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1845) au Mont Alibotusch (Slavyanka) en Bulgarie du sud-ouest. Il semble s'agir de la première mention certaine de cette espèce en Bulgarie., vu que toutes les mentions précédentes n'ont pas été confirmées. Des données succinctes quant à l'écologie et le biotope de cette espèce, ainsi que les espèces accompagnatrices, sont présentées et sa fréquence est traitée.

Key words: *Spialia phlomidis* - Mt. Alibotush - Bulgaria - distribution - sympatric Rhopalocera - conservation.

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Introduction

Following Warren (1926), Buresch & Tuleschkow (1930: 147) suggested in their comprehensive work on Bulgarian Lepidoptera that *Spialia phlomidis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1845) would probably be found in S Bulgaria in the future. The first actual record of this Hesperiid from Bulgaria is by de Jong (1978: 52). He quotes some additional records of *phlomidis* to those in his previous work (de Jong 1974) and, among the localities of newly examined specimens, mentions material (number of specimens, date and collector not stated) from "Bulgaria: Stanimaka (ZSM [Zoologische Staatsammlung

München])". This most probably dates back from not later than the first decades of our century as "Stanimaka" is the name at that time of Asenovgrad, a town at the northern foot of Mt. Rhodopi, at ca. 350 m. Its outskirts have occasionally been visited by Bulgarian entomologists ever since the beginning of the century but none has found *phlomidis* there. Since 1990, I have been carrying out regular and extensive collecting in the outskirts myself, especially in the valley of Chepelarska river just south of the town. However, despite resulting, apart from numerous Heterocera, in more than 105 Rhopalocera species (all to be discussed in a later work), this effort has so far failed to turn this particular species up. Therefore I believe that *Spialia phlomidis* does not presently occur there, although superficially the habitat might seem suitable for it, especially the rough, arid slopes of the valley.

A second record of *phlomidis* is found in Krzywicki (1981: 45): "Drei falter gesammelt bei Kresna, 15 Juli 1974". Following this, Ganev (1985b: 119) lists the species among Bulgarian butterflies and pronounces it "endangered" (Ganev 1985a: 116). Since, despite that the Kresna gorge is one of the most popular Bulgarian places with both foreign and Bulgarian lepidopterists, no other records of the species are known, it seems unlikely that an existing colony of *phlomidis* (suggested by the number of Krzywicki's specimens) would have remained overlooked for almost 20 years of active observations. Anyway, even more than in the Asenovgrad case, the arid biotopes in the gorge seem to fit the known habitat demands of the species and an eventual confirmation of its occurrence there should not come as a surprise.

New record

Considering the above discussed situation, it is therefore interesting to report the discovery of an isolated population of *Spialia phlomidis* on Mt. Alibotush (Slavyanka) in SW Bulgaria. The Lepidoptera of this mountain were intensively studied only during a rather short period in the late 20's - early 30's (see e.g. Drenowsky 1932, Tuleschkow 1931 and references therein). This species, however, remained unrecorded then, though it seems very probable that specimens were indeed seen on wing but (as I did at first) considered to be *Pyrgus cinarae* (Rambur, [1839]) and so not further pursued.

Spialia phlomidis was found on 11.VII.1993 on a southeast-facing calcareous slope of Mt. Alibotush at the upper end of Hambar Dere valley, to the southwest of Paril village. Specimens were observed flying along dry, very

steep grassy places with sparse trees of *Pinus heldreichii* Christ and barren screes, at 1600 m and probably higher (greater altitude could not be attained on this trip). The high altitude of the locality is remarkable since at this geographical latitude (in Macedonia) *phlomidis* is usually a lowland inhabitant and reaches such heights exceptionally (Turner 1964). Of the herbaceous vegetation, only very few species, dominated by *Sideritis scardica* Grisebach (Labiatae), were still in flower. I could count not less than 5-6 *phlomidis* specimens, but in the midday heat none of them were seen either feeding on flowers or mating. Most were patrolling in a rapid, violent flight up and down the slope and almost never settled, which made them very hard to capture. *Pyrgus cinarae*, on the contrary, flies more slowly and in a more 'fluttery' way and settles more frequently. Only one *phlomidis* male was collected while resting on a dried gramineous stem (Fig. 1, A & B). It was impossible to find out if any females were present as well. This find and the previous records of *Spialia phlomidis* from Bulgaria are presented in Map 1.

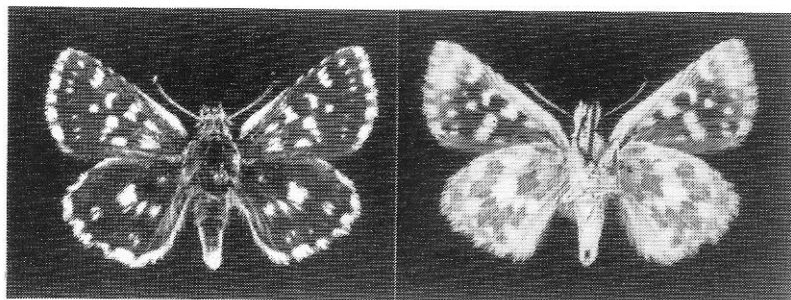
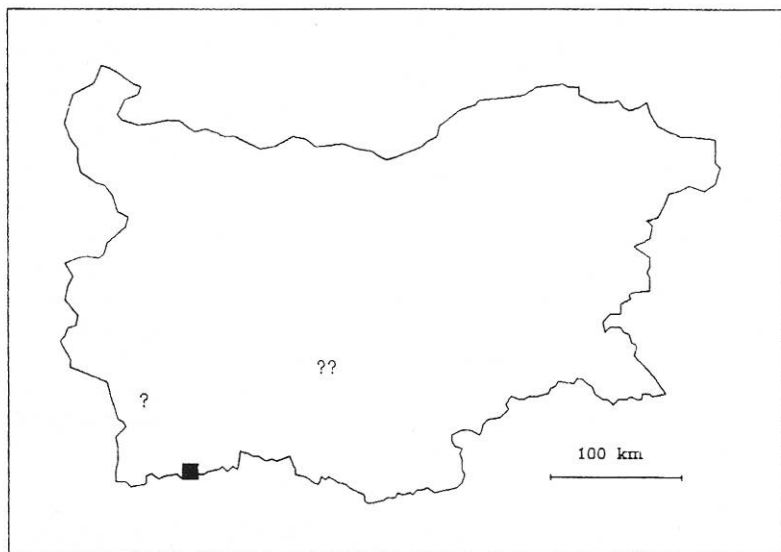


Fig. 1. *Spialia phlomidis* (Herrich-Schäffer, 1845), male. SW Bulgaria, Mt. Alibotush, 1600 m, 11.VII.1993, leg. et coll. Z. Kolev. (left: upperside, right: underside. Enlarged x1.5. Photo: R. Tyynelä (Zoological Museum of Helsinki, Finland).



Map 1. Records of *Spialia phlomidis* from Bulgaria. Single question mark: "Kresna" (Krzywicki 1981); double question mark: "Stanimaka [Asenovgrad]" (de Jong 1978); black square: Mt. Alibotush, 1600 m (leg. Z. Kolev).

Sympatric Rhopalocera

More than 50 butterfly species were observed that day, most of them feeding on flowers, mating or just seeking shade in the valley Hambar Dere at ca. 1400-1500 m. Among the more interesting of them, *Polyommatus (Agrodiaetus) nephohiptamenos* (Brown & Coutsis, 1978), *P. (s. str.) eroides* (Frivaldsky, 1835), *Hipparchia aristaeus senthes* (Fruhstorfer, 1908) and *Satyrus ferula* (Fabricius, 1793) should be mentioned. Of these, the only species which preferred the slopes to the valley seemed to be *Satyrus ferula*. It was flying in striking abundance in the same habitat as *Spialia phlomidis* (but only single specimens down in the valley). Though *Polyommatus nephohiptamenos* tended to gather in the valley at that time of the day, one male was also found well up the slope at 1600 m as well as a single male of *Polyommatus (Agrodiaetus) aroaniensis* (Brown, 1976) (Kolev 1994).

Conservation status

The so far single colony of *Spialia phlomidis* on Mt. Alibotush is situated, fortunately enough, within the Slavyanka Biosphere Reserve that comprises a considerable area of the Bulgarian part of the massif. This,

combined with the mountain's immediate proximity to the border, results in a very low level of human disturbance in the highland habitats that takes place mainly in summer (herb-collecting mostly). Therefore, the status that *phlomidis* has been awarded by Ganev (1985a: 116) does not seem justified; I find no immediate conservation measures necessary. However, because of the isolated position of this population and its relatively small size, as well as the general scarcity of the species, it seems appropriate that *Spialia phlomidis* is presumed vulnerable in Bulgaria.

Acknowledgment

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