



Aetherie Fritillary

Melitaea aetherie (Hübner, 1826)

DESCRIPTION

Wingspan: from 4 to 4.5 cm. **Open wings:** Both wings are orange with dark patterns. Male butterflies two series of dots. The upper one is bigger than the other, which can miss some dots. Female butterflies have longer and bigger dots. On the hindwing and forewing outer margins, we can see series of two arches which are one above the other, and wider in the case of female butterflies. Some female butterflies have large brown patterns which cover almost the entire orange background. **Closed wings:** The hindwings background is white or vague yellow. There are rounded orange spots outlined in yellowish colour that are surrounded by arched lines which face the inner part of the wings. There is another arched line parallel to the others that faces the outer part of the wings. The space between these opposite arches is broad and coloured in different orange shades.

KEY FOR VISUAL IDENTIFICATION

MALE



A series of large spots

Series of two arches, one above another
Rounded orange spots

Series of small dots, which can be absent

Arched lines

Opposite arched lines



Broad space between the arches coloured in orange

SIMILAR SPECIES

Knapweed Fritillary: When its wings are closed, the main difference between this and the above species reduces to a small space between the opposite arched lines. When its wings are open, both sexes have a clearly marked checked pattern, and a prominent long spot at the forewing anal angle. **Meadow Fritillary** and **Provençal Fritillary:** Both of these species are smaller, and can only be confused when they stretch their wings, though both of the species bear patterns which are more similar to a red than in the case of the Aetherie Fritillary.



Knapweed Fritillary



Meadow and Provençal Fritillary



BIOLOGY & HABITAT

It flies in May and June, and takes one generation a year to do so.

Its favourite habitats are open, sunny and dry areas, such as shrubs, grassland and sparse woodland, usually placed at the foot of the chalky mountains, where plenty of this species caterpillars foodplants, like the cardoon (artichoke thistle, or wild artichoke, *Cynara cardunculus*) and *C. baetica* live.

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
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DISTRIBUTION

These butterflies are rare and their number is decreasing in Andalusia due to the changes in the use of the ground, above all, the abandon of shepherding, which was the reason why the conditions for the growth of this species foodplants were perfect. The other reasons are the use of herbicides and olive groves spreading. It is considered to be an almost endangered species in the 'Libro Rojo de los Invertebrados de España' [The Red Book of the Spanish Invertebrates], but, surprisingly, it does not form part of the Andalusian list of endangered species. It is neither protected by varied environmental regulations. The species has not been spotted along the GMP, but there is a colony which is close to stage 22, and this is the place where it is most probable to be found. Other locations which are suitable for the species are on the stages that go through the Serranía de Ronda, the north of the province, and the Llana and Huma Mountains, at stage 20.

