

## June 2008. Beasties big and small, Lithuania & Finland.

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June's undoubted highlight was in the third week, a lifetime's ambition finally fulfilled with superb views of Brown Bears in a remote forest in Finland, simply mindblowing. And, on top of that, also managed to connect with Europe's second ever Swinhoe's Snipe!!!

Prior to that though, plenty of time for action on the homefront. All started well on the 1st - at Labanoras, on a day of unbroken sun and soaring temperatures, an overdue guest had appeared! Just days after I had feared them no more, I arrived to see a familiar flash of vivid blue hurtling across the track, fantastic, my Rollers were back, or at least one of them! It was the female, she settled on nearby wires, the very same wires as favoured in past years, but no sign of the male, a most distinctive bird with a bill deformity, I can only hope he will be along in a day or so. Just beyond her, very nice indeed, two Lesser Spotted Eagles quartered the meadows, not the amusement of the Marsh Harriers. Plus, one Corncrake and, in very good numbers, Red-backed Shrikes popped up all over the place!

1-3 June. Little beasties.

For all the bird news in early June though, the days were most remarkable for dragonflies - at Labanoras, literally hundreds of Northern White-faced Darters along the forest edge and poolsides, most impressive. Also a number of other species too ....a Broad-bodied Chaser, a couple of Downy Emeralds, several Club-tailed Dragonflies, a couple of Hairy Dragonflies and one or two Black-lined Skimmers. Damselflies too, amongst the species identified, the first Red-eyed Damselflies appearing on their favoured lily pads. Many blue damselflies about too, soon to be identified!

6-9 June. A visitor rolls in.

Hallowed month, the heights of the breeding season, always a lure enough to bring in the occasional human visitor from overseas. So it was, as temperatures nudged towards 30 C and the sun beat down, a certain birder from the UK arrived, chomping at the bit for the specialities of Eastern Europe.

Day One

Where better to start the entertainment than an evening at Baltai Voke, a chance for a first recce and a dunking into the spectacular evening choruses. Minutes after arriving, the first Red-backed Shrikes were popping up, sentinels atop their chosen snags. With Marsh Warblers emerging from beds of nettles and Great Reed Warblers inching their way into view, things were starting well. River Warblers and Thrush Nightingales singing from bushes all around, Bitterns booming left and centre, Black Terns flitting over, it was all classic East European stuff. For the ears of a newcomer into this land, the incessant quarking and croaking of frogs and toads by the score added a touch of the exotica, as must have the families of newly-fledged Great Grey Shrikes to the eyes, not to mention flotillas of Whooper Swans and cygnets. A short walk added fly-over Golden Orioles, yet more singing River Warblers and the first Penduline Tits of the weekend, a pair visiting a nest in a trackside birch.

As dusk began to creep in, three Whiskered Terns swooped in, calling as they went, but anti-social things they are, they chose flight paths to stay right in the setting sun! Not so with the the wheeling flocks of Starlings, a few thousand already gathering in post-breeding flocks to roost in the reedbeds. Bitterns booming, Nightjars churring, a Woodcock roding, the first evening came to an end.

## Day Two

Back to the patch, Baltoji Voke doing its stuff. After some crippling views of Marsh Warblers and a few stunning Common Rosefinches out enjoying the morning sunshine, it was time to start notching up the birds. Thrush Nightingales sat and sang, a Barred Warbler popped up and down in low bushes, finally giving good views some ten minutes later. Marsh Harriers quartered and three quite splendid White-winged Black Terns appeared on a pool close by. By mid-morning, with the sun rising and beating ever down, we were in for a couple of treats, the first being an exquisite Penduline Tit nipping into its nest hanging just above our heads, the second a pair of Black-necked Grebes in full summer plumage. All very nice. Rather more strange, however, was a Roe Deer swimming across a pool!

After zooming off for lunch, a drive punctuated by several stops for three rather rare Black-veined Whites and a stunning Camberwell Beauty, we then headed off to meadows to seek out our next targets. We didn't have to wait long - first singing Quails and Corncrakes, then directly overhead a Lesser Spotted Eagle, one of my guest's main targets. More Great Grey Shrikes with young, oodles of White Storks about, then a quick drive up through some forest to reach a vast area of heathland, a habitat none too common in Lithuania. Here, after a trek of many a kilometre, with barely a bird to note, we hit a little purple patch ...two Woodlarks, one male Black Grouse and a pair of Tawny Pipits!

Then events took a bit of a tumble! A long walk back, a brief Black Woodpecker en route, then we headed off to an area of extensive peatland ...oops, mistake! Not oops from a birds perspective - discovered a breeding colony of Black Terns, complete with two pairs of White-winged Black Terns - but oops I decided to take a track that wasn't designed for cars! An hour till dark and I got the car well and truly stuck, grounded on stumps and branches protruding from the peat bog! A Spotted Crake was calling in the twilight, several Nightjars too, but we were going nowhere! One hour later, we abandoned the car ...close on midnight, we arrived on the asphalt road some kilometres away. With thanks to friends called out, we got home rather late that evening, minus the car of course!

## Day Three

Perhaps better forgotten, many hours pushing and shoving the car, success being measured in shifting it centimetres rather than getting it free. A singing Wryneck lightened the mood, as did periodic Black and White-winged Black Terns, but overall the day was lost! Fortunately, finally free, the day did end on a high when a visit to Elektreniai, some 50 km west of Vilnius, resulted in the quite super sight of no less than 13 Red-necked Phalaropes twirling about, two Great White Egrets adjacent and a variety of waders against the setting sun.

## Day Four

Off to the airport, but first a last few hours in my garden for my guest to enjoy - an Icterine Warbler in the pines, Pied Flycatchers in various nestboxes, a Spotted Flycatcher above the garage door. With both Common Redstart also flitting about and oodles of juvenile Great Spotted Woodpeckers hanging off the feeders, off this visitor went, a flight back to the damp UK.

## 11-15 June. Baby days.

Other than a single day of torrential rain, when the best I could do was another pair of Whiskered Terns, plus a flock of eight Great White Egrets, the pattern of the middle month was lazy summer days, fledglings everywhere and increasing numbers of dragonflies. Up at Labanoras, the forest positively echoed to screeching woodpeckers - not only a cocktail of young Great, Middle and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, but also a Grey-headed Woodpecker feeding its youngster, the first time I have actually confirmed them breeding on my land itself. Also Redwings with noisy offspring and, at the house, White Stork chicks beginning to fatten up!

Other birds of note, a Black Tern at my pond, a Hobby and the usual Lesser Spotted Eagles overhead and, early hints of

autumn, the first movements of Crossbills - two over my Vilnius garden and a small flock on my land.

On the dragonfly front, the best of the lot was an Emperor Dragonfly, a right stunner, but plenty of others present too, several Scarce Chasers, the first flights of Ruddy Darters and the first couple of Black Darters too.

20-24 June. Mindblowing in Finland!

In an epic 3730 km kilometres, over four days and five nights, this mega excursion north was perfect from start to finish - amazing views of Brown Bears, a superb Swinhoe's Snipe (only the second for the Western Palearctic) and a nice selection of 'added extras' ranging from Red-flanked Bluetail to Siberian Jay and Golden Eagle to Rustic Bunting. All that to a backdrop of picture-postcard weather!

[Full trip report here.](#)