

## June 2009. Hail and Shine, Lithuania to High Arctic.

Contributed by Jos

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With a Greenish Warbler singing in the garden and the Rollers already breeding on the land, June started off very nicely. Two weeks of rather changeable weather then followed, dampening birding somewhat, the highlights being Citrine Wagtails and Blyth's Reed Warbler in the east of the country and a singing Red-breasted Flycatcher on the land. And then came a trip to Arctic waters, four days of action-packed birding, 24 hours a day under the round-the-clock sunshine. Arctic and Long-tailed Skuas, Brunnich's Guillemots, waders galore, seaducks by the bucketload, excellent birding throughout. And finally, just as the month neared its end, the sun arrived in Lithuania. And with its arrival, a phenomenal few days with the butterflies - 34 species noted, including a spectacular Poplar Admiral, both Black Hairstreak and Woodland Brown and impressive numbers of Lesser Marbled Fritillaries, Moorland Clouded Yellows and Amanda's Blues.

1-5 June. Garden Glories. Hail and shine, skies most undecided, so began June! In the Vilnius garden, Pied Flycatchers were feeding young in three nestboxes, Blue Tits in a fourth. Starlings had already fledged young, their boxes standing empty. Up on wires, Common Redstarts chacked, a Lesser Whitethroat trilling in the hedge below, Linnets over the hedge. Amongst the breeders, two unusual visitors - a singing Red-backed Shrike on a couple of occasions and, considerably rarer, a singing Greenish Warbler for a few days. Only the second ever in the garden, it coincidentally sang from the very same tree as the first, a handful of years back.

6-7 June. Weekend 'Birding' In reality, not birding. Went up to my land on Saturday, but had work to do - cutting grass, putting up trellis, etc. On their wires, the Rollers still resided, the female already 'missing' for extended periods, presumably on eggs. Also, many Small Heaths on the wing, a Wryneck and Common Whitethroat enjoying a new 'shrike pile' I created a couple of weeks earlier and, all in song, a number of Redwings, a very vocal Common Rosefinch and a pair of Golden Orioles. Next day, free of work, so opened the heavens - torrential rain dawn till dusk! I opted for window birding, driving around Baltoji Voke peering out into the gloom. Hundreds of hirundines low over the pools, several Goldeneyes with broods in tow, the birding was actually quite good. Terns galore, a raft holding perhaps 50 pairs of Common Terns, the young sheltering beneath adults as the rain lashed down. On the same pool, two splendid Slavonian Grebes, a rare mid-summer sight in Lithuania. Present for some weeks, they seem in little hurry to breed, but would be only the second pair to breed at this locality if they do. Elsewhere, a soggy collection of usual birds - White Storks in the meadows, Thrush Nightingales and Common Rosefinches in the dripping undergrowth. Surprise, surprise, no butterflies of any species to note!

13 June. Citrine Wagtails, Raindrops and Devil Birds. So came the weekend, so returned the rain! I decided on an excursion to the north-east of Lithuania, venturing to a site I have not visited before - a wetland squeezed into a nook of the country that juts out into Belarus, the borders mere kilometres in each direction. Rained whilst driving up, rained most of the time I was there. Basically, disgusting weather - temperatures dipping to little above ten degrees, the rain spitting sideways, later to become torrential! So it was with a 'yuk' that I arrived and chucked the dog out to have a paddle, I then shoved him back in the car and went off for a plod down some muddy tracks. The sky looked awful, the light was diabolical, but the rain had actually let up, so I thought I'd better make the most of it! Three White-tailed Eagles lumbered across the skies, a bevy of Marsh Harriers quartered reeds and embankments, Common Terns rose in alarm. Devil birds hawking the waters, Swifts decended in their hundreds, hurtling over the grey water, banking and passing metres over my head. Three pairs of Whooper Swans trailed youngsters, a flock of non-breeders lingered nearby, but it was passerines that I was really hoping to see. Despite the weather, many songsters put on a performance - Great Reed Warblers, numerous Marsh Warblers and then the first good bird of the day, a Blyth's Reed Warbler singing in a low tree. Nice one that, a rich song half way between a Marsh Warbler and Icterine Warbler, with a touch of Nightingale thrown in. Onward I walked, a couple of kilometres passed without anything of particular note, then wandered down a track that proved most fruitful - accompanied by Grey Herons, a flock of eight Great White Egrets took to the sky, then a lone Wigeon appeared amongst Pochard and Tufted Ducks. A few metres on, just after a pair of Yellow Wagtails, I finally bumped into one of my target birds for the day - Citrine Wagtail. A tad on the soggy side, but very welcome, two birds were carrying food to nestlings at the base of a birch. The couple of years previous had been rather poor for this species locally, so any day with a Citrine Wagtail is a good day. Just a pity the weather didn't agree - it was now beginning to rain again, so time to run back to the car. The Blyth's Reed Warbler was still singing in his tree. I drove round in the rain for a while, now rather heavy, then happened upon an excellent area of marsh - a Spotted Redshank alarmed, Black Terns hawked and, a surprise, another pair of Citrine Wagtails fed young. With the weather continuing to worsen, I was just pondering a return home when I heard a bird singing a little further along. A Bluethroat in a dense area of bush some hundred metres into the marsh. I sat and peered a while - it sang near constantly, but to see it would entail a stomp across the bog, not something I particularly desired, water from above and below! Na, instead I went home.

14 June. Fledglings. Rain stopped, almost! Even a patch of sun here and there. 'Twas enough to turn the day into a most pleasant affair. Up on my land, a fair scattering of dragonflies and butterflies, the latter including Common and Mazarine Blues, plus the first Large Skipper of the year. But it was for the birds that the real highlights went. Four Cranes overhead for starters, then a perfect collection of woodpeckers - both Great and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers with noisy youngsters, the male White-backed Woodpecker very active and a Grey-headed Woodpecker calling on occasion. Many Golden Orioles too, an arrival in the last week boosting numbers quite considerably. One Corncrake calling beyond the pools, one stunning Red-breasted Flycatcher singing in a dank corner of the forest. Also a female Goldeneye zipped into a nestbox, Long-tailed Tits fledged their youngsters and Black Terns continued their daily transits of the land. All in all, a splendid day.

19-22 June. Arctic Road Rage. Full report HERE.

26-29 June. Butterfly Action. 29 C and sun, at last! 'Time for butterflies', thought I, weeks of itching to get out finally

over. A quick look at the garden - a rare summer Crested Tit on the feeders - then off I went, destination my favoured 'butterfly polygon', a 30 km transect of forest track, meadow and bushland, localities that have oozed with butterflies in past seasons. I'd gone a mere kilometre from my house and a White Admiral fluttered across my route. Oo, fancying a photograph, I stopped and darted after it. A fine specimen it was, posing for pictures just perfect. And then I spotted a little fellow resting nearby ...one I had desired for many a year, a new species for me - an exquisite Black Hairstreak. Well that was good, I'd barely left home and already I'd encountered a top species, the start of an excellent day. Arriving at my butterfly patch, the variety and numbers were impressive. Black-veined Whites, the most striking of their family, were in abundance - usually relatively uncommon, at least 40 fluttered up and down the woodland edges, along with heaps of Heath and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Large Wall Browns and plenty of Little, Essex and Large Skippers. Two additional species, both usually scarce, broke all personal records - Moorland Clouded Yellows and Amanda's Blue, individuals commonplace as the day wore on. Slowly, slowly, the tally of species rise - a regular fly-by of Painted Ladies, numerous Small Tortoiseshells, occasional White Admirals. Then I got to a small chunk of meadow that always produces superb butterflies. And it was no exception on this day - in addition to Chestnut and Pearly Heaths, some of the many butterflies present included an early Scarce Copper and dozens of Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, two High Brown Fritillaries and, one of the highlights of the morning, a splendid Lesser Marbled Fritillary. Onward, I reached open meadows - Meadow Browns and Ringlets, one Purple-shot Copper, Small Whites, a mass of Amanda's Blues taking salts, quite a movement of Small Tortoiseshells. To the north, a thunderstorm was developing, here it remained hot and sunny. The butterfly action continued uninterrupted - the first Large Coppers of the year, loads more Moorland Clouded Yellows, dozens of Lesser Marbled Fritillaries. By the day's end, I'd seen more of this latter species than I have ever seen previously, a superb season in the making. My tally of species was approaching 30, a splendid total for so early in the season. I was wondering if it would climb any higher ...and it did. the next species was an absolute stunner. Taking minerals on a track and almost ending up underneath my car, an emergency stop produced one of the most impressive species in Lithuania - a Poplar Admiral. A butterfly of the canopy, and none too common, this was only the second I have ever seen, the near conclusion to a most productive day out. A few last extras - Wood White and Green-veined White - and then I returned to Vilnius. Having found Woodland Browns on the outskirts of the capital earlier in the month, I was also keen to try and photograph these, so made a short detour to visit this locality. They were still there ...and far from being a problem to photograph, one actually landed on my finger! Also Mazarine Blue and Dark Green Fritillary, the final total for species reached a mega 34, a total I have only ever beaten on rare occasions in the mid-July peak period.