

## July 2009. Butterfly Season Returns.

Contributed by Jos

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Following on from June, the fantastic butterfly days continued. With July the traditional peak of the Lepidoptera year, large numbers of fritillaries and other species were on the wing throughout, but within days of the start of the month, I had already found myself three new species - Granville, Knapweed and Cranberry Fritillaries, plus excellent others such as Spotted Fritillary, Rock Grayling and both Turquoise and Cranberry Blue.

### 3-6 July. Glanville, Knapweed and Cranberry Surprises.

With a few hours to spare on the 3rd and the sun bright, off I decided to go, on a hunt for butterflies less common. With the meadows and forest edges now a buzz of butterflies, I chose instead to visit an area of open heath, a rare habitat in Lithuania. Having encountered a few special butterflies at this locality the previous year, I had high hopes for my day. A few stops on route revealed again large numbers of Black-veined Whites and Moorland Clouded Yellows, heaps of Heath Fritillaries and a few Large Coppers. A Map Butterfly was the first of the year's second generation and a Silver-washed Fritillary was my first this year. Various heaths, browns and skippers, dozens of Dark Green and High Brown Fritillaries, I had to abandon them or I would never get to my planned destination!

A little bit of rally driving up some sandy tracks and then I dumped my car, in front of me the fine open heather heaths, basking under a glorious sun with blue skies stretching to the horizon. Off I wandered. A habitat not rich in butterflies, the rewards come with the species, not the numbers. Ten minutes later, I had my first prize - a super Spotted Fritillary, a most vivid orange one. Then a few more, then a Purple-shot Copper. A little later, arriving at a favoured sunny slope, I began to note more butterflies - quite a few Spotted Fritillaries, but also a smaller, duller fritillary. The pesky things were not keen on landing, but after much running round after several individuals, finally I got them sussed - sporting fine underwing patterns, Granville Fritillaries, another new species for me! Also added several Rock Graylings, one Common Grayling and, on the very edge of the heath, three smart Cranberry Blues, a most exquisite species. Just a few hours in the field, 26 species noted! Back to the city, back to work. Next day, with the weather forecast promising prolonged rain, and a trip to Hungary already cancelled, I also decided to forgo a voyage into the south of Lithuania. Never listen to the forecast - the day dawned moderately good and became ever better, warm and sunny by midday! Though I did need to dodge thunderstorms on the horizon, the break in the weather gave me the perfect opportunity to seek new pastures more locally, touring till I found an area that offered a slight variety in terms of habitat. From the outset, plenty of butterflies all about, much as in days past, but then I turned onto a small gravel road and my route ahead was literally blocked - dozens of butterflies of many species, all on the ground taking salts. I stopped and had a look around - a small marsh down below, flower meadows on steep slopes to left and right, the perfect spot to begin my search. The road offerings were fantastic - amongst a fair number of Large and Small Skippers, a whole bunch of others added variety ...Mazarine and Amanda's Blues, several Map Butterflies, one Comma and the season's first Purple Emperors, two fantastic individuals settling before me. A brief glimpse of another blue got me darting down the track, but the thing simply vanished before I could be sure what it was, I suspected Turquoise Blue, a species I very rarely see. A Painted Lady flew past, no hint of stopping, several Small Tortoiseshells fed on cornflowers.

Wandering into the meadows, the abundance of butterflies was impressive - hundreds of Meadow Browns, Chestnut Heaths and Ringlets, plenty of skippers of one sort or the other, several Scarce Coppers, quite a few Heath Fritillaries ...and another fritillary, a tad larger and distinctively darker. Had to get a view of the underwing, this was a new species for me I was sure. And then one landed, a rather tatty individual, but revealing the diagnostic underwing pattern - it was my first ever Knapweed Fritillary. Ten minutes more and I'd found another three, a little colony.

Back on the track, still the Purple Emperors flitted, I began to search for the mystery blue. Fifteen minutes later, it returned and settled, indeed a fine Turquoise Blue. A Wood White passed by, a couple of Large Whites too, then the rain looked to be arriving. Down sat most of the butterflies, back to home went I. On a roll with the butterflies, the following day saw me heading off to the far south-east of Lithuania, the boggy lands that separate the country from neighbouring Belarus. A stop at the picturesque Ula river started the day off with a good variety - Purple-shot Coppers, Cranberry Blues, Holly Blue, heaps of Scarce Coppers, two Lesser Marbled Fritillaries, plenty more too. But the main destination was Cepkalai Bog, a huge 12km by 7km raised bog. A couple of kilometres before the bog, where ancient pines cloak

rolling sands, I stopped at a clearing that had proved most productive a year earlier. One minute out of the car and a Large Blue fluttered by, settling briefly before drifting off up the slope. Good numbers of other butterflies too - Spotted Fritillaries, Niobe Fritillaries, Dark Green Fritillary, Heath Fritillaries, several Lesser Marbled Fritillaries, one Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, one Weaver's Fritillary ...what a collection! Another Large Blue floated by, again stopping barely a second, certainly not allowing photographs. Then the first Silver-studded Blues of the day (and year!), first one or two, then as the day warmed more and more. Also Rock Grayling and, amongst the birds, a fine Honey Buzzard overhead. A good while later, I arrived at Cepkalai. A huge place, very scenic and undoubtedly excellent for birds and beasts, but I rarely see anything of note on my wanders here - the best places would surely involve wading through gunk up to your neck! Didn't fancy that, so in a very pleasant hour or so, the grand total of butterflies recorded amounted to about fifteen! Mostly Heath Fritillaries, plus three Meadow Browns and a couple of Ringlets ...and one real special butterfly! Feeding on ground-hugging purple flowers, tucked in amongst Heath Fritillaries, my first ever Cranberry Fritillary, a very localised species in Lithuania. Super, my fifth new species in five trips out! Back in the forest, I decided to take a back route back to civilisation, ended up right on the Belarussian border, bumped into a Black Woodpecker, then eventually ended up at a village some 15 kilometres further south. Still more butterflies - Large Chequered Skippers, heaps and heaps of Large Skippers, a couple of Moorland Clouded Yellows. I meandered on for much of the afternoon, a few more clearings adding yet more Cranberry, Silver-studded and Large Blues, plus fritillaries of various mixes. It had been a good day, I returned home quite content. The season is still young, but already I've recorded 53 species of butterfly - all is set for a record year, just another nine to go! Meanwhile, next day, a break from the butterflies saw me on my land at Labanoras. Management work to do, little seen - but not so bad with Rollers as a backdrop, the White Stork brood growing fast and a Corncrake calling like crazy! 11 July. Youngsters. Rain stopped play at Labanoras, no real chance of butterflies. Young birds much in evidence - Whinchats everywhere, the White Storks continuing to grow well in the nest. With the reappearance of the female Roller, it would also seem their young have hatched, an active time for the adults now arrived. Also two Lesser Spotted Eagles on the land, Cranes yodelling and, in the flood forest, a female Garganey with two Teals - presumably one of the three birds present from the spring. Continued to install a fence linking a ditch and the 'shrike pile', a Corncrake again calling alongside, Whitethroats and Whinchats taking immediate advantage of the new perches. Rain left all a little murky, decided to leave - naturally a cue for the return of sun! 12-17 July. Record Breakers. Out pottering on the 12th, the idea of a butterfly 'big day' entered my head - an attempt to smash my previous best-ever day total of butterflies on the local patch. If my memory served me right, the earlier record had been 36 species in mid-July 2008. The day was warm and sunny, the season was at its peak, everything hinting at potential success. I arrived on my favourite track at 10 a.m., the first butterflies were already on the wing - two Red Admirals, two Purple Emperors, plenty of Silver-washed Fritillaries, Ringlets, Scarce Coppers. Along the track, a right bevy of blues, six species in all, including Silver-studded, Reverdin's and Amanda's, but overhead an ominous cloud was beginning to lurk. All too soon the sun had vanished and the buzz of butterfly action became somewhat muted. Still bright, butterflies remained on the wing, but every species now required far more searching - the record attempt was looking a little fanciful! Slowly, slowly, however, the tally continued to climb - a Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, lingering Purple-shot Coppers, several Large Wall Browns. By midday I'd passed the 30 species mark and all was still going well - a Moorland Clouded Yellow was next, then a Comma, then a Weaver's Fritillary. A few spots of rain began to tumble down. Oo er - this would not help! A dune system at the top end of my regular route added a few specialities - Spotted and Glanville Fritillaries, Grayling and Rock Grayling. That little collection, along with a Painted Lady flushed from nearby meadows, took me to the grand total of 38, two higher than my previous best, but with the rain now heavy, the prospect of seeing more had dwindled to near zero. It was only 3 p.m., I felt cheated, the prospect of a magical 40 had been stolen! A two-hour wander in meadows near my house the next day added another five species - the first Short-tailed Blues of the season, my first Purple-edged Copper for a couple of years, plus four Knapweed Fritillaries, a Lesser Marbled Fritillary and at least 20 Turquoise Blues. It was clear, the possibility of 40 in a day was real. And so it was, attempt number two... 17 July. Big Butterfly Day! Bright sun, not a cloud in the sky and a glorious 29 degrees - all was perfect. Arrived and immediately noticed quite a lot of new butterflies had emerged - large numbers of super fresh Brimstones, Silver-studded Blues by the dozen, Red Admirals here and there, several White Admirals too. Soon the notebook was filling up - still a few tatty Heath Fritillaries lingering, late Purple-shot Coppers, some past their best. In an open meadow, my first Pallas's Fritillaries of the season, simply super butterflies. Also a few Large and Small Skippers, along with increasing numbers of Essex Skippers. High Brown Fritillaries everywhere, one Dark Green Fritillary. I decided to plunge my car through a pool, not the best idea, but on the other side the reward was immediate - on thistles and assorted flowers, mega numbers of butterflies. Commas and Map Butterflies by the score, another couple of White Admirals, perhaps ten Weaver's Fritillaries, a Dusky Meadow Brown and, the star, my first Queen of Spain Fritillary this year. Tallying up, I had already seen over 30 species, the day was still young. Next stop, a quiet lane through ancient pines and occasional clearing. I'd seen a Poplar Admiral here a week earlier, but little did I expect to see it again. But I did - I was truly stunned to find it at exactly the same place again, really an unexpected bonus to the Big Day. Also happened upon a fantastic collection at another clearing just nearby - absolutely crawling with butterflies. Everything from Brimstones by the bucketload to more Pallas's Fritillaries. However, amongst the many coppers and fritillaries, there were also three more new species for the day - Cranberry Blue, Moorland Clouded Yellow and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. I had now smashed my record, my tally stood at a splendid 38 species. Forty was now guaranteed - I still had the sand dune collection to come. And the sand dunes did me proud - dozens and dozens of Graylings, plenty of Rock Graylings too. Soon added both Spotted and Glanville Fritillary, plus a Small Heath and an unexpected Small Copper, my first of the year. Yippee, I had now seen 44 species. It was now 7 p.m., I should have been content to return home in triumph - but I still had not seen Common Blue, nor Mazarine or Amanda's Blue. It niggled a little, so off I went - one last meadow to check before the butterflies settled down for the evening. I failed to find any of these, but did bump into a Short-tailed

Blue and my first Large Grizzled Skipper of the year, the latter a scarce species that I don't see every season. So that was that, a grand finale bringing me to 47 species, way beyond even my most optimistic hopes. I can retire now, I can't see me bettering this total!!!The list:

Large White  
Small White  
Green-veined White  
Wood White  
Brimstone  
Moorland Clouded Yellow

Small Copper  
Large Copper  
Scarce Copper  
Sooty Copper  
Purple-shot Copper

Short-tailed Blue  
Holly Blue  
Silver-studded Blue  
Cranberry Blue

Purple Emperor  
Poplar Admiral  
White Admiral  
Red Admiral  
Small Tortoiseshell  
Comma  
Peacock  
Painted Lady

Silver-washed Fritillary  
Pallas's Fritillary  
Dark Green Fritillary  
High Brown Fritillary  
Queen of Spain Fritillary  
Lesser Marbled Fritillary  
Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary  
Weaver's Fritillary  
Glanville fritillary  
Spotted Fritillary  
Heath Fritillary

Rock Grayling  
Grayling  
Meadow Brown  
Dusky Meadow Brown  
Ringlelet  
Small Heath  
Pearly Heath  
Chestnut Heath  
Large Wall Brown

Large Grizzled Skipper  
Small Skipper  
Essex Skipper

Large Skipper 18-31 July. Onward with the Sun.Touching 30 degrees, right nice. A trip to southern Lithuania kept the butterfly action ticking along, plus too a Hobby at the nest, a Red Squirrel playing chicken on the road.Of the butterflies, honours went to an assemblage upon sandy heath - Large Blues, Spotted and Niobe Fritillaries, plus a total of 30 other species. Nearby, a Speckled Wood was my first in Lithuania for a couple of years, whilst a Camberwell Beauty added spice to the already excellent weekend. A tally of butterflies recorded during the week now amassed an impressive 57 species, higher than my annual totals for any of the years from 2005 to 2007!Rolling on one week and the month was beginning to draw towards its conclusion, very much in the style it began - butterflies galore. On the 25th, a couple of hours near my Vilnius home added Little Blue to the month's collection, with Turquoise, Holly, Short-tailed and Mazarine Blues also seen, plus Large Grizzled Skipper, a few tatty Painted Ladies and a fresh emergence of Brimstones.Up on my

Labanoras plot, the 26th was a landmark day - first in the neighbourhood, my White Stork chicks left the nest for their maiden flight, all three then plodding across cut meadows nearby. A successful season approaching its finality. An hour or so later, they had all returned to the nest, gazing down as I passed. Also the Rollers still actively feeding young, Cranes calling, plus a Lesser Spotted Eagle in late summer display, rising high on thermals, then calling and fluttering as it dropped. Further hints at a summer nearing its end, activity at the feeders picking up, a Middle Spotted Woodpecker busy, dozens of Great and Blue Tits devouring the peanuts. Back in Vilnius, a Crested Tit continued to visit the garden daily, while overhead an unusual Marsh Harrier passed over, pursued by two Common Terns. Elsewhere in the last days of the month, more Short-tailed Blues around the capital, a Black Kite over the south of the city and a few Crossbills over the garden.