

August 2010. Back to Birding.

Contributed by Jos
Last Updated Tuesday, 24 August 2010

After a month and more of glorious butterfly action, it was back to the birds. With hints of autumn migration underway, August began on a high with two Great Snipes flushed from wet meadows. With Hoopoes and Wryneck also on the menu, and a trickle of warblers through the garden, it was a welcome return to avian delights.

1 August. Double Treat. Temperatures still sitting at 28 C, butterflies still out in mass, but birds were on the move, high summer concealing the first movements of the coming autumn. In meadows, massive congregations of Starlings, assorted Lapwing flocks, a lone Golden Plover. However I still had eyes for butterflies - many hundred Red Admirals on the wing, a fresh flush of Painted Ladies and abundant Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. Admiring birds and butterflies, suddenly there was another attraction - one of the rarest and most distinctive dragonflies in Lithuania! A relatively recent coloniser, it was a Banded Darter, a species I know from only one locality in the country (and even there I have only seen once). But here it was, an individual hawking just nearby. Grabbed the camera and darted off in pursuit. I didn't get very far, straight across wet boggy meadows it went, my feet squelching to a halt just before they submerged. No sooner had I cursed at the loss of this dragonfly and another major surprise rose from the ground just ahead - amongst about six Common Snipe, two chunky Great Snipes! A rare breeder in the country, these were almost certainly early passage birds, a treat indeed. Round they circled landing again in damp meadow a little further. Left the Great Snipe to their peace, travelled onward. A Hoopoe on the track, White Storks overhead. Little new amongst the butterflies, so decided on a change of habitat - open heath, task to paw through the 'studded blues'. I had suspicions that some in this area were Idas Blue, rather than the more abundant Silver-studded Blues. A few Graylings graced the route, blues were conspicuous by their absence. But then I found a small gathering, almost all females, but one or two males still amongst them. And indeed they were Idas Blue, species number 76 for the year. Then, quite remarkable, I go near five years without seeing one, then two in the space of an hour ...a second Banded Darter hawked past, pausing on heath long enough to get a few photographs. Overhead however, a thunderstorm was brewing. Lightening began to lick the skies, time for me to retreat.

2 August. Up at the feeding station, Nutcrackers play their annual tease - in trees nearby, flying over, even peering down on occasion, are they ever tempted to savour the culinary offerings? No, ten years and more I have been waiting, not a sausage. Still, not bad to have them as a backdrop. Also Wood Warblers and Icterine Warblers filtering through, Red-backed Shrikes on the 'shrike pile', a Great Grey Shrike nearby. Over on the house, the White Stork season nearing its end, the three youngsters now free-lying, returning to the nest only to roost. Much grass cutting this day, a hot and thankless task, the only rewards swirls of White Storks overhead. Closer to Vilnius, still plenty of butterflies on the wing - relocated the Lesser Purple Emperor from a couple of weeks back, plus added several Little Blues and one Reverdin's Blue.

7-9 August. The Heat is On. 34 C reported, humid. Muggy day tramping the byways, Golden Orioles feeding a fledging, Common Cranes trailing two youngsters, an Kestrel migrating through the meadows, none too common in these parts. However, tops of the day again went to Banded Darters, another two seen, surely a sign of a mini invasion or expansion this season, most welcome. Up at Labanoras, Middle Spotted Woodpeckers continue to visit the feeders, Nuthatches now also back in abundance. In the deep south of the country meanwhile, a little wander round notched up a few nice bits and bobs - meadows alive with Pale Clouded Yellows, one field alone sporting an estimated 100 individuals, whilst a neighbouring forest clearing added the rare sighting of a Silver-spotted Skipper, one of very few that I have ever seen. Also during the day, two Swallowtails, two Camberwell Beauties and a half score of Specked Woods, good butterflies all.

12 August onwards, IRAN....Now the heat really is on, up to 45 C, ultra humid ...welcome to Iran. Dream of many years finally falling into place. Travelled from the steamy Persian Gulf up through the central deserts so far, birds fantastic at every turn. Updates on return.