

December 2010. Winter Assault.

Contributed by Jos

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Snow, ice and plunging temperatures. So started December, flocks of Waxwings, large flocks of winter thrushes, Great Tits invading the house, plus a few Smew and White-tailed Eagles lingering on. As the month progressed, with no let up in the snow and cold, a Crested Tit and two Hawfinches joined the crowds at the feeders, I made a quick visit to the UK.

1-5 December. Winter Falling. What a start to the month - an onslaught of temperatures nudging minus 19 C, waters already in the grip of ice, flurries of snow whipping across the land. And birds too, 22 Waxwings in the Vilnius garden on the 1st of the month, another the next day, 13 more on the 5th. Also Fieldfares and a Blackbird, the latter not too common in winter in this neck of the woods.

More engaging however, the goings on of the local Great Tits - after one decided the kitchen interiors were much to its likings, it now brings all its chums! Open the door and in they come, five or six zooming back and fro, temporarily swopping the chilly outside for the slightly warmer coziness of the kitchen table. Up at Labanoras, all ticking over nicely, the plunging temperatures bringing much action to the feeders, two White-backed Woodpeckers the highlight, but also a new male Middle Spotted Woodpecker. One Red Fox came to nose around, two Roe Deer strutted through the snow-laden woods.

6-9 December. Oodles of Thrushes, Garden Treats. The so-called 'winter thrushes' of the UK, Fieldfare and Redwing, not overly abundant in the frozen lands of mid-winter Lithuania. Much a summer visitor, small numbers do nevertheless appear in the snows, today's flock though of about 250 well above average. A pleasing sight as they stuffed themselves silly on berries, even more impressive harbouring a Common Starling in their midst, the latter even rarer in winter here. Just beyond, on some of the last vestiges of water yet to freeze, five Smew lingering amongst the abundant Goosanders, a trio of White-tailed Eagles adding further variety. Blackbird in the garden on the 7th, another not so common winter bird in this quarter, but better still a Crested Tit on the feeders - the first for over a month, a mega-tame bird feeding with me watching from just a metre distant. Two days later, it was the turn of Hawfinch to steal the limelight, a pair visiting the feeders. 11 December. Balmy England. Respite from the snow, a day in the UK. Flying into London, out of Bristol, just enough time for a visit to Slimbridge. Gloomy skies, but birds by the bucketload - feeders jostling with Long-tailed Tits and buddies, a Water Rail poking around underneath, my first at feeders. From the hides, though many pools frozen, an abundance of waterbirds particularly on Rushy Pen - all the usual suspects, a couple of hundred Bewick's Swans, dozens of Greylag, Pintails and assorted others. Eastern Greylags reported out on the flats, didn't see them. A Bittern had plonked itself down on the ice a day earlier, didn't see this either. 12-16 December. A week in Lithuania. And back in Lithuania, yet more snow and plunging temperatures. Nights falling to a chilly minus 20, days creeping up to about minus 14. Black Woodpecker still active around the Labanoras feeders, Crested Tit still on the Vilnius feeders.