

April 2011. Arrivals.

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Temperatures finally climbing, a long winter in its last gasps. More and more migrants arriving as the month progressed... Bluethroat at Baltoji Voke, Wrynecks at various localities, Black Stork and Montagu's Harrier on my land, common birds everywhere.

1 April. Quick night trip out and about, a second Pygmy Owl of the season located, but damp and misty, little other seen ...one Brown Hare topping the rest. 3 April. Home Sweet Home. They're back, yippee! Atop their nest for another year, the return of White Storks in my Labanoras garden. And with them, what an impressive influx, Grey Herons at the heronry, Cranes in the meadow, Green Sandpipers displaying directly above the feeders and a raft of migrants passing over or pausing to stop. First-ever record of Serin on my land, highest ever counts of Lapwings and Cormorants (190 and nine respectively), hundreds of Bean and White-fronted Geese over and, added extras, Mute Swan and Curlew, neither frequent birds on my land. And on top of all that, a surprise flock of 55 Waxwings feeding on fallen apples in the garden and the first raptor movements of the year - two Marsh Harriers in the morning, a cracking male Hen Harrier in the afternoon. In fields full of Meadow Pipits and Skylarks in song and display, with the sun growing ever warmer, out came yet more signs of a spring underway - raucous croaking, a bunch of Common Frogs lined up along the ice edge of a yet to thaw pool. Fluttering past, early butterflies, two Brimstones, a Small Tortoiseshell ...ah splendid. Migrants pouring in, frogs and butterflies, even the first flowers, Lithuania back to life again. 4-5 April. Spring Treats. 4th April, a real treat... on a quick visit to Lape Papis (not a destination I plan to visit much this year), oodles of birds - hundreds of wildfowl in, rafts of Pochard and Wigeon, flotillas of Teal, heaps of Great Crested Grebes and assorted other waterbirds, including Shoveler, Pintail, Gadwall and Smew, nice all. Better still though, a rare spring bonus for me, a classic male Bluethroat hopping along a muddy bank - best bird of the day by far, a gorgeous white-spotted individual. Also Penduline Tits arrived, an Osprey circling the lake and both Bittern and Marsh Harrier in the reeds. And next day, in sites across Vilnius, so too arrived Black Redstarts, their song filtering down from city blocks, punctuating a boring wait at a junction, passing time in a queue, leading to a pause at the doors to offices here and there. Starlings now in mass, gulls over the river, familiar summer life creeping back to this urban land. 7-8 April. Cold Shudder. So much for spring! A few days on and here we are, basking in temperatures barely above freezing, bathed by rain bordering on sleet and battered by blustery winds! Yuk! Not my cup of tea, so birding limited to the garden - Starlings atop nestboxes now, a Black Redstart in song, several Hawfinch knocking about and, best of the bunch, a pair of Crossbills lingering in the pines at the garden's end. Much song and call from them, day after day in the same group of trees ...maybe nesting to follow, a first for my garden if so. 10-14 April. Cool Northerlies. Abnormal spring, temperatures pitifully low, migrants slow in their arrival. Up at Labanoras, the cold winds, even accompanied by occasional flurry of snow, grounded virtually all migrants, barely a thing on the move, quite a contrast to the week before. On the 10th, just two new arrivals on my land - one big and mighty, one small and humble. First up was White-tailed Eagle, a fine adult soaring over the feeding station before drifting across the meadows and then round and back over the forest. Second was Dunnock, a fairly secretive summer bird out here - they do breed in my forest, but infrequently do I see them. This day's bird however was at the feeders, the first I have seen taking food. Also a couple of Green Sandpipers, the White Storks mating upon their nest and another Waxwing surprise, a flock of about 30 passing over my land. Forest lake still frozen, though getting a tad dodgy to walk on (the dog crashed through the ice, me not). Mallard back on smaller pools, now ice-free, plus more and more flowers appearing. Elsewhere, the migrant trickle continued - the following days seeing Garganey and Wryneck at Baltoji Voke, Chiffchaffs here and there, greater numbers of Black Redstart in the city. 15-16 April. Birding a Building Site. T'was called my garden, now resembles a sandy replica of the Himalaya! Blighted by excavations related to home improvements, and now underlain by water tanks and pipes, the birds strangely seem most unaffected by all the action around them - as an excavator rumbles around, so Crested Tits still add a buzz to the peanut feeders and Chaffinches and White Wagtails run around

the excavator's metallic tracks. Starlings have taken up residence in two nest boxes, Tree Sparrows in another, Great Tits in a fourth, plus the Crossbills continue their occupation of the pine fringe. On the down side, birding beyond the garden is going to take a dent as I seek to restore some degree of charm to my little plot! Still, Pied Flycatchers and Common Redstarts expected in the next days, some compensation. 17-26 April. Ah, warmest days of the year so far, good birds, plenty of butterflies, frogs and toads... Pied Flycatchers and Common Redstart both returned to the garden, both immediately showing interest in the nestboxes, up above still the Crossbills continued to call from the pines, a pair of Hawfinch ticking away on various occasions. Elsewhere, Black Storks, Wrynecks and Montagu's Harriers on my land, the first arrivals of White-Winged Black Terns, spring gathering pace. 28 April. And the days tick by, warm sun firmly in control, a flood of migrants arriving - Whinchats, Common and Lesser Whitethroats, Savi's and Sedge Warblers, a variety of waders, one Little Egret (only my third in Lithuania) ...the list goes on. 30 April. Fantastic last day to the month. Showing a couple around, the day started with Lesser Spotted Eagles, moved up a gear with a stunning pair of nesting Nutcrackers gathering additional nest material and giving views quite unparalleled. And then, no let up, another stroke of luck with the discovery of a Grey-headed Woodpecker nest, a most quaint male peeking out of the hole, the bird's red catching the morning sun a treat. And then, for a change of setting, an afternoon tour of Baltoji Voke - Black and White-winged Black Terns, Little Gulls, Savi's and Great Reed Warblers, singing Wrynecks, a Hoopoe, all in glorious sun, nice end to the month. Struggling to find time to update this website at present, indeed even to go birding, normal service resumed next month....