

May 2011. Snow to Sun.

Contributed by Jos
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A Greenish Warbler singing in the garden, Bitterns, Hobby, Wrynecks and swarms of Black Terns on local lakes, a good start to May. And so it continued, migrants arriving through the month, all the local breeders from Pied Flycatchers through to Red-backed Shrikes and more. By the end of the month, after a quick trip to the snowy mountains of Georgia, it was turn of the butterflies to impress - exceptionally high numbers of Swallowtails, plus the first fritillaries of the year and both Grizzled and Northern Chequered Skippers.

1-4 May. Spring Treats. Before temperatures took a tumble down and rain set in, a couple of good days to start the month. Up at Labanoras, migrants on the move - Whinchats gracing the meadows, Blackcaps in the shrubbery, a Hobby atop a dead tree within the swamp zone. And, echoing across from lakes yonder, the haunting voice of Bittern, a treat indeed. And to that backdrop, birds galore - the Wryneck now a hundred metres from its location a week before, plus Pied Flycatchers in abundance, a pair of Hawfinch and both Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs at every turn. Also a good flush of butterflies - the first Map Butterflies and Wood Whites of the year, several Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshell, plenty of Brimstones and loads of Orange Tips. And next day, with the day cooling as it progressed, it was back to my Vilnius garden and heavy labour - still a mountain of sand to move! But what compensation, in exactly the same tree as the previous two, a singing Greenish Warbler appeared, my third ever for the garden! On and off through the day he sang, relegating the Pied Flycatchers and Common Redstarts to mere onlookers, local rabble by comparison. And were Greenish Warbler not enough, a garden first too - in one of the ponds, alongside 12 Common Frogs, one little Marsh Frog, sporting his green stripe in full glory. Two days on, another garden high - sowing grass at dusk, a shrill whistle caught my ear, a roding Woodcock went sailing over, following the line of pine. Only the second ever for my garden, this was a good bird. 6 May. Cool & Blustery. A stunning male Golden Oriole in an open meadow, common migrants in growing numbers, today saw a return to dry weather after a few days of rain ...but none too warm, a chilly 12 C, a wind adding a certain bite. Perfect conditions to visit Papis Lake though, the shallow lake a cool weather trap for wayward hirundines! And so it, the surface waters a hive of action - several hundred Swallows hawking low, newly arrived House Martins in their midst. But better still, a right bevy of terns - at least 500 Black Terns hugging the waters, a few dozen White-winged Black Terns too, plus an impressive 200 or so Little Gulls, smart adults mingling with the terns. And just for good measure, one Caspian Tern too, a relatively uncommon bird on the patch. Some dozens of Sedge Warblers in song, a Water Rail squeaking, a Cuckoo on a fence post. And with that, back to my garden and onward with the renovations - Common Redstarts popping down onto the sand piles, a Dunnock in song, Pied Flycatchers chasing off Tree Sparrows that ventured too close to their nestboxes. All nice distractions to hard labour. 7-8 May. And glorious the sun returns, heaps of butterflies on the wing, Orange Tips galore, the first Green-veined Whites, plus oodles of Brimstones, a few Map Butterflies and Peacocks. Up at Labanoras, displaying Marsh Harriers over the land, both Common and Black Terns on transit, plus Cranes on the meadow, a Black Redstart at the house and a scatter of Whinchats now staking out territories. In the forest, I opened up a new path through some of the finest woodland, Wood Warblers trilling away, a Cuckoo off yonder and Goldeneyes still on the swamp. All in all a most pleasant day, a Brown Hare also noted, plus three Roe Deer. Next day, back to work in the Vilnius garden, a distant Bittern booming during the night, a Lesser Whitethroat and plenty of Pied Flycatchers during the day. 13-17 May. Republic of Georgia. A mini-break to savour the delights of the Caucasus Mountains - Great Rosefinch, Caucasian Snowcocks and Caucasian Black Grouse amongst Snow Finch, Twite, Red-fronted Serins and more. Plus incoming migrants from Green Warblers and Semi-coloured Flycatchers to Red-backed Shrikes a'plenty, all in all a good little trip. Full details [HERE](#). (link to follow). 21-22 May. Summer's In. And what a difference a couple of weeks make, the byways now crawling with Whitethroats and Whinchats, thickets resounding to Thrush Nightingales and Common Rosefinches. Hoopoes here and there, Wrynecks in abundance this season. Better still however, truly the butterfly season now racheting up a gear or two - a trip to the far south of Lithuania not only producing a species count in the double figures for the first time this year, but also providing a few quite remarkable sightings. Top of the billing, an impressive flight of Swallowtails - an absolute minimum of 30 active over a single flower meadow, many egg-laying. Not only is this a little early for Swallowtails, but also represents one of the highest concentrations I have ever encountered in this country, hopefully a good omen for the season ahead. And with the Swallowtails, heaps more butterflies - at least 60 Wood Whites, plus a good showing of Map Butterflies, Peacocks, Small Tortoiseshells, Brimstones and Green-veined Whites. And, were that not enough, my first Small Heath of the season and, both totally unexpected, three Weaver's Fritillaries and two Short-tailed Blues. These latter two are moderately common in July, but never before have I encountered individuals of generation one. Next day, I bumped into yet more Swallowtails - three on my Labanoras land, always nice. Plus too another Short-tailed Blue, here's to a good season ahead. Also on my land, a good arrival of breeding birds - both Thrush Nightingales and Common Rosefinches singing in the regeneration zone, a pair of Red-backed Shrikes atop my 'shrike pile', plus both Golden Oriole and Icterine Warbler in the forest. And the roving Wryneck finally seems to have settled on a nestbox, thoughtfully the box closest to my cabin - nice for me as I can view from my veranda, not so nice for the Pied Flycatcher, it's been turfed out! A second Wryneck now calls from the regeneration zone too. 23-26 May. Garden Highs. Hot on the heels of good days in Labanoras, so too my Vilnius garden performed - a nocturnal solo by a Tawny Owl, a vocal and showy Black Woodpecker doing a royal fly-over before flopping down into the pines, then the arrival back of my first Spotted Flycatcher of the season. Nestbox tally currently stands at two boxes occupied by Pied Flycatcher, one by Starlings, another by Great Tit. Crested Tits continue to churr, perhaps sneaking into the visitors still. And then, at the midnight hour of the 26th, a new addition to my garden list - one singing Great Reed Warbler! I'd previously heard him singing aside a reedy stream some hundreds of metres beyond the pines. From the garden however, his grating calls could not be heard - at

least not during the day! So on a calm night, onto the kitchen veranda I went, straining my ear ...and there, almost drowned out by Thrush Nightingales, came the slightly muffled grates and churrs, Great Reed Warbler on the list! 28 May. Rain in Labanoras. And boy did it rain, arrived to heavy cloud, sat myself on the picnic table and no more than 15 minutes later, it was absolutely bucketing it down! Still, in those 15 minutes I did manage a couple of nice birds - my first Lesser Spotted Eagle of the year on my plot, an unseasonal Nutcracker flying over (usually a late summer/autumn bird on my land), plus a Marsh Harrier quartering. Rather soggy to boot, a walk through the swamp forest did however reveal a new bird on territory - to a backdrop of Common Rosefinches and Golden Orioles, a Sedge Warbler in full song. Very much testament to the extent to which the beavers have opened out the forest, this bird sang where just a few years ago, the canopy was total! Another year or two and it will be a lake not woodland!!! A few rain-filled hours later, I admitted defeat and departed, Whinchats dripped on stalks, the local White Storks shielded newly-hatched youngsters. 29 May. Return of the Sun, hot too. And to celebrate, my first run of my standard butterfly route, a favoured set of tracks leading through some excellent forest rides and small meadows. And a super day for butterflies, several species out for the first time this season, including Heath Fritillaries and a couple of Green Hairstreaks, the latter always a welcome butterfly. Also, three Swallowtails continuing the amazing start of the year for this species, plus a good showing of Dingy Skippers and, far rarer, a Northern Chequered Skipper too. All in all, 12 species noted, not bad for the end of May. And, rather unexpected, a vocal Eagle Owl none too pleased when I inadvertently parked right beneath the pines he was roosting in.