

August 2011. End of Summer.

Contributed by Jos

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What a difference a month makes - after tramping the wilds of the U.S. for the better part of July, I return to Lithuania to find the butterfly season past its peak, the bird breeding season basically over and the first dribs and drabs of migration already underway. Highlights of the first two weeks included a Pine Martin in my Vilnius garden, a flush of Camberwell Beauties out and about, plus Queen of Spain Fritillary, Bath White, Silver-spotted Skipper and late Greyings and Rock Greyings. Also, reasonably uncommon in Lithuania, a pair of Canada Geese just down from my garden and, all on my land, flocks of White Storks, a pair of Cranes and lingering Red-backed Shrikes. Pretty much the pattern for the remainder of the month too - plenty of departing migrants, including an early Hen Harrier, plus a good selection of butterflies still .

1-12 August. Moping About. So there I was, back in Lithuania. After a fantastic month of chasing bears and generally seeing wonders galore, it was time for my traditional period of moping about, savouring the little that passes for everyday birding and wildlife spotting on my home patches. Can't really say I went out birding as such, but plenty of time to reacquaint with my land and local forest tracks and by-ways - plenty of butterflies still on the wing, but with the passing of July, so too had the peak of the season faded into history, the bulk of the butterflies active being pale faded-out affairs, a tad tatty and looking none too smart. Silver-washed Fritillaries, Scarce Coppers, Little Blue, numbers of all much diminished. A few nice splashes of colour amongst the rags however - a couple of fresh Pallas's Fritillaries and, concluding a good showing of these species this year, several stunning Camberwell Beauties and a Swallowtail. Up at Labanoras, an air of silence in the forest, most of the breeders already departed, no Pied Flycatchers to be seen, warblers notable by their absence. Still a few lingerers out in the meadows - Red-backed Shrikes feeding late youngsters, a pair of Cranes strutting alone, White Storks still on the nest. Bits and bobs more. For the highlight of the period however, the surroundings were my humble garden in Vilnius - not the stacks of Tree Sparrows active at the feeders nor the Middle Spotted Woodpecker regular on the peanuts, but instead a nocturnal visitor - returning home late, out from the hedge darted a long sleek shape, a pause in the car headlights, a Pine Martin peering around. Very nice, a new species for the garden! 13-14 August. Up and Running. What a good weekend. With the country basking in sunshine, it was really my last chance to make amends for missing most of the butterfly season, a couple of days scouting around to try and locate a few key species. All in all, it turned out most successful, a total of 32 species the final tally. On the 13th, a few hours wandering on sandy tracks and trails produced almost all the species that I'd hoped for - a single Reverdin's Blue amongst the numerous Silver-studded Blues, a surprise Purple-edged Copper and, lingering heathland specialities, plenty of Greyling and one late Rock Greyling. Also Small Coppers, Dusky Meadow Brown and, continuing the excellent run of them this year, at least three Camberwell Beauties. Next day, in one of my favoured meadow patches, the selection was just fantastic - heaps and heaps of whites, the real corker amongst them an Eastern Bath White (a species I only ever see at this exact spot). Also the first of the traditional late-summer Pale Clouded Yellows floating in, a good showing of Red Admirals and Commas and a feast of fritillaries - six species in all, Silver-washed the most abundant, but also Pallas's, Queen of Spain, Lesser Marbled, Small Pearl-bordered and Weaver's. One other butterfly worthy of special note, I also managed to find a Silver-spotted Skipper, another species I rarely see away from this spot. And just to ensure I didn't forget my birder roots, a trio of harriers - several Marsh Harriers, a male Montagu's Harrier and, a very early autumn record, a female Hen Harrier drifting through. Also White Storks behind tractors, Swallows gathering, autumn drawing in. 25-28 August. Labanoras Highs. With much rain in the week previous, not to mention odd jobs with the house renovation, it was good to finally get out and about again, Labanoras my destination of choice.

Summer is effectively over, one lone White Stork the last lingerer of the clans, plus a few other ragtag tail-enders - one Lesser Spotted Eagle, Cranes still in my meadow, one Red-backed Shrike on the shrike pile, plus a steady movement of migrants, Swallows south, quite a few Whitethroats and Whinchats, a couple of Blackcaps, etc.

And as they depart, so too arrive the harbingers of autumn, the first Nutcrackers on the moving, plus an incoming Great Grey Shrike on a post at the meadow fringe. Also, two mighty White-tailed Eagles, a fine adult soaring overhead, then a half hour later, a juvenile cruising low, landing in my wood.

On the raptor front, however, the glories go to a Kestrel, a single bird flying through on the 25th. A scarce bird in eastern Lithuania, this was only the 5th record ever on my land, all of which were in August/September, with the last being five years ago. Otherwise, the only additional news, the restocking of the feeders for winter, Middle Spotted Woodpeckers, Nuthatches and oodles of Great Tits immediately descending.