

December 2011. Off to a Hotspot.

Contributed by Jos

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Off on travels to exotic lands mid-month, but till then hoping for a bit of sunshine in the ultra-mild Lithuania, the highlights off the first days of the month limited to the comings and goings in the garden. With gloomy skies, I could think of nothing better to celebrate the new month than buy a new lens for the camera. Gave it a quick whirl in the garden - despite the poor lighting conditions, the results pleasing enough, a Crested Tit approaching a peanut feeder.

2-3 December. Cool and Gloomy.

Barely saw reason to venture out, admired Crested Tits from the kitchen, popped up to Labanoras to top up the feeders - an impressive six woodpeckers hogging the feeders on arrival, the grand total amounting to five Great Spots and one Middle spot, with another Middle spot a little later. Also male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker just nearby, the usual Black Woodpeckers in the swamp forest. A darn tree had come crashing down in storms during the week, demolishing a front section of my cabin!

4 December. Runt Scoter.

Got word that the Ruddy Duck of a month earlier was still present at Metelys, albeit on a different bay with a verbal description slightly at odds with the original. Anyhow, arrived to find three guys watching the bird, and indeed a quick look with the binoculars and there bobbed a small diving duck in the bay some way out. Dumpy bird, smaller than Coot, nice off-white cheek, barely marked. Problem one, bird of three weeks back sported a distinct, though not very dark, horizontal bar through the cheek. I had previously deemed the bird a female, but now could it just be a first-year male with plumage more advanced than three weeks back?

A chat with the birders present, no reason to question the bird at present, decided to release news of the bird. Walked back to my car and put the telescope on the bird. Hmm, something odd. Head shape wrong, cheek showing no trace of the dark smudging, even bill didn't seem to match - not only was this not the bird present in mid-November, but there was no reason to even call it a Ruddy Duck! Looked more like a super runt Common Scoter to me! Photographs were later to confirm this, a mighty small one however!

Elsewhere, four Red-breasted Mergansers on Dusia, a few dozen Whooper Swans and about 12 Bewick's Swans.

10-11 December. Last Efforts in LT.

Under assault by Hooded Crows, a big female Goshawk over Vilnius city, plus a good assortment of the usuals in the garden, but the more noteworthy news again came from Labanoras - under the first significant snows of the winter, very large numbers of Great Tits now swamping the feeders, plus Marsh Tits and the associates. And in amongst them, the male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker again, Great Spotted Woodpeckers in small flocks and, cream de la cream, two White-backed Woodpeckers together, a male and female scolding each other. Not on the feeder this day, but not far off.

All looking good to a productive mid-winter on the feeders, but for me, that's that until the New Year - I hung the super feeders, topped them up with ample supplies to last out the month. Almost certainly, I will not get chance to visit again before my departure from Lithuania at the week's end.

Next posting, if nothing major happens locally this week, should be foreign lands, a hotspot in various means of the word.