

September 2013. Change of Days.

Contributed by Jos
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Season on the change - a cocktail of departing migrants, butterflies still on the wing and summer left-overs, Common Lizards sunning, Grass Snakes slithering. Amongst the Labanoras birds, White-tailed and Lesser Spotted Eagles, Corncrake and surprises in the form of Water Rail and Eurasian Wigeon. Also plenty of mammals active - Wild Boars galore, Raccoon Dogs, Red Foxes and Badgers also plentiful

Autumn Comings - 1-10 September. Passerines on the move, Nutcrackers in the hazel groves, storks long gone. In the opening ten days of the month, glorious warm sunshine prevailing, not a bad little haul of birds to kick things off at Labanoras. Amongst a steady passage warblers and other odds and ends, one Corncrake flushed from the meadows, one Red-backed Shrike lingering, one Lesser Spotted Eagle overhead and a rare autumn appearance of a Reed Bunting. Also several Cranes, a party of three Wheatears (good count for my land) and several flocks of Whinchats. Also, a late flurry of butterflies still on the wing, Red Admirals, Brimstones and Commas prominent, Short-tailed Blue and Large Grizzled Skipper welcome extras. Also a Common Lizard basking in the sunshine and, promises of a busy feeding season ahead, plenty of activity at the feeders, White-backed Woodpecker and Black Woodpecker already in the area.

Activities of the Night! Apple season again, sack loads of the fruit I am gathering, dumping the crop in almighty piles in front of my night cam. Come the cover of night, out come the players - amongst the impressive cast, almost non-stop Raccoon Dogs munching the apples, displaced only by the frequent appearance of gangs of Wild Boar, the squabbling families and stripy youngsters devouring the apples with glee. Badgers wander in to pick over the scraps, Red Foxes prance through, barely a sniff as they go. Also Roe Deer on occasion, a domestic moggy too! Away from the camera, also recorded a Common Shrew during the period, the 20th species of mammal to be found on my land. Red Letter Day - 14 September. Rare is it that I record a new species upon my land, but upon the pools within the forest, there she sailed, the buffy oranges and deep browns of a Eurasian Wigeon, species number 156 for the reserve. Mingling with a half dozen Mallard, this alone would have made my day, but the event was made all the more remarkable for the presence of additional company - as the flock flushed, birds rising from reed and pool, a smaller duck also launched into the air.

Round the bird flew, pale wing panels prominent, another rarity for my land - Garganey! The only other record of this species on my land dates from spring 2009, the arrival of two males and a female becoming the precursor to successful breeding that year. So, a red letter day indeed - two rare ducks pay a visit. Probably no coincidence that this day also marked the first day of significant autumn movements amongst other birds - hundreds of Jays on the move, a steady passage of Wood Pigeons, a trickle of émigré Great Tits and Long-tailed Tits, all signs of an autumn moving up a gear! Amongst the movements, also a flock of overhead Crossbills, a party of nine Lapwings and the return of a Great Grey Shrike, hopefully to winter. Another milestone also passed on this day - each year I keep a tally of species recorded upon my land during the year. With the addition of Wigeon, Garganey and Crossbill, the grand total for 2013 reached 124 species, surpassing the previous record set in 2012 by a single species. With three months to go, and at least one or two possible candidates still possible, it truly is looking to be a bumper year!

Red Letter Day Mark II - 16 September. Two days after the Eurasian Wigeon, yet another new species for the land! Squeeking away most content, this latest addition was a splendid Water Rail, a not totally unexpected species. In years of late, it is not unusual to find only a couple of new species per year on my land, so two in three days is pretty neat. Passerine passage also stepping up a gear, the skies now fairly heavy with Chaffinches southbound, flocks of Siskins, Wood Pigeons et al. Hybrid Factor - 18 September. Tree Sparrows are abundant in my Vilnius garden, flocks and flocks of them crowd onto my feeders throughout the winter, some remaining to breed in nest boxes, others dispersing out into neighbouring gardens to find place to breed. House Sparrows by contrast are rare. In eight years of feeding, I have only ever seen two - single males on both occasions, one day only on both occasions. Now there is a third!

All's not how it should be in the sparrow world of late however. Sparrow hanky panky, illicit actions over the summer. From early September, a number of 'odd' sparrows appeared in the flocks - something amiss with the dapper chestnut crowns and smart cheek patches of the standard Tree Sparrows. Instead these individuals, three or four of them, appeared to show heavy influence of a few wayward House Sparrow genes! A supercilium of varying intensity, cheek patches significantly reduced and the crown far from pure, each of the individuals painted a most distinctive picture. And then, not even sporting a smirk, I spotted my suspect - happily rubbing shoulders with the Tree Sparrows on the feeders, one male House Sparrow. Third House Sparrow ever in my garden, guilty by association and circumstantial evidence maybe, but the verdict stands, hybridisation of House and Tree Sparrow has occurred, he almost certainly the father.

Raptors Drifting - 21-28 September. Time of the raptors ...the autumn swing continues. High over Labanoras and through the forest, a steady trickle of raptors to enliven the days. All southbound, a continual drift of Sparrowhawks on the move, quite a few Common Buzzards and a Hobby too, but amongst these, the 'big boys' ...all in short succession on the 21st, making the best of a window in the weather, no less than four Lesser Spotted Eagles and, rather less common on my land, two mighty White-tailed Eagles, adults both. Also one very large female Goshawk hunting Mallards in the flood forest and, away from the raptors, a couple of Common Cranes also southbound and two Woodlarks, my only records so far in 2013. A week later, Buzzards and Sparrowhawks still moving through, a distinct slackening on other fronts though. On top of these, oodles of common stuff moving through, finches, corvids and tits all prominent. Also my second Reed Bunting of the season. Autumn days indeed.