

Ringling the Month. November 2014.

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Nutcrackers teasing, woodpeckers at the feeders. Summer long gone, fields and meadows near devoid of birds, it is the start of my winter ringing season at the feeders ... quite a good start - White-backed and Middle Spotted Woodpeckers amongst the initial haul, Nutcrackers and Black Woodpeckers in the immediate neighbourhood. Elsewhere, Black-throated Divers and seaducks the best of the rest.

Feeding Station. Late October - 1 November. In the winter 2013/14 season, a total of 370 birds belonging to 20 species were ringed at my Labanoras feeders - on dates from mid-October through to March, Great Tits and Blue Tits flocked in by the hundred and dozen, the rich supporting cast also including a nice selection of woodpeckers too. And so to the end of October 2014 ... thoughts once again returned to my ringing programme. As autumn faded out, with a late flurry of highlights including a pair of Crested Tits feeding not too far from my feeders on 19 October (a new species for my land), three Bewick's Swans flying over the same day, plus my seventh White-tailed Eagle of the autumn a few days later, I began to prepare for my winter 2014/15 ringing season. Hazel Grouse and Black Grouse were also seen within days of each other and, a signal of a good winter ahead for me, most of my regular wintering woodpeckers returned - one Black Woodpecker, two Grey-headed Woodpeckers, a pair of White-backed Woodpecker, several Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Middle Spotted Woodpecker and, to complete the line up, one Lesser Spotted Woodpecker too. With the feeders bustling, and a Nutcracker lingering rather close, nets went up from 25 October ...and boof, in came the birds, a fairly good selection from day one. By 1 November, no less than 66 birds had been caught at the feeders, the totals as below:

- Great Spotted Woodpecker - 4
- Middle Spotted Woodpecker - 2
- White-backed Woodpecker - 1
- Great Tit - 40
- Blue Tit - 5
- Marsh Tit - 6
- Nuthatch - 1
- Jay - 6
- Siskin -1

As in past years, already the familiar patterns are playing out - almost 80% of the Great Tits are males, almost all are adults. Interestingly, almost half at this early stage are returning birds from the previous winter ...just three weeks earlier, there were no birds at the feeders with rings from the previous winter. Spotted Teaser - 6-8 November. So near, so far ... Ten years and more I have waited, tossed food in their direction, watched every autumn as they venture near, given up as they evaporated away in October. Yet, here we are in 2014 and one is lingering beyond the usual August-September window ...a lone individual calling and flying around. On the 6th, a flock of Jays feeding around the feeders, then the familiar craaa craaaa craaaa echoing from above ...oh jeepers, there he was, sitting right above the feeders, peering down.

Come on, come on, a pile of juicy peanuts in full view ...was my wait of a decade about to finally be over? Ah fiddlesticks, he sat a while, then hopped across to a dead tree adjacent, then to one more distant. Two days later, the feeders were vacant again. A few days later however, on the 12th, he was back ...feeding on the ground a mere fifteen metres from my feeders!!! With hazelnuts long gone, was this bird actually sneaking into my feeders when I wasn't looking or simply looking for scraps dropped by other birds? Either way, thereafter, the Nutcracker was not seen again, vanished back to the coniferous forests nearby. Another near miss to add to the tally of many years of 'so near, so far'! Nutcrackers, darn Nutcrackers! The photograph above is one of my autumn birds, my winter wait continues ... Mildness Reigns - 13-16 November. Crippling action at my feeders, an unseasonal warmth hits the country, sultry temperatures reaching 14 C on the 12th November, slowly dropping thereafter. Nice though it may seem, the result is a very quiet spell at the feeders - a predicted influx of Great Tits has yet to materialize and numbers now sit at a mere 50% of the same period in 2013 - only 70 birds using the feeders at present. Likewise for woodpecker action - though Black, White-backed and Grey-headed Woodpeckers all now happily reside in my flood forest, along with the spotted trio, visits to my feeders are few and far between, an occasional Middle Spotted Woodpecker dropping in now and then, Great Spotted Woodpecker rather more regular. Roll on the awaited drop in temperatures!!!!Meanwhile, elsewhere, a quick tour of Dusia and Metelys lakes in southern Lithuania added a few nice birds - in the days before the winter ice arrives, these traditional sites usually host large numbers of Goldeneye and Tufted Ducks in particular, but along with these expected masses, often a diver or seaduck may occur too. So it was, on the 16th, I decided to pay a visit - 130 Whooper Swans and six Bewick's Swans amongst the highlights, two Black-throated Divers and two Red-breasted Mergansers even better. Big flocks of Fieldfares too, a push before the cold? Down comes the Snow, Up Goes the Action - 22-30 November. A white carpet to greet in the day, snow falling steadily through the morning. And with it, an immediate upswing at the feeders - along with an influx of common birds, one Coal Tit and one Willow Tit at the feeding station, one Sparrowhawk attacking also. A fellow predator, one Great Grey Shrike on territory also. The winter's ringing tally is rather more healthy than a couple of weeks before - though the numbers are still considerably down on the same period of 2013, the totals now sit at:

- Great Spotted Woodpecker - 8
- Middle Spotted Woodpecker - 2
- White-backed Woodpecker - 1
- Great Tit - 106
- Blue Tit - 17
- Marsh Tit - 12
- Willow Tit - 1
- Coal Tit - 1

- Nuthatch - 1
- Jay -14

- Siskin - 2 With virtually all birds stationary at the feeders, i.e. once present, then caught repeatedly over the weeks, these figures (except for Siskin) broadly equate to the total numbers of birds visiting the feeders daily. Additionally, skilled at avoiding the nets, a minimum of two additional Great Spotted Woodpeckers are present, one more White-backed Woodpecker, two Grey-headed Woodpeckers and, in the immediate area, one Black Woodpecker and one Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Days later, with temperatures dropping to minus 14, bird concentrations at the feeders increased ever more, a splendid flurry of action to finish the month off, a covey of nine Grey Partridges noted too.