

Baltic Mammal Challenge, October 2015.

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The BIG 50 is reached. After early month highlights including rampaging Wild Boars, focus naturally turned to seeking a final species to bring my Baltic Mammal Challenge to its target, the Holy Grail of 50 species in 2015 in the Baltic States. Failed yet again to see a Muskrat at another potential location, failed to catch any new rodent species at assorted localities around the city ...but turning closer to home paid dividend on the 10th - House Mouse in my Labanoras house, a species that had been eluding me for weeks in more urban settings!

Wreckers of the Night. Under the cover of darkness, 120 kg of grain vanished, grain box uprooted ...mystery vandals of the night! Several occasions it occurred, a feeder on my Labanoras plot trashed. Hmm, this feeder was a hefty thing, surely a brute of some size was the culprit ...maybe a Moose, perhaps Wild Boar, fanciful thinking even considered a wandering Brown Bear. I set the night camera and lay in wait, nothing for a couple of nights ...and then the guilty party slipped up, caught in action on film ...not a single animal, but a whole gang of them, Wild Boars all! For highlights of a couple of nights of destruction, [CLICK HERE](#) for the video clip! House Mouse, Mouse in the House! Having spent almost ten months hiking Baltic forests and meadowlands, tracking impressive critters over umpteen kilometres and meandering over virtually every corner of the three Baltic States, I had now reached 49 species, just one to go! In recent weeks however, I had failed to find either Root Vole or Harvest Mouse in the Nemunas Delta, I had failed to find Muskrat at both Kintai and the Šventoji River, I had also failed to find House Mouse in any of several attempted locations in Vilnius city and had also drawn a blank on Black Rat at the only locality I know for them! Shucks, I should have looked closer to home! In true style, species number 50 was a humble House Mouse in my very own home in Labanoras! Long have I known that mice wander in on occasion, but I have always supposed that they were purely Yellow-necked Mice, the more frequent species in the area. In quite a few trapping sessions in and around my cabin, Yellow-necked Mice have proved themselves ten-a-penny common, but never had I actually paid much attention to the mice in the house, a couple of kilometres away. A casual comment by an acquaintance some days earlier had got me thinking, "Hmm, rather than endless sessions in Vilnius Old City, maybe I need to check those mice in my countryside house". So it was, beside the sofa in the corner of a room, adjacent to a suspicious little hole, I left a pile of peanuts ...out popped a predictable Yellow-necked Mouse! No worries though, next was another mouse, a far smaller one ...yep, a House Mouse! And then there were two! So that was that, species number 50 in my living room, a classic ending to the grand Baltic Mammal Challenge. Leaving a camera overlooking the hole, House Mice visited no less than 155 times, Yellow-necked Mice a mere dozen or so occasions. Guess I should be thinking about a little relocation of the beasties now, but as I don't actually use this house, I reckon they will be fine till spring.