

A Tale of Two Ends. April 2016

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An excellent start to April, an excellent end to April, but three weeks of cold nothingness in between! With warm sunny days gracing the beginning and end of the month, the superb selection of butterflies in the first days included a Camberwell Beauty and multiple Yellow-legged Tortoiseshells, while the month's end saw a magnificent eleven species, including Large Tortoiseshell and flights of Holly Blues, Map Butterflies et al.

4 April. Mass Emergence. A little over a week into the annual butterfly season and a positive explosion in butterfly numbers! With sun and temperatures reaching 16 C, it was the warmest day of the spring so far, perfect conditions for a few early butterflies. What I found however far exceeded my expectations – grand masses of butterflies out enjoying the sunshine, an estimated 230 butterflies and no less than six species! By any standard, this was superb for so early in the season. I started the day on my plot at Labanoras, yellow flowers poking through the meadows and a carpet of blue flowers dotting the woodland. Not on these though were butterflies congregating, instead mostly settling to lap up the oozing sap from the stumps of birches recently felled by Beavers – not a behaviour I have noted before, but a good 35 or so Small Tortoiseshells doing this, plus a couple of Commas. A handful of Brimstones also fluttering past. Next up, a 20 km meander through neighbouring pine forests. Brimstones super abundant, my first Peacocks of the year on the wing, then an absolute classic – repeatedly settling on a sunny track in an area of open pine, one smart Camberwell Beauty, a top butterfly indeed. This was soon followed by the first of four Yellow-legged Tortoiseshells (another rather uncommon species) and endless more Brimstones, plus another two Commas and a few Small Tortoiseshells. I had expected a mere two or three species this day and perhaps a dozen or so individuals, but by the trip's end, I was staggered – totals sat at approximately 170 Brimstones, one Camberwell Beauty, four Yellow-legged Tortoiseshells, at least 40 Small Tortoiseshells, 12 Peacocks and four Commas! Amongst the non-butterflies, several more White Storks had arrived atop their nests, the first displaying Green Sandpipers had returned, a singing Chiffchaff was active in the forest, one Moose went crashing through my reedbeds and a gentle procession of Common Toads lumbered towards the breeding pools. BALTIC YEAR LIST

- 4. Comma
- 5. Camberwell Beauty
- 6. Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell

6-13 April. All Fizzled Out! After the glorious start to the month, a predictable shift in the winds brought cool northerlies, generally overcast skies and temperatures barely topping 10 C. Still, spring pushes on, good numbers of Common Toads and Common Frogs spawning, a continuing trickle of summer migrants arriving and, in a few hours of sunshine at Labanoras on the 11th, a small collection of butterflies in sheltered spots - four Small Tortoiseshells, six Brimstones and, my fifth of the season, another Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell. Forecast for the next week - much the same, cool northerlies, occasional sunny patches, probably no new species of butterfly on the wing ...fortunately warmer climates to the south were beckoning for me! 14-17 April. On the Hunt for Eastern Festoon Taking a break from the cold wet Baltic States, this was a short trip to explore the Aegean island of Kos, with the principal goal being to find Eastern Festoon and any other spring butterflies on the wing. Turned out to be an excellent little trip, seeing no less than 27 species of butterfly. [CLICK HERE](#) for a full report of this trip. 21-25 April. Snowing! One degree and snow, the culmination of three weeks of fairly abmossal weather, temperatures rarely exceeding 10 C and absolutely not conducive to flights of butterflies. Needless to say, not a single butterfly to be seen. Surprisingly good however for birds, quite a few migrants moving despite the conditions - the Labanoras selection including a healthy dose of raptors, with White-tailed Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Osprey, Montagu's Harrier, Marsh Harrier, Common Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and Common Kestrel amongst the species seen. 28-30 April. Out on a High. A change in the weather! A rare sun putting in an appearance and, for a handful of days at least, the temperature rising to a pleasant 17 C. Harbingers of pleasant spring days, Brimstones were up and about, pastel yellows along woodland edge. At Labanoras on the 28th, no less than eight species seen, many in good numbers. A dozen Peacocks, a few Small Tortoiseshells, three Commas and a Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell all attracted to flowering willows, while at meadow edge the first Orange Tips, Holly Blues and Green-veined Whites of the year. On the bird front, Pied Flycatchers and Wood Warblers were back on territory and both Water Rail and Moorhen were back in the flooded forest, hopefully to repeat last year's breeding performances. Two days later, in a few hours before cloud returned to dominate, it was even better - a total eleven species and perhaps 70 individual butterflies seen, including a very nice Large Tortoiseshell (never a very common butterfly) and the first Map Butterflies and Wood White of the season. Excellent for raptors too - Osprey, Montagu's Harrier, Lesser Spotted Eagle and Black Kite all seen, along with the more usual Marsh Harriers, Common Buzzards and Sparrowhawks. BALTIC YEAR LIST

- 7. Orange Tip
- 8. Green-veined White
- 9. Wood White
- 10. Holly Blue

- 11. Large Tortoiseshell
- 12. Map Butterfly

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