

Rise of the Season. May 2016

Contributed by Jos
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Sunny days to start and finish the month, an immediate upswing in the numbers of butterflies, Orange Tips and Map Butterflies abundant early on, plus Camberwell Beauties, three Bath Whites and a emergence of many hundreds of Green Hairstreaks. Towards the month's end, a second wave of butterflies saw many species on the wing, not least Pale Clouded Yellows, Queen of Spain Fritillaries and Little Blues.

2 May. Bits and Bobs.

Month's start, weather improving, a good deal of sunshine, temperatures climbing to above 16C. Only limited time in the field this day, but a reasonable selection of butterflies active - Orange Tip, Holly Blue and Map Butterfly amongst them. 5 May. Spectacular in Green. Heatwave by this year's standards, 23 C and wall-to-wall sunshine! A marked reduction of Small Tortoiseshells on my land at Labanoras, but a big rise in the numbers of Map Butterflies, Orange Tips, Wood Whites and Green-veined Whites. Also first Speckled Woods of the year (never very common here, but four active this day) and a Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell. Out in the pine forests beyond, a very nice surprise was awaiting. A surprise in very big numbers! One of the daintier of the early spring butterflies, Green Hairstreaks are fairly widespread in the open pines of eastern Lithuania, but rarely common, usually just the occasional one or two seen here and there. Not so today! In the chunk of forest that I covered, they were absolutely everywhere ... after initial excitement with four in a sunny patch of lichen-draped bilberry, I then went on to find them in virtually all open areas. The highlight of the morning was 25 or so Green Hairstreaks clustering around a single small Salix bush, all the more impressive for the fact that two stunning Camberwell Beauties patrolled the very same clearing and yet another Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell fluttered in to join the Green Hairstreaks on the Salix! So, what a day - a grand total of about 70 Green Hairstreaks, by far the highest ever day total that I have recorded (also significantly exceeding the average number that I usually see in an entire year). Also two cracking Camberwell Beauties, two Yellow-legged Tortoiseshells and a whole host of other butterflies. In total, fourteen species and over 300 individual butterflies. **BALTIC YEAR LIST**

- 13. Small White

- 14. Green Hairstreak

- 15. Speckled Wood

Grass Snake and Black Terns also seen, mass arrival of Whinchats on territory. Bittern, Savi's Warbler and Moorhen all vocal in the reeds. 7-8 May. More Spectacular in Green! Well, I had been bowled over by 70 Green Hairstreaks on the 5th ... little did I expect this to rise yet more! After another 40 or so in Labanoras on the 7th, I spent the morning of the 8th in pine forest south of the Vilnius ... 23 C, perfect sunshine and Green Hairstreaks by the bucketload! With dozens flitting in sunny glades and endless excellent habitat stretching in all directions, I quickly realised I was going to smash my record of two days earlier. Trying to get some sort of count, I resorted to following a forest track and counting on a ten kilometre transect (through a mix of good open habitat and less good mature growth) - result, a grand total of 190 Green Hairstreaks! Truly amazing, there must have been thousands flying on this day across the forest. Few other butterflies were active in this area however, so I then shifted to adjacent meadows that are very productive later in the summer. Not so bad today either - several hundred whites flying, Green-veined Whites, Small Whites and Wood Whites in the main, but a good scatter of Orange Tips too, plus the icing on the cake, at least three Bath Whites. A localised species in Lithuania, I have only ever seen this on a handful of occasions, always second generation individuals in the late summer. So there we have it, a top day for early butterflies, 190 Green Hairstreaks and three Bath Whites!

BALTIC YEAR LIST

- 16. Bath White

Aside the butterflies, Eagle Owl, Wryneck, Red-backed Shrike, Golden Oriole and Corncrake also recorded. 29-30 May. Second Wave Starts. After two weeks in Japan, I arrived back to all change on the butterfly front – the first wave of the butterfly season was effectively over, the second main wave just beginning to kick in. In warm sunny conditions and temperatures sitting at a pleasant 25-26 C, my first impressions on my land at Labanoras were of very much reduced butterfly numbers - no sign of any of the early spring butterflies, with previously common species such as Small Tortoiseshell, Map Butterfly and Brimstone all conspicuous by their absence. Lots of nice birds, including Red-backed Shrikes and two Great White Egrets, but I saw very few butterflies at all. A few kilometers away at lakeside meadows though, the first hints of wave two were fluttering across a small patch of slope - a half hour or so producing a whole bunch of new species for the year, Large White, Heath Fritillary, Small Heath, Sooty Copper and Common Blue included.

This did not prepare me for the afternoon however - shifting to flower-rich meadows south of the capital, I was in for a real treat. Sixteen species of butterfly on the wing, again not including many of the typical first wave butterflies, but instead quite a few Common Blues, a bunch of Sooty Coopers, a single Small Copper and, very pleasing, five species of fritillary (Pearl-spotted, Small Pearl-spotted, Weaver's, Queen of Spain and Heath Fritillaries). Also, several rather early Pale Clouded Yellows, quite an emergence of Small Heaths and a couple of Grizzled Skippers. With the forecast

promising continued sun and high temperatures, all was looking good for some excellent action in the subsequent days. One day later, I added six Little Blues to the collection of special butterflies, these flying on roadside verges at a location near my home. BALTIC YEAR LIST

- 17. Large White
- 18. Pale Clouded Yellow
- 19. Small Copper
- 20. Sooty Copper
- 21. Little Blue
- 22. Common Blue
- 23. Queen of Spain Fritillary
- 24. Pearl-bordered Fritillary
- 25. Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary
- 26. Weaver's Fritillary
- 27. Heath Fritillary
- 28. Small Heath
- 29. Grizzled Skipper

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