

Autumn Pickings. September 2016

Contributed by Jos

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Despite the onset of autumn, still quite a flurry of butterfly activity throughout the month - Eastern Bath White, Clouded Yellow, Chalkhill Blue, Brown Hairstreak and Brown Argus amongst the near 30 species seen.

1-3 September. Autumn Pickings. Nearing the season's end perhaps, but the first three days of September were grand, a haul of no less than 22 species still on the wing, some in good numbers. Two areas visited - meadows south of the capital and borderlands in the far south, both proving better than expected. At the first locality, forest tracks were almost devoid of butterflies, but arriving a favourite area of meadow adjacent, the sight was awesome - in temperatures above 25 C, a multitude of whites and others fluttering across the fields.

Exploring in depth, the rewards were plenty - in addition to the several hundred Small Whites and Green-veined Whites, also a mighty impressive 80 or so Weaver's Fritillaries and minimum of 30 Queen of Spain Fritillaries, high totals indeed, especially for so late in the season. Also here, amongst the total of 16 species, at least 15 Pale Clouded Yellows and three Eastern Bath Whites. A couple of days later, though the sun had been replaced by high cloud, the species tallies soared ever higher. Visiting my regular localities in the Belarussian border zone near Druskininkai, my expectations had been rather low due to the cloud, but fortunately it gradually became brighter and warmer as the day wore on ...and with the improvement, slowly, slowly, more and more butterflies! Saw 20 species in all, including typical early autumn species such as Red Admiral, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell, plus lingering (and mostly tatty) butterflies from earlier in the season, amongst them Scarce, Sooty and Small Coppers and High Brown Fritillary. Best of the bunch however were Large Grizzled Skipper, Chalkhill Blue, Map Butterfly and Reverdin's Blue (all two-three weeks since my previous sightings). 7-11 September. Yet More. One day of wet weather on the 4th, then back to days of splendid sunshine and temperatures approaching 25 C ...some of the best weather of the year! I had expected the year to have been largely over by now in terms of butterflies, but how pleasantly wrong I was!!! With trips to meadows south of Vilnius, to Labanoras and to the Kernave and Dukstos areas, I was still managing to record up to 16 or 17 species a day, rather impressive I think for September in the Baltic States. And better still, amongst the rich selection, I was also seeing some very nice numbers and species. Of the high tallies, the most significant included around 65 Pale Clouded Yellows, a mighty 55 Queen of Spain Fritillaries and a wonderful 25 Eastern Bath Whites (my highest day total of the year, representing more in the single day than I often see in an average year). Notable species included a vagrant Clouded Yellow on the 9th, two Brown Hairstreaks on the 11th and five Brown Argus on the 11th. Though an non-annual visitor to Lithuania, the Clouded Yellow was my second of the year, while the Brown Hairstreaks were my second and third and the Brown Argus my third to eighth of the year! I hadn't expected any of these species to still be flying!

Also found two more late Large Grizzled Skippers (7th and 11th), an equally late Map Butterfly (11th), a Speckled Wood (10th) and no less than 19 Small Coppers (9th and 11th). With the forecast set to remain good for at least another week, all's looking excellent for continued butterfly action for some time yet! 15-18 September. The Final Countdown. It was always a question how long the amazing run of high temperatures could last. Well, the forecasts now predicted pitiful temperatures of just 12-13 C for the next week, rain fairly frequent. That should just about end the butterfly season! In the meantime however, it was excellent - no less than 16 species recorded on the 15th and, despite a notable chill to the air and mostly overcast skies, still 10 species on the 18th. Highlights? All scattered between sites in the Druskininkai area and meadows south of Vilnius, another 20 or so Pale Clouded Yellows, no less than 74 Queen of Spain Fritillaries (!) and 32 Small Coppers, along with a single Eastern Bath White, a late Chalkhill Blue and an equally late Reverdin's Blue. Also saw Sooty Copper, Scarce Copper, Weaver's Fritillary and Speckled Wood, all of which were potentially my final ones of the year. 25-26 September. On it Ticks! No end to the season - after a run of cloudy days hovering around 12 C with periodic rain, a return to partial sun and 14 C revealed it was not all over! Far from it, no less than ten species still on the wing in my favoured meadows on the 25th, some in very good numbers. Queen of Spain Fritillaries totalled perhaps 40, some very fresh looking individuals, Small Coppers were sitting at a minimum of 35 and Pale Clouded Yellows at about 18. Remarkably, an impressive 12 Eastern Bath Whites were also present, plus three Sooty Coppers, a dozen Small Whites, two Green-veined Whites, a Comma and a Weaver's Fritillary. Two other localities on the 26th produced yet more butterflies, albeit in lower numbers - eight Pale Clouded Yellows, one Queen of Spain Fritillary, three Small Whites, a Comma and, now very late, a lingering Scarce Copper. These apparent abundances however are somewhat deceptive - most localities, especially non-meadow habitats, are now totally devoid of butterflies. That said, there must be odds on chances for a reasonable selection of butterflies lasting even until October this year!

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