

Stunning End to the Season. October 2016.

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Last Updated Sunday, 26 March 2017

Amazing weather to start the month - positively tropical at 20 C, the result being still numerous butterflies on the wing. Amongst 16 species, unprecedented records of Chestnut Heath and two Large Coppers, neither species ever recorded so late in the season in Lithuania.

1-2 October. The New Summer. Always a potential for frost in the early days of October, even snow on a rare occasion. Not so this year however - the month beginning with sunshine and very unseasonal highs of 20 C. In these stunning conditions, numerous butterflies remained on the wing, numbers actually rising as new freshly-emerged individuals appeared, including ultra unusual records of both Chestnut Heath and Large Copper, both usually single-brooded summer butterflies in the Baltic States. As far as I know, this is the first record of a second generation Chestnut Heath in Lithuania, whilst perhaps only the second of Large Copper (one record existing of an individual on 17 September some years ago). Over and above these however, numbers of butterflies in general were impressive - in many a year, all butterflies have long disappeared by October, but in the sunshine at an assortment of productive meadows north and south of the capital, no less than 16 species and 250 individual butterflies were noted on the first day of the month, this actually representing a significant rise on the numbers in late September! Amongst them, quite a number of fresh newly-emerged individuals, especially Queen of Spain Fritillaries, Eastern Bath Whites, Small Whites and Small Coppers, active mating and egg laying observed. Lots of Pale Clouded Yellows too, plus a rise in Commas and a reappearance of Painted Ladies, Peacocks and Brimstones. Somewhat a surprise, two Brown Argus were also seen, these quite possibly also being the first October records for Lithuania. On the bird front, Cranes and Whooper Swans heading south. Little parties of Crossbills doing the same. 3 October. Last Gasp for last Large Copper. With the forecasts for the following week looking ominous, this was likely to be my last real opportunity for any numbers of butterflies in 2016. Out I headed to meadows. Though mostly overcast and cool in the morning, with a grand total of just three butterflies seen (one Green-veined White and two Small Whites), things totally flipped to the positive in early afternoon when a weak sun broke through - as the temperature clambered up to 16 C, butterflies emerged for the final finale ...20 Queen of Spain Fritillaries, one Weaver's Fritillary, 16 Pale Clouded Yellows, five Eastern Bath Whites, all very nice. Also a couple of dozen Small Whites, eight Small Coppers and three Peacocks. The biggest surprise however was another Large Copper - initially assuming it was the same individual as seen a couple of days later, the underwing spotting identified it as a new individual, quite remarkable ...and signs that the species certainly had a second generation this year. So, one brief sunny spell, nine species and approximately 75 individual butterflies ...the grand finale, over and out. 4-9 October. Season's End.

And then it was all over, the butterfly season coming to a grinding halt as autumn hit with a vengeance! Days and days of strong winds, heavy rain and daytime temperatures down to 5 C ...no point even looking for butterflies! No sun forecast for several more days to come, even then the temperatures not predicted to rise very much - I seriously doubt there will be an encore to follow! 13-16 October. No Encore. Sunny days again, but hard frost and night temperatures hitting minus 3 C. One brave butterfly in the relative warmth of the late afternoon on the 13th (a Brimstone), but otherwise the meadows and woodland edges have fallen quiet, the butterfly season is truly over. Still, with a brief flurry of snow on the 14th, winter is not so far away ...time to resume my ringing at my winter feeding stations. Weekend one notched up a bunch of birds, a good number of both Marsh and Willow Tits amongst them. Also at my feeding station, a Hazel Grouse just nearby, Bewick's Swans overhead and a Wigeon on a pool. Goodbye butterflies, hello birds.

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