

June 2017. Time of the Specials.

Contributed by Jos
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June is a superb month in Lithuania, some of the country's most special butterflies appearing on the wing. Though I was out of the country for much of the month, highlights did include Clouded Apollo, Marsh Fritillary, Bog Fritillary, Green-underside Blue and Scarce Heath in the first few days of the month, with Alcon Blue, Knapweed Fritillary and Large Copper at the other end.

New Butterflies. 1-3 June. Quite some time I have been searching for two particular species in Lithuania, both being rather scarce and localised. Needless to say, to find both within a couple of days of each other was very pleasing! Both in the country's Red Data Book, the species in question were Marsh Fritillary and Green-underside Blue, the first a rare occupant of scattered wetlands, the second a species mostly restricted to grassland edges in south Lithuania. I had seen neither in the country, though I had seen Marsh Fritillary in Latvia in 2016. **Target One:** Marsh Fritillary. A small marsh in eastern Lithuania, barely a few hundred metres across, this little wetland is a place I have visited several times this season. Not only special for Violet Coppers, two seen on this visit, but also for a number of other interesting butterflies all due to fly in the coming days. Today's highlight was Marsh Fritillaries, at least 15 active, mostly in a damp area of transition habitat. Splendid butterflies indeed! The same general area should also support Bog Fritillary and both Large and Scarce Heaths ...failed to find any however, probably still some days too early. Other butterflies present though did include an early Red Admiral, a Northern Chequered Skipper, several Speckled Woods and, in meadows nearby, Short-tailed Blue, a late Holly Blue and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary. **Target Two:** Green-underside Blue. A chilly 10 C early on, the bright sun doing little to warm the day. Checked several areas in the Marcinkony area, but with the temperature rising only a couple of degrees while I was there, conditions were far from ideal. Sheltered patches did however harbour a healthy number of Brown Arguses (at least 15), plus a couple of Grizzled Skippers., as well as a few Common Blues and one Little Blue, but certainly no Green-underside Blues. Checked another possible site a little later, failed again on Green-underside Blue, the main rewards here being Swallowtail and Queen of Spain Fritillary. Next stop Cepkaliai – idea was to look for Bog Fritillary, another zero show, perhaps still a few days early. Did find a couple of Baltic Graylings though, plus four Pearl-bordered Fritillaries and one Chequered Skipper. Deciding I was not going to find Green-underside Blue, I gave up on the pine forests and associated meadow and headed to a favoured area right in the far south of the country. Turned out to be a good move, there were stacks of butterflies, starting with a Glanville Fritillary active in flower meadows. However, what I was not ready for was what I found next - wandering along a sunny track, forest to one side, meadow to the other, quite a number of blues were flitting around. Some clearly Common Blues, but then some 'different' ones caught my eye ...and as soon as one landed, my eyes were feasting on no less than a Green-underside Blue! And then there were more! And more! The entire forest edge was full of them, dozens and dozens attending flowers - in a mere 750 metre stretch, I estimated a minimum of 65 present, almost all males. Quite stunning, I had been hoping to perhaps find two or three if I was lucky, but now I had whole flocks of them! So, rounding the day off at another site, adding Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries amongst others, I returned home most content, 26 species seen, a few real crackers amongst them. **BALTIC YEAR LIST**

- 44. Marsh Fritillary
- 45. Glanville Fritillary

- 46. Green-underside Blue

4-8 June. Flight of the Fritillaries. Early June, season cranking up, many excellent butterflies now on the wing, including many of the rarer localised species, not least several fritillaries. With a departure from Lithuania for three weeks imminent, I hoped for good weather in these last few days in the country and, fortunately, was duly rewarded – sandwiching days of rain, skies were blue and temperatures good on the 4th, 6th and 8th. Time to make hay ... travelling quite extensively, I visited some of my favourite sites in central and eastern areas, good butterflies at all.

4 June. Started out not too far from Ukmerge, Clouded Apollos still flying, plus a range of others including Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Little Blue, but the highlight of the day was surely checking out one site where I had seen a tatty Glanville Fritillary moderately late in the season in 2016. A dry sunny slope rich on flowers, it was simply a delight on this day – no tatty Glanville Fritillaries to report, but instead a splendid emergence of at least 16 most pristine individuals. A highly localised species in Lithuania, rare it is that I see more than a few Glanville Fritillaries in any given season, so this was a treat indeed. Failed to find Large Heath at one nearby location, but did add my first Black-veined White on the year.

6 June. Only a few hours to spare, squashed in between work commitments, but with a hot sun shining down, I could not resist popping out to one site not too far from the capital. And good that I did – on marsh and nearby meadow, 17 species noted in a fairly short period. More than that however, a few real classics amongst them – alongside some stunning Marsh Fritillaries, I finally found the main butterfly I was seeking. The species in question was another listed in the Lithuanian Red Data Book, the rather diminutive Scarce Heath. A fairly dark butterfly, the underwings are decorated with a series of small orangy pearls, most exquisite. Found a total of five, all in very fresh condition. Second attempt in a row, I did however fail to find Large Heath, a species that should occur alongside. Nearby meadows added my first Large Skipper of the season.

8 June. Less than 24 hours later, I would be on a plane heading out of the country. With a three-week absence, I feared I would miss key flight periods for a number of localised species, one of which being Alcon Blue, another Bog Fritillary. With sun on this day, I hoped for an early Alcon Blue and sincerely hoped for a Bog Fritillary, a species that should already be on the wing. Tried a couple of localities in the morning, including areas that I saw the range-restricted Alcon

Blue the previous year, but no joy. Couldn't complain too much however, as one meadow in particular proved most excellent – amongst more commonplace Heath Fritillaries, at least two False Heath Fritillaries and, more impressive, no less than five Knapweed Fritillaries. This last species is always a challenge to find in Lithuania, many a year goes by without me seeing one. This particular site though seems reliable – I saw one at the same locality a week earlier and three on the same slopes in 2016. Also here, several Mazarine Blues, one Little Blue, loads of Common Blues, four Large Skippers, one Wall Brown and my first Small Tortoiseshell for a month, clearly generation two about to appear. Onward to the next target of the day – specialist of raised bogs, wellington boots are the order of the day, all of its favoured localities require quite some squelching about! I have previously seen this species only in Cepkaliai Bog, but certainly did not have time to travel to that locality this day, so tried instead bogs in the heart of forestland not too far south of Vilnius. Had already tried this locality a couple of times in the preceding week, but was still hoping for luck. Walking out into the bog, soon encountered the tail-end of the Baltic Grayling season, still one or two flitting from pine to pine, while few Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries also zipped about, so too the last of the spring emergence of Green Hairstreaks. Had to pause a while while a cloud shut out the sun for a while, but resuming, I then found the first of the target species, white-centred spots lining the rear underwing, a Bog Fritillary. Found three in all, success! Rounded off with a wander in nearby meadows, added my ninth fritillary species of the week – four Queen of Spain Fritillaries. Indeed, flight of the fritillaries. BALTIC YEAR LIST

- 47. Bog Fritillary
- 48. False Heath Fritillary

- 49. Black-veined White
- 50. Scarce Heath

- 51. Large Skipper

And with that, as I departed Lithuania for three weeks, I'd recorded 51 species in Lithuania so far in 2017, a total that compares favourably to the 47 at the same time in 2016. 29 June. All change in Lithuania. After three weeks away, I had hoped for a full day in the field on my return ...heavy rain all morning dashed that, but fortunately sun broke through in mid-afternoon allowing a few hours out and about. Predictably, massive change on the butterfly front, large numbers of Chestnut Heaths, Pearly Heaths and Amanda's Blues immediately apparent, along with Dark Green Fritillaries drifting across the flower meadows, a few Lesser Marbled Fritillaries and my first Ringlet and Meadow Browns of the season. Soon added several Purple-shot Coppers, a male Scarce Copper, a couple of Mazarine Blues and a single Little Blue. A good mix of species indeed. I again however was looking for Alcon Blue - a species restricted to just a couple of sites in the country, I had found a couple at this site the previous year, but now wondered if I had missed the main flight period while travelling. Focussing on a warm sunny slope with scant vegetation, first butterfly was a Common Blue, the next Amanda's Blue, but the next species was exactly what I was hoping for – not just one, but several Alcon Blues, females actively egg-laying. At least 12 present in all, scattered across both this slope and adjacent areas, a very healthy number I think. Oodles of Heath Fritillaries present and, not an easy species, at least one Nickerl's Fritillary too. Several rather battered Knapweed Fritillaries also present. With the addition of Small Skipper, I had now found twelve new species for the year, very pleasing. It was not quite over though, shifting locality by a couple of kilometres, I added three more - a very nice White Admiral along woodland edge, about ten Large Chequered Skippers in damp vegetation aside a stream and three stunning Large Coppers in meadows. All in all, 25 species in total, 15 new for the year ... very good for a few hours in the late afternoon. BALTIC YEAR LIST

- 52. Large Copper
- 53. Scarce Copper
- 54. Purple-shot Copper
- 55. Amanda Blue
- 56. Alcon Blue
- 57. Dark Green Fritillary

- 58. Lesser Marbled Fritillary

- 59. Nickerl's Fritillary

- 60. White Admiral
- 61. Chestnut Heath
- 62. Pearly Heath
- 63. Ringlet
- 64. Meadow Brown
- 65. Large Chequered Skipper
- 66. Small Skipper