

## October 2017. Last Gasps of the Season.

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Last Updated Friday, 27 October 2017

Cold, wet and windy, the tides of October spelling the end to the 2017 butterfly season. In a final little fanfair however, the first few days of the month threw a few unexpected highlights, eleven species of butterfly seen, three fritillary species the most unexpected. And then, right through to the month's end, occasional butterflies on the wing - truly remarkable for the Baltic States!

1 October. A distinct chill hitting the lands, nights dropping to 5C and days struggling to exceed 10 C. Hardly conducive to butterflies flying, but even in these last gasps of the season, still the limited sunny spells brought a number of butterflies - eleven species on the first day of the month, including 20 Queen of Spain Fritillaries, one Weaver's Fritillary and one fairly fresh Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary ...three species of fritillary in October, who would have thought it?!

Also at least 30 Small Coppers braving the elements, two Eastern Bath Whites and a half dozen Pale Clouded Yellows. As for the rest, a single Small White, a single Green-veined White, a single Small Tortoiseshell, a single Red Admiral and two Commas. 2-7 October. The End.

Patchy sun and a cold wind on 2nd October - a return to the grasslands that had produced the impressive numbers of butterflies in the preceding days failed to do likewise. Till 11 a.m., not a single butterfly was seen, then in weak sun and the nippy winds, finally a few brave butterflies appeared - a grand total of three species and 13 individual butterflies ...one Green-veined White, seven Small Coppers, five Queen of Spain Fritillaries.

Thereafter, days of heavy rain and low temperatures, pretty much ending the season so I thought. A brief respite on the 7th October did however bring the final stragglers, three Small Whites at Labanoras ...most surely my last butterflies of the year in Lithuania.

Despite the dismal weather, still a few dragonflies about too - Common Darters widespread and even on the wing in moderately bright patches, plus Migrant Hawkets in a couple of locations. 15-20 October. Season Lives On! By rights, butterflies in this neck of the woods should have been over long ago, frosts and even a dash of early snow not unheard of by mid-October. With torrential rain and cold dominating this year from the 8th October onwards, I really didn't expect any more butterflies, but I did manage to find a single Small White in a brief spell of sun at Labanoras on the 15th. Spurred on by this, and encouraged by an unseasonably warm 15 C, I then nipped out to meadows south of the city when I spotted a big patch of blue sky approaching on the 18th ...and what a nice reward, butterflies flying! My latest ever assortment of butterflies in this country, no less than four species and 12 individuals on a very brief outing: six Small Coppers, four Queen of Spain Fritillaries (one looking freshly emerged), one Brimstone, one Small White. Next day, it got even better - in sunshine and temperatures of 13 C, these same meadows actually produced a slight upswing in the number of butterflies! All in a single hour, one Brimstone, one Small Tortoiseshell, six Queen of Spain Fritillaries and no less than 18 Small Coppers! Also Common Darter and Migrant Hawker, plus four Siberian Winter Damselfly, the latter not something I see often.

One day on, as I waited at traffic lights in the city centre, gazing up at the bright sun and cursing that I was unable to get out to the meadows to enjoy the conditions, albeit now only 10 C, so a Red Admiral fluttered by ...my sixth species in three days, unheard of in late October in these parts!

24 October. 2017 Finale!

Several cloudy days, a couple of nights dropping to a chilly minus 2C, truly thought the butterfly season would be over. And so dawned 24 October, clear skies and a considerable frost, freezing point early on, rising only to a meagre 3 C by midday. However, with bright sun and blue skies, relative warmth still lurked in sheltered spots and taking a quick wander on the local patch, there, low and behold, butterflies!

Only saw three in all, one Queen of Spain Fritillary and two Small Coppers, but truly quite amazing to have flying butterflies on such a late date here in Lithuania, especially given it was only 3 C! Certainly my latest ever in the country.

Also notable, still some dragonflies and damselflies active, or at least three anyhow - one Common Darter and three Siberian Winter Damselflies. One day later, it was snowing, a partial white layer beginning to coat the land! And that was it, the end of the 2017 season. Probably.

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