

Spring Flush. April 2018.

Contributed by Jos
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With rising temperatures, so the butterfly season truly began. From fairly good numbers in the first half of the month, with numerous Small Tortoiseshells and Brimstones, plus Camberwell Beauties, the second half of the month saw an absolute explosion in numbers, the first Swallowtails on the wing, plus butterflies flying in their hundreds by month end.

7-8 April. Stump Stores. Back after a splendid week of butterflies in Greece, I returned to Lithuania just in time was a major upswing in the temperature - cold and snowy when I departed, 20 C and sun on return. And with the rise in temperature, a dramatic flush of early season butterflies, even to the extent of seeing a half dozen Small Tortoiseshells at the airport! It was however the next day that the more impressive numbers were to be seen. Visiting meadows not far from the capital, things were immediately looking good - four species in time at all, Brimstones fluttering along, plenty of Small Tortoiseshells along woodland edge, a dozen Peacocks and a couple of Commas. Within a couple of hours, my tally of butterflies had already reached about 140 individuals, a very good number for so early in the season. The real piece de la resistance however was to come as I exited the site - spying an area of recently cut birches, I noticed that the stumps were actively oozing sap. And around the sap, butterflies. Exploring more widely, the stumps proved totally amazing - a source of rich nectar at a time when flowers are few and far between, every single stump had gatherings of butterflies, amounting to a massive 195 individuals in total! Small Tortoiseshells in the main, but also Peacocks and Commas, it was very much a candy store for butterflies. Total counts for the day:

- Brimstone - 44
- Small Tortoiseshell - 242
- Peacock - 25
- Comma - 12

14-15 April. Flight of the Beauties. Continuing good weather, sun and 18C on the 14th. First Swallows of the year at Labanoras, plus booming Bitterns and displaying Marsh Harriers too. As the day warmed, Brimstones, Commas and Small Tortoiseshells on the wing, then Peacocks too. Butterfly of the day however, patrolling a sunny fringe to woodland, a classic beauty - Camberwell Beauty, glorious and fresh. Failed to find either of the larger tortoiseshells - should be flying any day.

Even better the next day, a pleasant 20 C bringing a nice run of early species - on a trip to the Druskininkai area, a grand total of nine species recorded, including no less than ten Camberwell Beauties, plus four new for the year - two Orange Tips, one Green-veined Whites, a couple of Holly Blues and a Green Hairstreak (all two weeks in advance of dates last year). LITHUANIAN YEAR LIST

1. Brimstone.
2. Small Tortoiseshell.
3. Comma.
4. Peacock.
5. Camberwell Beauty.
6. Orange Tip.
7. Green-veined White.
8. Green Hairstreak.
9. Holly Blue.

15-18 April. New Bird on the Block. And then started a few relatively cool days - 14 C or a little above, mostly overcast or windy. On the butterfly front, just a few Peacocks and Small Tortoiseshells, plus Brimstones here and there, but pretty good days for birds - migrants such as Pied Flycatchers and Willow Warblers arriving, plus a bit of a purple patch on my land at Labanoras: not only a pair of Garganey (non-annual visitor) and eight Wigeon (fourth record and highest ever count), but even better three Black-tailed Godwits! First record for my land, round they flew a few times before landing on a flood pool, joining the ducks and two pairs of Whooper Swans. The addition of Black-tailed Godwit brings the total number of bird species recorded on my land to 174, a nice total! 20 April. The Surge! Remarkable day for so early in the season, a few hours in meadows south of the capital producing a very impressive haul - in pleasantly sunny conditions at 20 C, no less than 13 species were seen, four of which new for the year and most of which flying a good two weeks earlier than in the previous two years! In the open meadow, an absolute minimum of 45 Green-veined Whites on the wing, amongst them two Eastern Bath Whites, while at the meadow-woodland fringe an emergence of at least 25 Map Butterflies and 18 Wood Whites, the latter three all new for the year. More good butterflies in adjacent clearfell and on

willow catkins - top being my first Large Tortoiseshell of the year in Lithuania, along with two Green Hairstreaks and two Holly Blues. Also, another Camberwell Beauty resting on a forest track and Brimstones, Small Tortoiseshells, Peacocks and Commas all continuing in good numbers. LITHUANIAN YEAR LIST

- 10. Eastern Bath White.
- 11. Wood White.

- 12. Large Tortoiseshell.
- 13. Map Butterfly.

22 April. One More. Moderately cool, smaller numbers of butterflies flying, but on my first visit of the season to the Ukmerge region, did manage to add one new species for the year - a nice Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell visiting willow catkins. LITHUANIAN YEAR LIST

- 14. Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell.

28 April. Bird, Deceased Mammal and Skipper. All happening at Labanoras! The flood pools in the meadow are doing absolutely amazing this spring - still extensive, they got a first for my land ten days ago with Black-tailed Godwit and now struck it gold again with another new species for my land, a totally unexpected Little Grebe. While not particularly rare in Lithuania, I would not say common either, so a very nice addition. Species number 175 for my land. Whooper Swans still present too. On the other side of my land, at the margin of meadow and forest, a rather more gruesome find - as several Roe Deer trotted off, I then found the carcass of a young Roe Deer, a carcass rather devoured! Freshly killed, presumably early that morning, the entire ribcage had been crunched open and much meat consumed. Culprit - really only two possibilities, Wolf or Lynx. Lynx is the likely candidate here - as well as a perfect spot from the perspective of a Lynx ambush, the relative lack of damage to the throat and other parts of the body also hints toward Lynx over Wolf, as does the fact that the intestines were discarded a metre or so from the body (stand to be corrected, but Lynx apparently do this, whereas Wolves don't). Also supportive, I saw Lynx in this locality some years back. Need to put a camera to check. And upon the remains, what should land? My first Grizzled Skipper of the year! LITHUANIAN YEAR LIST

- 15. Grizzled Skipper. 29 April. Thousand Up! In terms of both species diversity and absolute numbers, this was my best ever April day for butterflies in Lithuania - a remarkable 16 species and perhaps over 2500 individual butterflies! All started in the Druskininkai area, a glorious sun displacing early clouds. And with the sun, an immediate emergence of numerous butterflies - gathering around flowers, scores of Green-veined Whites, a handful of Wood Whites and, new for the year, a single Small White. Holly Blue sunning, a bunch of Green Hairstreaks flitting about, Peacocks, Orange Tips and Brimstones adding to the mix. A short while later, as I reached my destination, a couple of Swallowtails drifting past, a Camberwell Beauty on the track. Oodles of Green-veined Whites and Wood Whites here too, plus my first Speckled Woods of the year, a couple of Commas and more. Temperature was nicely climbing to 25 C, the next few hours were truly pleasant - a good mix of species, most noteworthy being more Swallowtails and Camberwell Beauties, plus increased numbers of whites and Map Butterflies. Nothing was to prepare me for my final stop of the day however - almost an afterthought, I decided to pause at meadows near Vilnius on route home. And what a good decision - not only a Marsh Sandpiper sharing a boggy patch with Ruff and Wood Sandpiper, but a sea of Pierids! Puddling at damp patches, flying in mass over the grassland, it was just immense numbers of Green-veined Whites everywhere! Very difficult to estimate numbers, but fairly safe to say there were at least 2000 over the relatively small area of meadow I checked, almost certainly many times more. Also here, at least 60 Wood Whites and my second Small White of the day. In addition, found my first Lithuanian Queen of Spain Fritillary of the year and had a Large Tortoiseshell at woodland edge. All in all, a stunning day - such numbers and species more typical of mid-May onward. Total butterfly tally for the day:

- Swallowtail - 10
- Small White - 2
- Green-veined White - 2250++
- Orange Tip - 150+
- Brimstone - 90
- Wood White - 140+
- Green Hairstreak - 45
- Holly Blue - 4
- Camberwell Beauty - 6
- Large Tortoiseshell - 1
- Small Tortoiseshell - 17
- Peacock - 160+
- Comma - 7
- Map Butterfly - 100+
- Queen of Spain Fritillary - 1
- Speckled Wood - 6

LITHUANIAN YEAR LIST

- 16. Swallowtail.
- 17. Small White.
- 18. Queen of Spain Fritillary.
- 19. Speckled Wood.