

Bonanza Month. June 2018.

Contributed by Jos

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A stunning month of impressive butterflies! Among the highlights, a flight of Twinspot Fritillaries, several Nickerl's Fritillaries and Cranberry Fritillaries and good numbers of Black Hairstreaks and Ilex Hairstreaks. Additionally, large numbers of Green-underside Blues, several Alcon Blues and a good range of other species such as Poplar Admirals and Woodland Browns.

2-4 June. Lithuania, the New Mediterranean. Grass withered and dry, temperatures still edging towards 30 C on a daily basis, quite a remarkable spring it has been, no real rain since March. And what an amazing period it has also been for butterflies - numerous species taking to the wing weeks earlier than in previous seasons, numbers generally high. On a jaunt around the country, taking in central districts around Ukmerge and more southern localities in the Marcinkonys and Druskininkai area, an impressive 32 species were noted - of particular note, a remarkable five Black Hairstreaks near Ukmerge (my highest ever day count and far earlier than I have seen before) and, at the same locality, two stunning Poplar Admirals (a species I didn't see in 2017). Also in these days, while the classic early spring species declined, there was a marked upswing in early summer species including dozens of Lesser Marbled Fritillaries and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, good numbers of White Admirals and quite unprecedented numbers of Green-underside Blues, a grand total of 61. Also managed three Large Coppers, one Large Blue and eight Brown Argus. LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 56. Black Hairstreak.

- 57. Large Blue.

- 58. Poplar Admiral.

- 59. White Admiral.

- 60. High Brown Fritillary.

- 61. Knapweed Fritillary.

- 62. Chestnut Heath.

- 63. Large Skipper.

9 June. Twinspot Magic. One species in particular has bugged me for a number of years in Lithuania - Twinspot Fritillary. Highly restricted in range, it occurs in just a few localities in river valleys in central parts of the country - and long have I tried to find and photograph it! Got brief glimpses of one in 2017, but soon lost it in a mass of other fritillaries and failed to relocate it. Fast forward to 2018 and action plan 'Twinspot Fritillary' - expecting it to be flying a little earlier than the usual end of June, I'd already been checking potential meadows for a week before this sunny weekend unfolded. On 9th June however, things were looking excellent from the very moment I arrived in my chosen meadow - hundreds of Lesser Marbled Fritillaries flying, oodles of other species too. And it took all of two minutes to stumble into my first Twinspot Fritillary, prominent double rows of spots decorating the underwing a perfect treat. And no brief glimpse this time, there it sat, happily feeding upon a flower top! And then more and more - the only slight difficulty being to sift through the numerous Lesser Marbled Fritillaries flying everywhere. A happy half an hour later though, an absolute minimum of 20 Twinspot Fritillaries had been seen, right corks of butterflies - really felt like a new species for me!

And excellent day in many other ways too - near 30 species of butterfly, including a mass flight of White Admirals (at least 45), my first Purple Emperor of the year, my first Woodland Browns of the season, yet more Black Hairstreaks, an early White-letter Hairstreak and a nice trio of coppers - Large Copper, Purple-edged Copper and Purple-shot Copper.

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- 64. White-letter Hairstreak.

- 65. Purple-shot Copper.

- 66. Purple Emperor.

- 67. Dark Green Fritillary.

- 68. Twinspot Fritillary.

- 69. Meadow Brown.

- 70. Woodland Brown.

- 71. Large Chequered Skipper. 10 June. Southern Delights. More stunning stuff this day - under a scorching sun, a zoom around the Marcinkonys area producing more excellent species, not least about 15 Moorland Clouded Yellows, two Cranberry Blues and about ten of the localised Large Heath in an area of rank wetland. Even better, a couple of Nickerl's Fritillaries in a meadow near a small stream - the weak fluttering flight of this species an immediate pointer to identification. Also added one Bog Fritillary, another bunch of Green-underside Blues, 40 at a single locality, and my first Scarce Coppers, Silver-studded Blues and Spotted Fritillaries of the season. LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 72. Moorland Clouded Yellow.

- 73. Scarce Copper.

- 74. Silver-studded Blue.

- 75. Cranberry Blue.

- 76. Spotted Fritillary.
- 77. Nickerl's Fritillary.

11-12 June. Pitter Patter of Raindrops. First significant rains for over two months bringing much needed water to a parched landscape, but still sunny spells and nothing to dampen the march of the butterfly season. Popped out to a couple of localities these days, dodging showers and not really expecting too many butterflies. But pleasant it still was - at the first site, as spits of rain pattered down upon my back, still I quickly found a few Knapweed Fritillaries atop flower heads. Excellent I thought, there existed hope that I might find my main target for this day - the highly localised Alcon Blue, a species restricted to just a handful of sites in the country. Not much flying, but with the cloud thin, quite a few species were still sitting out in the open - amongst these, many Pearly Heaths, Small Skippers and Heath Fritillaries, plus a couple of Purple-shot Coppers and my first Geranium Argus of the year. It took near an hour, punctuated by a couple of breaks in the car as the rain got a little heavier, but then I found my desired one - or two to be exact. On a steep slope, with Amanda Blue and Common Blue nearby, two splendid Alcon Blues roosting quietly on flowers. A half hour later, the heavens opened and a torrential storm developed - time for me to leave! Rain over and patchy blue skies next day, an ample excuse for a quick visit to another locality. Nice rewards for a hour of wandering in flower-rich meadow - 18 species, tops being my first Idas Blue of the year, one Large Copper, another Geranium Argus and a half dozen Woodland Browns. LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 78. Alcon Blue.

- 79. Idas Blue.

- 80. Geranium Argus.

13 June. Arrival of the Aristocrats. As high season swings in, so the true royals of the summer take to the wing - the full suite of dramatic admirals and emperors! On this pleasant day, gracing woodland rides, one Poplar Admiral, a handful of Red Admirals, several White Admirals, three Purple Emperors and one Lesser Purple Emperor. Also added my first Silver-washed Fritillaries, Ringlets and Large Wall Browns of the year, as well as four Glanville Fritillaries and my 10th Black Hairstreak of the season, totally crushing my best ever season record for this species. LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 81. Lesser Purple Emperor.
- 82. Silver-washed Fritillary.
- 83. Ringlet.
- 84. Large Wall Brown.

14-19 June. Southern Greece, a tale of Two Mountains. A short trip to the mountains of southern Greece, a respectable 90 species seen, including a very nice selection of endemics and near-endemics, plus Europe's smallest butterfly, the Grass Jewel. TRIP REPORT to follow. 20 June. Back In Lithuania. After my few days in southern Greece, a couple of hours out and about in Lithuania - notable increases in Meadow Browns, Ringlets and Mazarine Blues, plus the emergence of generation two Map Butterflies and Essex Skippers. Other highlights of the day, two slightly faded Alcon Blues, three Idas Blues and a couple of Geranium Argus and a Knapweed Fritillary. A product of the long dry spell, flowers, however, were relatively few and no hoped-for clumps to attract hairstreaks and similar. LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 85. Essex Skipper.

23 June. Hairstreaks and Frits. With cloud forecast for eastern parts, I travelled across to middle Lithuania this day, the targets on my radar being Scarce Fritillary and Ilex Hairstreak, both localised species in the country. Hazy sun and warm on arrival, abundant Ringlets and assorted whites marking the start of a good day. I walked a large circuit, initially on forest track, then through tangled undergrowth and forest clearings - good numbers of butterflies throughout, Red Admirals, White Admirals and Purple Emperors, a dozen Woodland Browns, plus concentrations of Lesser Marbled Fritillaries a few Weaver's Fritillaries and a scatter of other species, including High Brown, Dark Green, Silver-washed, Small Pearl-bordered and Heath Fritillaries. Best of the bunch - two very fine Pallas's Fritillaries (earlier than I usually encounter this species) and three Painted Ladies (a migrant species in Lithuania, common some years, but one I did not see at all in 2017). Also found three Large Coppers, a Geranium Argus and several Large Chequered Skippers, but did not manage either Scarce Fritillary or Ilex Hairstreak! Soon remedied this however by walking another track - now midday, hundreds of Green-veined and Small Whites puddling at small pools made for impressive spectacles, sometimes joined by a few Map Butterflies and a Purple Emperor or two, but then a small dark butterfly flitted up, flying up into bushes and vanishing. Cursing that it was almost certainly a hairstreak, I did not have to wait long before my suspicions were confirmed - quietly feeding on flower tops a few hundred metres further, one Ilex Hairstreak. Further searches failed to reveal Scarce Fritillary, but I did find my first second generation Swallowtail of the season. Changing locality, as cloud began to edge in, completed the day's action with oodles more Lesser Marbled Fritillaries and, new for the year, four Blue-spot Hairstreaks. LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 86. Painted Lady
- 87. Pallas's Fritillary
- 88. Ilex Hairstreak
- 89. Blue-spot Hairstreak

24-25 June. Rain! The three-month drought breaks, rain and heavy skies finally quashing thoughts of butterflies for a while. Probably much needed - with the Lithuanian landscape parched and withered, flowers are few and

presuming food plants for caterpillars suffering. Hopefully a few days rain will pay dividend later in the season.

27 June. Big 50 Day. Intention was only to potter around a forest in middle Lithuania searching for Cranberry Fritillary, a rather localised species, but reality turned into a rather rare event for me – a grand total of 50 species of butterflies in the single day! Arriving on site at about 10 a.m., there were masses of butterflies already on the wing, clouds of Small Whites and Green-veined Whites over a forest edge meadow, abundant Brimstones along woodland rides, Map Butterflies and both Purple and Lesser Purple Emperors taking salts from damp patches on the tracks and, at an impressive forest clearing, a colourful riot of fritillaries and other butterflies. Stopping to investigate, one of the very first butterflies seen was the exact species I had hoped to find - Cranberry Fritillary! At least four present, flitting from flower head to flower head, mingling with a half dozen other other fritillary species, most abundant being Silver-washed Fritillary and Heath Fritillary. At the smaller end of the scale, but equally impressive, were Ilex Hairstreaks – usually a species that I consider myself lucky if I see more than one or two in a whole year in Lithuania, they seemed to be everywhere this day! With twos or threes on flower heads every hundred metres or so, there was an absolute minimum of 16 alongside this single track through the clearing on this day, very nice indeed. Among the many other species, also a dozen Moorland Clouded Yellows, at least 18 Holly Blues, a Large Tortoiseshell, a faded Woodland Brown and a couple of Large Chequered Skippers. In just a couple of hours, I had notched up 36 species, a very respectable total considering I was in a single woodland habitat. Attempted to find Purple Hairstreak on route back – perhaps still a week or two too early, but in any case I failed to locate any. Better luck with a couple of additional woodland species – White Admiral and Wood White – and even more luck in adjacent meadows. A site I know well, I quickly located a lingering Alcon Blue and a couple of Knapweed Fritillaries, both species past their prime now and rather tatty. Also here, another Ilex Hairstreak, plus a whole bunch of new-for-the-day species, specifically two Short-tailed Blues, two Little Blues, one Geranium Argus, three Mazarine Blues and single individuals of Small Copper and Large Copper. I had not counted up the species total at this stage, but I later understood I was on 46 species. One last stop, a roadside locality that is usually reliable for Turquoise Blue – again a week or so too early in reality and none were seen. I did however bump into several fine butterflies, key of which were one Swallowtail, one Purple-edged Copper, one Queen of Spain Fritillary and, what was to turn out to be species number 50 for the day, a splendid Large Blue! LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 90. Cranberry Fritillary

28 June. Additional Six. My Big 50 day had been achieved with relatively little effort – a mere three localities producing all the butterflies. Had I decided to add a couple more localities, I could potentially have added a few more ... and so I decided to visit them this day. Site one, productive meadows south of the capital – many butterflies here, near two dozen species, but only two that I had not noted the day before, namely Painted Lady and Weaver's Fritillary. By contrast, locality two, a fairly sandy area of open forest, produced very few species in total, but did include no less than four that I had not seen the day before – these being Silver-studded Blue, Spotted Fritillary, Grayling and Rock Grayling. The last two were particularly welcome as they were my first of the year. Also one rather dramatic grasshopper species, pictured below:

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- 91. Grayling

- 92. Rock Grayling