

Perfect Days. July 2018.

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Only in Lithuania for the first half of the month, but should be top of the season and hopefully take my year list over and above the magical 100 mark. Superb start with a fantastic Scarce Fritillary in the west, plus Scarce Large Blue, Marbled Fritillary and more Ilex Hairstreaks.

1 July. Western Exploits. With rain forecast for the east, I made a fairly rare venture into western Lithuania this weekend, exploring forests near the Latvian border and meadows close to the coast. New sites all, I hoped to find four species in particular, all rare or absent in eastern Lithuania & Scarce Fritillary, Marbled Fritillary, Arran Brown, Scarce Large Blue. Target One & Scarce Fritillary. Rare in Lithuania, with just isolated populations dotted around central, northern and western parts of the country. My only previous record of this species was a single individual in a middle Lithuanian forest in 2017, and even then it was just a brief fly-past. A stunning species, this was the number one target for this trip. Windy, a mere 15 C and only patchy sunshine on arrival, not ideal conditions & but many butterflies already active, sheltered spots proving very productive. Ilex Hairstreak and several Woodland Browns and Large Wall Browns nice starters, but then on focussed on a small clearing, slightly damp and covered in patches of raspberry & ideal Scarce Fritillary habitat I thought. Given the cool conditions and relatively early hour, most butterflies were sunning rather than flying, so it was a question of zigzagging and finding the butterflies at rest, rather than watching the usual clouds of stuff in the air. Worked a treat though, a mere 15 minutes or so of searching and I glanced to my right to see the stunning colours and patterns of a Scarce Fritillary decorating a raspberry bush, excellent I thought. Unfortunately, one quick photograph and up it went, caught the wind and vanished. Fifteen minutes or so later, at almost exactly the same spot, I relocated the butterfly & and far more cooperative it was this time. As cloud zipped over, it would close its wings to reveal the stunning underwing, then as sun reappeared, it opened the wings to bask.

Target Two & Marbled Fritillary. The most widely distributed of today's targets, quite a number of populations of Marbled Fritillary exist in the western half of the country and it is a species I have found in good numbers on a couple of occasions. As for searching this day, I didn't need to & I found a small colony while looking for the Scarce Fritillary!

With Lesser Marbled Fritillary, Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary, High Brown Fritillary and Silver-washed Fritillary also in the general area, a nice assembly it was. Target Three & Arran Brown. Moderately common in parts of Latvia, but at best rare and localised in northern parts of Lithuania. To the best of my knowledge, there have not been any records in the last few years, so I didn't really rate my chances too highly. On top of this, I was possibly also a week or so too early and weather conditions, though now sunny, remained cool and windy. Searched ideal looking habitat for the better part of the day, grassy trackside margins adjacent to woodland and meadow clearings & of the browns, notched up hundreds of Ringlets, good numbers of Large Wall Browns, a few Woodland Browns, but of Arran Brown, not a sign. Target three, failed. Target Four & Scarce Large Blue. Restricted to a small number of sites in Lithuania, all localities are in the western half of the country. I have never found more than a handful of individuals at any one location.

Was overcast by the time I arrived at my chosen site for this species & and not a single butterfly was flying, not looking very promising. And a very big meadow it was, my chances of randomly finding a fairly rare butterfly at roost seemed somewhat small. Narrowed the search somewhat by focussing on areas with an abundance of the foodplant, but after a good 40 minutes or so, I was almost ready to give up & my blue tally at that time limited to Amanda's Blues and a single Short-tailed Blue. But then, fortune smiled upon me & flushing a blue I initially thought too small, it landed nearby and revealed itself as a slightly tatty female Scarce Large Blue, excellent. And then more luck, skies began to brighten and I got a quarter hour window of sunshine. Up popped more Scarce Large Blues, four in all. So the day was over, three targets out of four, pretty successful. LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 93. Scarce Fritillary

- 94. Marbled Fritillary

- 95. Scarce Large Blue