

Prolonged Summer. September 2018.

Contributed by Jos
Last Updated Friday, 19 October 2018

And so a glorious summer continues - top weather and abundant butterflies right through to mid-month and beyond. More typical of mid-summer, Large Copper, Little Blue, Wall Brown and Large Skipper all on the wing, plus a good range of others, including four species of fritillary, massive numbers of Pale Clouded Yellows, a Chalkhill Blue and a Brown Hairstreak, the latter my 108th species of the year in Lithuania. In all, a grand total of 31 species noted during the first two weeks of the month, my best ever September total. Also worthy of special mention, one superb European Mantis, a species only known in Lithuania in the last decade.

1-2 September. Heatwave Weekend. Very much in the flavour of the whole summer, September began with temperatures touching 26 C and butterflies flying in good numbers. Meadows near Vilnius were full of butterflies - abundant Small Whites, Pale Clouded Yellows and Eastern Bath Whites, at least 50 Small Coppers, 45 Sooty Coppers, 35 Common Blues, plus dozens of Red Admirals, Peacocks, Queen of Spain Fritillaries, etc. Also a half dozen Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, several Weaver's Fritillaries and a late Silver-washed Fritillary. As I slowly zigzagged the meadows, more and more species - four Short-tailed Blues, an unexpected Little Blue, my last Large Grizzled Skipper of the year and, all attracted to fallen apples, a mass gathering of at least 25 Speckled Woods, plus a half dozen Commas! In all, 24 species of butterfly this day! Even more impressive however was a major surprise for me - a European Mantis! Recorded in Lithuania for the first time in 2008, this southern species seems to be actively colonising the country with a number of records now each year, mostly around Vilnius and Kaunas. For me however, it was a first in Lithuania and an impressive insect it was - initially caught in a large spider web, the creature then sat atop a stalk carefully cleaning itself of the web strands, its alien-like head swivelling around. Next day, time for the borderlands of southern Lithuania and another grand day - a repeat of many of the species of the previous day, including good counts of 100 Pale Clouded Yellows, 40 or so Sooty Coppers and 125 Common Blues. While the species total was slightly lower, it did include a number of species not seen the day before, the best being three stunning Camberwell Beauties, a lingering Chalkhill Blue and, freshly emerged, two very nice Large Coppers and a Large Skipper, both these later species far more typical of mid-summer. 6 September. Hunt for 108. An amazing year it had been in Lithuania, butterflies abundant in numbers and diversity. Though I had missed a couple of my targets (Olive Skipper, Arran Brown), I had managed to see 107 species through the spring and summer, surpassing by previous best ever total of 104. Now at the twilight of the season, there really remained only a single additional species that was possible - Brown Hairstreak. Not particularly common in Lithuania, the best localities that I know for this late-flying species are in the Neris Valley north of Vilnius, so that is where I concentrated my search. Had already searched in vain a couple of times in the previous week, but off I went again this sunny day - two localities on my radar. A mostly open grass area, the first site did produce a couple of Brown Argus amongst at least 65 Common Blues, but search shrubby edges as I might, not a sign of a Brown Hairstreak could I find. No big problem, I had high hopes for my second site, a set of streamside meadows and woodland edge. A very good range of butterflies I found, no less than four copper species amongst them - along with expected Small Coppers and Sooty Coppers, two tatty Scarce Coppers and two newly emerged Large Coppers. I also saw what were almost certainly my final two Map Butterflies of the year and, more unusual, a late generation Wall Brown. As for Brown Hairstreak, I checked all the spots where I have seen them in the past, but not a sniff! Finally was time to depart - was slowly driving through a patch of woodland and my eye caught an orangey shape on trackside vegetation ...and low and behold, there was a most fine Brown Hairstreak! And a very cooperative Brown Hairstreak it was, posing very nicely for photographs. Species number 108 for the year in Lithuania, one that would be the final addition for the year. LITHUANIAN BUTTERFLY LIST 2018

- 108. Brown Hairstreak 9 September. Numbers on the Rise.

As mid-month approaches, by right butterflies should be on the decline - and indeed they are for some species, a last lingering Scarce Copper still noted this day, just three Small Heaths, no Map Butterflies, etc. However, with temperatures still at 24 C, an impressive 20 species still flying, some even increasing in number! In one area of meadows, a splendid 75 Small Coppers this day, plus at least 50 Sooty Coppers, 25 Queen of Spain Fritillaries and about 15 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries. Also a fresh brood of Green-veined Whites, at least 45 flying, plus continuing good numbers of other Peirids, Peacocks, Red Admirals et al. Long live the summer, no sign of the season coming to an end just yet! 14-21 September. Glorious Autumn. Capping off a fantastic summer, the weather just kept giving - steadily climbing to an unprecedented 27 C on 21 September! And with it, plenty of unusual species on the wing for so late in the year - among 24 species noted, highlights included a very nice Brown Hairstreak near Kernave and a whole raft of very late species (five Pearly Heaths and a Chestnut Heath near Druskininkai, six Wall Browns, one Large Skipper and two Large Coppers near Vilnius). Also flying, good numbers of Queen of Spain Fritillaries and a few Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, along with plentiful Eastern Bath Whites, Sooty Coppers, Common Blues et al. Truly nice to be walking about surrounded by abundant butterflies in the second half of September! 22-26 September. Autumn Storms! And then it all came crashing down! Hot and sunny on the 21st, cold wet and windy on the 22nd, temperature a mere 7 C. And down it went, a lot of rain over the next days and a chilly 2 C at dawn a few days later. Predictably, almost no butterflies - a solitary Peacock and a Small White the only butterflies seen, both in a sunny spell at Labanoras. 27 September. Life after the Storm. I had feared temperatures just a couple of degrees above freezing would have finished the season off, but as temperatures crept back to 15 C, albeit clouds still rolling over at an alarming rate in a buffeting wind, I ventured optimistically out to my favoured meadows. Low and behold, still a few species flying - a dozen or so Queen of Spain Fritillaries sunning in sheltered spots and a few Small Whites and Pale Clouded Yellows taking to the wing. Zigzagging the meadows, I added yet more - a single Eastern Bath White, a single Green-veined White, a half dozen Sooty Coppers,

three Small Coppers and, rounding it off, two Peacocks. Eight species, not bad at all after the torrential rain of the days before. With slightly better weather, here's hoping for another couple of weeks before the season finally closes for good!