

Birding in the Era of Coronavirus, an East European View

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INTRODUCTION With expectation of a lockdown and restrictions of movement, and thus birding, this diary was designed to document the evolution of the Coronavirus outbreak from the perspective of a single birder living in Lithuania, eastern Europe. 2020 had started in pretty stylish manner, an excellent trip to New Zealand continuing into New Year and a short trip to Israel in mid-February. However, clouds were already developing - even as I passed through Shanghai on route back from New Zealand on 11 January, media reports were growing by the day of a new Coronavirus spreading rapidly in Wuhan, a city I had never even heard of. Fast forward to the Israel trip, talk was of an impending pandemic, Israeli border officials were none too impressed with the Chinese entry stamps in my passport. Still, at that stage, it did seem a localized disease, hitting Asia badly, but leaving Europe largely unscathed.

Well, we all know that changed in fairly short space! Late to the party, Lithuania recorded it's first case on 28 February, a lady returning from Italy. Relative calm in the country, no measures or restrictions were put in place, bar increased surveillance at airports. Meanwhile, in a winter that never really happened in Lithuania, the first signs of springs were emerging, Cranes were back early, yodelling cries echoing across the meadows, skeins of White-fronted and Bean Geese started their annual spring fly-over, Skylarks appeared and filled the skies with welcome song. On 10 March, two more cases, also returnees from Italy, a State of Emergency was declared. The government started to stir, another two cases on the 12th kicked them into action and then there was no stopping them! As cases rose by two or three a day, then six or seven each day, schools were closed for at least five weeks and announcements that further measures would follow. Pretty much an open secret that the government would order a shutdown as soon as any internal transmissions were reported. **STAGE ONE - RISE OF THE VIRUS IN LITHUANIA, MARCH 2020.** The early stages of the infection in Lithuania, first restrictions on day-to-day life, time for difficult decisions. Inevitably, it seemed, Lithuania was following the path of other nations in Europe, perhaps three weeks behind, but heading for bad times nevertheless. As cases appeared, at least there was a silver lining to the month of March - it is the beginning of the spring migration season, birds arrive back in the country in numbers, early season butterflies take to the wing. To read more, [CLICK HERE](#). **STAGE TWO - STEADY AS IT GOES, APRIL 2020.** As March made way for April, and the land readied itself for the soon to come mass movements of spring birds, so the Coronavirus continued its steady climb in Lithuania - cases were rising by steady 50 or so a day for much of the month, deaths slowly climbing to 45. Superb migration however at Labanoras, some of the many birds including Pallid Harrier, Little Crake and Wryneck, plus many waders. To read more, [CLICK HERE](#). **STAGE THREE - THE EASING, MAY 2020.** On the Coronavirus front, a feeling amongst the public that the country somehow escaped relatively unscathed and that it is all over. At the month's beginning, the death tally sat at 45, new infections occurring at 10-15 per day. The government has announced a range of measures to ease the shutdown - most shops and some services have reopened, but the national quarantine stays in place. Peak season for some classic bird migration, the arrival of Red-backed Shrikes, Black Terns et al, plus usually a splendid month for butterflies, exotics such as Clouded Apollo and assorted skippers possible. To read more, [CLICK HERE](#).