

## Birding in the Era of Coronavirus, STAGE TWO, April 2020.

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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 - at month's start, cases were rising by steady 50 or so a day, the total sitting at 600, deaths nine.

In comparison to elsewhere, Lithuania has got off pretty light so far - closed borders, closed schools, general shutdown of non-food shops, ban of gatherings of more than two persons, must maintain 2 metre spacing, remote working now the norm, penalties of 1500 euro for violation of new regulations. Government is trying to introduce a new 'big brother' bill to force telecom providers to provide geo-locations of anybody with a mobile phone. However, no full lockdown, freedom to move about and still only a moderate number of Coronavirus cases. Moreover, no shortages of anything, it is still possible to buy whatever you want - large 'food' supermarkets sell everything from clothes to garden furniture, and for everything else retailers in the country offer fast free delivery or pick up. But things are not normal, most folk are not going out. And I will continue to reside in my Labanoras, cabin life really quite pleasant. 1 April. Snow Shock. Quite 'pleasant' in the cabin, woke to a blizzard outside, none too warm inside! A Raven cronking, Great Spotted Woodpecker on the adjacent feeders, Marsh Tits and Great Tits too. Dragged myself out of bed and took a short brisk walk - snow going sideways, strong wind and darn chilly! And for my efforts, a pair of Goldeneye circling over, the newly arrived White Storks hunkered down on their nest, not looking too happy it has to be said. And that was about it, retired to my cabin for much of the rest of the day. Fortunately, however, there was also quite an upswing of action at the adjacent feeders - not only migrant Chaffinches and a Greenfinch, but a rather smart Reed Bunting. A summer visitor to Lithuania, Reed Buntings have begun to breed in my opened-out flood forest in recent years, but it the first time I have had one at my feeders, so pretty good day all in all. 2-3 April. A Bucketload of Weather. Coronavirus cases up by another 120, total now just shy of 700, one more death associated with Ukmerge hospital. One of a minority of countries not in total lockdown, Lithuania's Prime Minister is now mulling doing the exact opposite - relaxing some of the shutdown restrictions, specifically allowing cafes and non-food shops to reopen. Albeit with a slightly sinister suggestion of requiring persons to download an app to track their movements. Snow all gone, only to be replaced by rain and gusting winds for nigh on two days! Spent most of the time peering out of the cabin window, a Middle Spotted Woodpecker alongside several Great Spotted Woodpeckers on the adjacent feeders, the Reed Bunting also now accompanied by a couple of Yellowhammers. Just beyond, single Woodcocks flushed on both days were a surprise &ndash; a summer visitor to Lithuania, I usually see only one or two per year, but often none. Equally nice, one Water Rail in the flood forest (very rare in spring, usually get them in August) and, mid-afternoon on the 3rd, just when the sun finally decided to show, the return of the first Marsh Harriers, a pair immediately engaging in courtship display right adjacent to the breeding ground of the Cranes. And cherry on the cake, a musical ensemble playing in the background - big flocks of Redwings, not usually an abundant migrant on my land. But here they were these days, flocks all over the place, large numbers sitting atop trees around my cabin, almost all in song and melodious warble. 5 April. Big Birdwatch. 6.30 am, bit chilly, woke in my cabin, ramped up the gas heater, put on the kettle. Dawn chorus in full swing - Skylark, Fieldfare, Blackbird, Song Thrush, Starling, Yellowhammer among the early singers, Cranes yodelling, Bittern booming off yonder. From the window, first sightings of the day, two White Storks atop a distant nest, then Jay at the feeders and Grey Herons and flights of Great White Egrets heading out from the colony. Coffee duly drunk, took a two-hour stroll, cutting through the woodland and wetland edge, thereafter back through meadows. Snipe and Green Sandpipers, Great, Middle and Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers, Bitterns still booming, Water Rail squealing, a pair of Marsh Harriers active over their nest site. Plenty of common birds, plus a little bit of migration, with incoming flights of Chaffinches, Redwings, Fieldfares and White Wagtails. Deviated to incorporate a patch of spruce, the only area on my land to regularly get Coal Tits and Goldcrests, them got lucky with a roosting Tawny Owl. Now 9.00 am, already 42 species seen, back for breakfast. Despite still nippy, tucked into my porridge on the outside bench, Magpie, fly-over Mute Swans, Bean and White-fronted Geese and a perching Great Grey Shrike for my reward - the later particularly nice, usually just a winter visitor to my land. Breakfast and another coffee over, a wander to the edge of my property to scan adjacent White Stork nests, twitching the Tree Sparrows and House Sparrows that nest within the storks' nests. Duly saw them, plus Linnets, so wandered to an area of regenerating scrub the other side of my land, Woodlarks on breeding territory, my first Chiffchaff of the year and a rather nice Grey-headed Woodpecker. Approaching midday, and almost back at my cabin and enjoying the sun now showing considerable warmth, I was now in for the highlight of the day &ndash; a gaggle of geese attracted my attention to the sky, but there to a backdrop of picture perfect blue was a sight most pleasant &ndash; sharing a thermal, one adult White-tailed Eagle and one Black Stork! White-tailed Eagles are reasonably regular on my land, Black Storks aren't anymore! In former years, there used to be pretty much annual, but this was only the second in the last seven years, so pretty happy I was. And then it was time for barbecue, aka doing nothing but sitting in the sun and scanning the sky. So passed several lazy hours, a steady stream of White Storks drifting north, mostly threes and fours, but also one flock of 23, also a number of Cranes and Buzzards northbound too. One more White-tailed Eagle, an immature this time and one new bird for the day, a Sparrowhawk. As evening approached, and with the day's tally sitting at 61, I took another walk, this time adding only Long-tailed Tits. Then, however, I returned for a grand finale upon my bench - just after 7.00 pm, a magnificent Lesser Spotted Eagle flying directly across my view, my first of the year and a very nice bird. Not long after, three Whooper Swans did a fly-by and then, to end the day in style, a little bit of a stake out &ndash; at 8.30 pm the previous evening, a Woodcock had passed over by cabin, calling its little grunt. So there I waited in expectation ...and at 8.30 pm, so it went over again! So the dying embers of the day, bird number 65 for my land. 6-8 April. Partial Lockdown Announced. Coronavirus cases now at 912, up 220 or so in the last four days, deaths at 15. Lithuanian government

announces a PARTIAL LOCKDOWN for the coming Easter weekend - for three days, movement between municipalities prohibited, entry into all cities and towns across the country will be restricted. Very clever to announce so early however, just means everyone will just travel in advance of the lockdown! Wearing of face masks to become mandatory, currently only 20-30% of folk using them. Meanwhile, up on my land, a growing sense of spring - temperature up to a pleasant 18 C, sun in full force. And with the sun, butterflies back on show (several Yellow-legged Tortoiseshells, a very nice Camberwell Beauty, a few Small Tortoiseshells and Peacocks, a couple of Commas and plenty of Brimstones), plus good numbers of amphibians out to play, lumbering Common Toads, a few Common Frogs and heaving hordes of Moor Frogs racheting up their annual din! Top spot of the lot though, a new species for my land, Smooth Newts in one of my excavated pools, very pleased with those! On the bird front, two new for the year - one smart Black-tailed Godwit in summer dress on the floodpool on the 6th, then my first returning Pied Flycatcher on the 8th. Equally nice, Woodcock is now a regular evening bird, roding at dusk on a regular circuit, plus Water Rail and Bittern continuing their vocal ways. 9-10 April. Country prepares for weekend lockdown, but so many holes in it that nothing much changes in reality. Wearing of face masks now compulsory in public places. Coronavirus virus cases hit a total of 999, deaths rise to 22. Masses of amphibians on my land now, Common Toads breeding in the excavated pools, the newly discovered Smooth Newts actually seeming abundant, frogs of three species also very active, especially Moor Frogs. Butterflies too, Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell and Small Tortoiseshell recorded, several Brimstones also. Seventh record for my land, a posse of three Wigeon on the 9th were notable, even more so the next day when they had increased to five! Two new species for the year - a Common Redshank and a Hawfinch, both on the 10th. 11-13 April. Lockdown. Lithuania is officially under lockdown, movement between municipalities prohibited, number of Coronavirus cases breaks the 1000 barrier. Not much difference to me, I have barely been off my land in weeks now! 11 April. A fine day it was - quite chilly, but glorious sunshine. And in it, one Black Redstart feeding on soil laid bare by Wild Boars, one immature White-tailed Eagle overhead and a mini wader fest on the flood pool - no less than five species present (eight Lapwings, six Green Sandpipers, two Black-tailed Godwits, one Redshank, five Common Snipe). And a few snapshots of the work of the vandals of the lockdown! All on my land this day, Wild Boars rooting up the meadows, Black Woodpeckers demolishing the rotting stumps, a bull Moose shredding countless stratching posts and Badger excavating a new burrow near my cabin. 12 April. Cloudy breezy day, and pretty quiet on the migration front. White-backed Woodpecker added to the week's woodpecker tally, then a few hours enduring a deckchair to await raptors. A far nicer prospect on a warm sunny day, but the rewards did come - a steady trickle of Common Buzzards and Marsh Harriers, better still one Rough-legged Buzzard and, top bird of the day, a northbound Osprey, sharing the overhead skies with three soaring White Storks. Potentially even more cool was a pair of Whooper Swans - a regular fly-over species and occasional on flood pools, this pair had decided to take up residence in an area of perfect breeding habitat within my flood forest. Closed canopy forest a little over fifteen years ago, Beavers have subsequently raised the water levels, drowning the trees, Black Woodpeckers speeding up their demise. Extensive reeds have now colonised, a forest ecosystem transformed into a perfect wetland with breeding Bitterns, Marsh Harriers and Sedge Warblers, feeding Great White Egrets and occasionals such as Little Crake and Savi's Warbler, it really would be bee's knees to have Whooper Swans breeding too! 13 April. Cold and windy, some rain. Not much bird action, migration effectively on pause. 15 April. Beginning of the End? No exponential rise in coronavirus cases, just a moderate 20 or so each day, total cases now sitting at a little below 1100, deaths at 30. Due to a flare up in the small town of Nemećine, the government responds with a lockdown of that city, entry and exit not permitted. For the rest of the country however, a partial lifting of the shutdown - with restrictions on how they operate, many non-food shops are now permitted to reopen. Yay, DIY stores included, can buy stuff to finish my cabin. Up at Labanoras however, a wild and windy day, snowing in the morning, raining through the bulk of the day and a glorious patch of sunshine in the evening. But not a bad day on the birds - a humble Dunnock in the morning snow was nice, these usually a reclusive species on my land (and elsewhere in Lithuania), followed by a super selection of waders on meadow floodpools in the evening - Black-tailed Godwits still present, as well as Green Sandpipers, Snipe and Lapwings, joined by the highlights of the day, two early Wood Sandpipers and two Greenshanks, the latter only the second ever record for my land. 16 April. Time of Review.

Coronavirus, Lithuania.

Coronavirus cases jumped 37 over night, total cases now 1128, deaths 32. Town of Nemećine isolated.

However, exactly one month after they were ordered to close, retail outlets across the country are allowed to reopen with certain restrictions - must have direct entrance to the street (no shopping centres), only one customer allowed for every 10 square metres of floor space, must have mechanisms to ensure social spacing. Shopping centres, beauty salons, etc remain closed, schools still closed (six weeks now), borders still firmly closed, no entry or exit. Remote work to remain the norm, and a requisite where possible.

Birds, Labanoras.

Six weeks after the nationwide State of Emergency was declared, one month after the shutdown commenced, I have to admit I like the new norm. Acknowledging I am privileged to have this land as a retreat, the last six weeks have, in all honesty, been most pleasant - other than my cabin being decidedly chilly on many an occasion, what is there to dislike when I wake each morning to the wild calls of Cranes and the deep booming of Bitterns? Umpteen walks a day at the very beginning of spring migration and the emergence of first butterflies and amphibians is hardly a punishment.

Highlights to date - Black Stork and White-tailed Eagle sharing a thermal, breeding Cranes and Bitterns, first ever Pintail for my land, discovery of a population of Smooth Newts, the simple pleasure of being on my land day after day.

And in the spirit of reviews, I have compiled a full list of the 88 species of bird that I have recorded on my land during this period:

#### Labanoras Coronavirus Bird List

Bittern. Booming male throughout the period, inhabiting 'woodland' opened out by Beavers and invaded by extensive reedbeds.

Grey Heron. Common, a colony of about 15-20 pairs.

Great White Egret. Breeding at the heron colony, several pairs actively visiting the site from 20 March.

White Stork. Abundant, several nests visible from my land.

Black Stork. One on 5 April.

Mute Swan. Pairs flying over on several occasions.

Whooper Swan. Almost daily in March and April, flying over or settling on flood pools. More noteworthy, a pair were present from 12 April in a reeded area of the open forest, suggestive of potential breeding.

White-fronted Goose. Abundant passage migrant. Daily counts in the hundreds on several occasions in March and early April.

Bean Goose. Common, similar numbers to White-fronted Geese.

Mallard. Common, several on the floodpools and flooded forest.

Pintail. First record for my land, a pair on a flood pool in the meadows on 29 March.

Eurasian Wigeon. A pair on 29 March, then three on 9 April, these increasing to five on 10-16 April.

Common Teal. Almost daily, up to 12 on flood pools.

Goldeneye. One or two pairs on the breeding territories in the flood forest, often on the flood pools.

Goosander. A pair on 5 April 2020 showing interest in nesting sites in the flood forest.

White-tailed Eagle. Several records in March to April, both adults and immatures.

Osprey. An early spring bird on 10 April.

Lesser Spotted Eagle. An early returning bird on 5 April.

Marsh Harrier. Arrived back on 5 April, common thereafter. One pair holding territory at their nesting site in the flood forest.

Rough-legged Buzzard. One on 11 April.

Common Buzzard. Common, seen daily. Light migration in late March and early April. Sparrowhawk. Several records.

Goshawk. One record on 5 April.

Water Rail. One in flood forest from 4 -10 April 2020.

Crane. Common through March and April, one pair on their nesting territory in the flood forest, frequently two or three pairs in the meadows.

Lapwing. Up to ten daily around the floodpools.

Green Sandpiper. Breeds in the flood forest, territorial display common from late March. Up to eight also frequently seen on the floodpools.

Wood Sandpiper. Two on the floodpools on 15 April, one next day.

Common Redshank. One on 10-11 April 2020.

Greenshank. Two on the floodpools on 15-16 April.

Curlew. Two in meadows on 16 March.

Black-tailed Godwit. One on 6 April, two on 11-15 April.

Woodcock. Singles flushed on both 3 April and 4 April, a roding bird every night from 5-10 April.

Common Snipe. Seen several times, displaying birds on a couple of occasions.

Black-headed Gull. Breeds on an adjacent lake and is commonly seen overhead or on the floodpools.

Common Gull. Not abundant, seen several times.

Herring Gull. Small numbers commonly seen.

Stock Dove. Seen on a couple of dates in March.

Wood Pigeon. From mid-March, common throughout.

Tawny Owl. One pair found at roost.

Pygmy Owl. A wintering bird, last heard in mid-March.

Black Woodpecker. Regular, seen every few days

Grey-headed Woodpecker. Regular, seen or heard every few days. Appears to be breeding just off the edge of my land.

White-backed Woodpecker. A common species on my land, one pair appears to be breeding.

Great Spotted Woodpecker. Common, regular at the feeders.

Middle Spotted Woodpecker. Common, occasionally at the feeders, more at their breeding territories.

Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. One pair regularly seen, drumming and display.

Skylark. Abundant, present from the end of February.

Woodlark. One territorial pair from late March, a second pair present on some dates in early April.

White Wagtail. After arrival in early April, becoming common around the floodpools and elsewhere.

Wren. Common summer visitor, present throughout.\*  
 Dunnock. One on 15 April.  
 Robin. Common summer visitor, good numbers from early April.  
 Black Redstart. One on 11 April on open land laid bare by Wild Boars.  
 Song Thrush. Common passage migrant, becoming abundant in April.  
 Mistle Thrush. Breeds in nearby pine forests, common on the meadows on my land.  
 Redwing. Heavy passage this year, hundreds passing through in first and second weeks of April.  
 Fieldfare. Abundant passage migrant, big flocks in late March and April. Several pairs breed, singing birds on territory.  
 Blackbird. Common summer visitor, many pairs breed within the forest.  
 Chiffchaff. Becoming common in the forest from 5 April.  
 Goldcrest. Several in pine forest on the edge of my territory.  
 Pied Flycatcher. Early bird on 8 April.  
 Great Tit. The most abundant of the tit species, common on territories and at the feeders.  
 Coal Tit. Several in pine forest on the edge of my territory.  
 Blue Tit. Common on territories and at the feeders.  
 Willow Tit. Primarily a winter visitor, but one pair holding territory.  
 Marsh Tit. Common resident, several pairs on territories and at the feeders.  
 Long-tailed Tit. A couple of pairs on territories  
 Nuthatch. Resident, seen or heard daily.  
 Treecreeper. Resident, occasionally seen.  
 Great Grey Shrike. More usual during autumn and winter, one seen on 5-6 April.  
 Magpie. Relatively common. One pair breeding on the edge of my land.  
 Jay. Common, birds breeding in the forest and visiting the feeding station.  
 Jackdaw. Several passage birds in March.  
 Hooded Crow. Common, many seen daily.  
 Raven. Common, birds seen daily.  
 Starling. Common summer visitor, arriving from March.  
 House Sparrow. Breeds in adjacent territories, pairs seen in early April occupying storks' nest.  
 Tree Sparrow. Quite common in surrounding gardens, breeding birds seen in storks' nests in early April.  
 Chaffinch. Summer visitor, first birds from in March, common from April.  
 Linnet. Summer visitor, several seen from 5 April.  
 Goldfinch. Moderately commonly seen, birds every few days.  
 Greenfinch. Occasional birds.  
 Siskin. Fairly common passage visitor, flocks seen mostly in March.  
 Bullfinch. Common, pairs and small flocks almost daily.  
 Hawfinch. Returning spring bird on 10 April.  
 Reed Bunting. One bird at my feeding station on 1-2 April, singing birds in the flood forest from 5 April.  
 Yellowhammer. Common, many pairs in regenerating scrub areas.

Additional to these, also seen Capercaillie, Tufted Duck and Great Crested Grebe on walks from my land. 17-18 April. Ice Age!

17th. Snow, hail, rain, wind and sun ... got the whole bucketload this day! And for some reason cold I now feel, tucked up in my sleeping bag, a Bittern booming to the side, Song Thrush singing above.  
 On the positive side, Greenshanks, Wood Sandpipers and Wigeon still on their pool, one Lesser Spotted Eagle over during a sunny spell. 18th. Spike in Coronavirus cases this day, 90 new cases, the biggest single day jump in Lithuania. Cold northerlies holding up migration too, very little moving north. But an okay day nevertheless - supplies arrived from a newly reopened DIY store, veranda construction resumes, three Swallows hurried past (my first of the year) and a ten minute walk to my neighbouring lake was rewarded with three fine summer-plumage Black-throated Divers, a scarce breeder in this part of the country.

Best if the 'day' however was once the day was over - echoing out of a beautiful still night, not only the haunting voice of Bittern, but the hoo hoo hoo of a Long-eared Owl, only the third I have recorded on my land. And just for good measure, one distant Tawny Owl. 19 April. Warming. After a few days of cold and even pretty heavy snow at warm point, the temperature is set to rise in the next days, a warm period coinciding with the beginning of peak spring migration ... should be good. As for today, a singing Pied Flycatcher singing by my cabin, a White-tailed Eagle circling above, Greenshanks still on their pool.

In my flood forest, all set for a good breeding season - Bittern, Crane and Marsh Harrier already on nesting territories, Snipe and Green Sandpiper displaying over, plus all the woodpeckers drumming. Sign of days to come, one Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell in flight in the afternoon.

Mini jump in new Coronavirus cases again, but parliament set to meet on Wednesday with expectation of further easing of restrictions - can already do more or less whatever these days, probably more shops allowed to open, all the useless ones like beauty salons and hairdressers, which could stay closed for the next ten years for all I care. 22-23 April. Perfect

## Days to Isolate!

22nd. Can't be bad when a day starts with a mother Moose and calf ambling through the bushes, then a new species of bird for my land - a breeding plumage Spotted Redshank paddling around with the two long-staying Greenshanks! Closer inspection revealed the Greenshanks had been joined by a buddy, three now present. And that really set the scene for the day, a pleasant 20 C and unbroken sunshine, a light southerly wind and perfect conditions for migration. And migrants duly obliged - all new for the year, Willow Warbler and Blackcap singing in the forest, a trickle of Tree Pipits all day and a Wheatear on the boar turf (3 years since my last Wheatear on my land).

Back at the pool in the meadow, remarkably another Spotted Redshank appeared mid-morning, this one not in breeding plumage, plus another four Garganey (two pairs, I presume not the same as the previous day's pair). And then, cherry on the cake, a last check of the pool in the evening added a Common Redshank to the mix - never did I imagine I would have the pleasure of simultaneously hosting three Greenshanks (third and fourth records), two Spotted Redshanks (first record) and a Common Redshank on my land! What with Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell, Small Tortoiseshell, Peacock and Brimstone, a good day it was. Except it wasn't over! Cooking on the fire in the evening, scanning the skies to the south, a grand finale to the day - one female Pallid Harrier skirting the meadows, third record for my land, first in the spring, yay. Meanwhile, the government has decided to extend the nationwide quarantine till 11 May at least, though is further easing restrictions, most shops and outside restaurants to open in the next week with conditions. Still a prohibition on gatherings of more than two, face masks compulsory, schools shut, no suggestion of the borders being reopened. 23rd. The flood pool continues to give - though the Garganey gone and the summer plumage Spotted Redshank gone, it was still a pretty good day - not only was the non-breeding plumage Spotted Redshank still present and the three Greenshank (and Snipe, Green Sandpipers and Lapwings), but another top class wader graced the pool - my third record of Ruff, female this time.

Continuing mini arrival of migrants too, my first Whinchat of the year, plus occasional Swallows through, a few more Tree Pipits, etc.

Miniscule by European standards, death toll hit 40 this day, cases now at 1400. 24 April. Beauty on the Wing. New life to start the day! Rather early for Lithuania, my first ducklings of the year - a female Mallard and eight newly-hatched youngsters in the flood forest. Hopefully more ducklings to follow - Goldeneye and Goosander seem intend on breeding, hopefully Teal also. Out in the meadows, one fly-over Hawfinch, two Grass Snakes too, but tops of the day were four most gorgeous Camberwell Beauties patrolling warm sunny glades in the pines, one doing the honours of nicely posing for a quick photoshoot. Brimstones and Peacocks also flying, plus my first Green-veined White of the year and a Yellow-legged Tortoiseshell. 25 April. Des Res for a Wryneck. A bit chillier this day, but a bit of a fall of migrants first thing, a flock of Tree Pipits among them, plus increased numbers of Whinchats and Pied Flycatchers, as well as my first Wood Warbler of the season. I did have plans to plant a small wild flower meadow and do some work on my cabin, finishing off the veranda, installing electrics, etc, but I soon got waylaid by another little project - singing from birches just adjacent, one very nice Wryneck. But this Wryneck had chosen an area with no vacant nestboxes - all the ones I had installed were occupied, several by Starlings, one by Great Tits and one by Blue Tits. Can't be having a Wryneck with a problem, thought I, so I abandoned by cabin ideas for a while and instead built a new nestbox and slung it up. And how did the grateful Wryneck thank me? It relocated and began to sing from another patch of trees! 26 April. Pipit Delight. All quiet on the eastern front today, except an absolutely mega flock of Tree Pipits - a minimum of 115 in a pretty tight flock, with a few elsewhere singing and displaying in good habitat. To put it in context, my highest ever previous count on my land was a flock of 20, also in April a few years back ...so nearly six times higher today. First House Martin of the year too. 27-28 April. Spring Advancement. New cases of coronavirus are down to mere single figures these days, a slightly dangerous complacency creeping in among the population, a feeling it is all over and up to 50% of persons now flouting the regulation to wear masks in public places - idiots! Fortunately no such people, or indeed any people, on my land - but nice butterflies and birds. Sunny weather on the 27th was rewarded with a nice flush of butterflies, Green-veined Whites, Small White, Orange Tip, Peacocks, Brimstones, Comma, while the 28th was another productive day on the seasonal pool in the meadows, an impressive selection of waders gracing the margins - Spotted Redshank and Greenshanks still present (the latter even displaying), a pair of smart Black-tailed Godwits, several Green Sandpipers, 19 Wood Sandpipers and a number of both Snipe and Lapwings. Pretty good! 29-30 April. Grand Finale to the Month. Constant turnover of waders on the 29th, flocks migrating in and out of the meadow pool - having never recorded Spotted Redshank prior to this year, another three breeding-plumage birds this day took this month's tally up to seven! Also Black-tailed Godwits today, a few Green Sandpipers on their territories, Snipe and a peak of 32 Wood Sandpipers (though clearly more during the day, as I saw several depart prior to this count, and I presume did not return).

Also my first Yellow Wagtail of the year, my first Common Terns (four) and, in the evening, my first Lesser Whitethroat of the season, a male rattling out song. Next day however was just the bee's knees - on a glorious sunny morning, if somewhat frosted, out I went at 6 am to wander the woodland/flood forest edge. Black Woodpecker calling, a very welcome pair of Garganey in perfect nesting habitat, Starlings yodelling and chattering at their nestboxes, Pied Flycatchers laying claim to any boxes still vacant. But then, to a backdrop of a booming Bittern, a call emanating from a patchwork of reeds and open pools ....

peep peep peep pe pe pe pe peeee

Yay, that was a call to evoke warm feelings, a couple of times before I have had this superb species grace my land, singing birds at this very same spot - Little Crake, a cracker. A good half hour I sat and listened, set me up just fine for the day :)

Over at the seasonal pool in the meadows, a little quieter today - Black-tailed Godwits gone and the Spotted Redshanks of the day before, but one new Spotted Redshank in their place, plus a peak of 28 Wood Sandpipers (again numbers varying during the day, constant migration).

Warm and sunny, blighted only by a requirement to also work, nice all the same - plenty of butterflies, Yellow-legged Tortiseshell and Camberwell Beauty among the rewards, good numbers of Orange Tips and Green-veined Whites now, Peacocks too.

Returned to the Little Crake spot in the evening - still busy calling away, one Savi's Warbler now also present - all's well on the eastern front. For STAGE THREE, THE EASING , an ongoing account of incoming spring birds and the continuing situation with Coronavirus as we moved into May, [CLICK HERE](#).