

Birding in the Era of Coronavirus, STAGE FOUR, June 2020.

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Stage Four. Unwelcome End, June 2020.

Lithuania's National Quarantine for Coronavirus came to an end on the 17th June, the natural end to this phase of the Coronavirus story – still a handful of new cases each day, the country's total now sitting at 1800 cases and near 80 dead. But it all made no difference to me – most of June, I spent in hospital, failed rehab or otherwise ill. And the prospects for the near future are not much better.

1-9 June. June did not start badly however, still a few late migrants moving through Labanoras, best a Common Redstart, another Marsh Warbler on territory, a second Quail of the season and a singing Corncrake. Moreover, plenty of butterflies in the first week of the month - including some of Lithuania's special species such as Bog Fritillary, Pearl-bordered and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries, Baltic Grayling, Chequered and Northern Chequered Skippers and, rarest of the lot, Violet Copper. None of these were on my land, but my hectares did see Swallowtail and plenty of common species though.

So to the dark cloud - I went down with fever at the very beginning of the month, a totally unexpected event lasting a few days and marked by high temperature, cold chills and shaking. Had I developed Coronavirus? It seemed not - after a few days, the symptoms disappeared and I felt fine. Not for long! Less than ten days later, the symptoms returned with a vengeance. Soon I felt so bad I knew I had to leave Labanoras and return to Vilnius.

10-18 June. To cut a long story short, I was tested for Coronavirus (negative), then as my temperature climbed to 39.8 C I was sent to hospital. Diagnosis tick-borne encephalitis, oh no! A nasty disease with plenty of equally nasty consequences and potential to knock me down for months. One week in hospital, connected to assorted drips and subject to various injections and my temperature receded. In return, severe pain in my neck, shoulders and arms, inflicting me especially at night ... sleep was not really an option. Fatigue and my weakness in my arms, especially right - difficult to use my arm in any meaningful way. Nice parkland outside the hospital window, but I was generally too exhausted to sit up, so the bird list remained very impoverished - a mere 16 while I was there, six of which were by voice. Perhaps the best, a calling Long-eared Owl at night, a singing Black Redstart and a Lesser Whitethroat rattling away.

19-22 June. A week on and I seemed to be in better shape, though extreme fatigue and repeated pain still shocked through my neck and, more so, my arms. Couldn't sleep because of the pain at night, but tolerable during the day. With the slight improvement, the hospital let me go home – cue to immediately tour a few of my favourite butterfly patches, some superb species very welcoming after time in hospital - 40 species in all, including three stunning Poplar Admirals, 45 Knapweed Fritillaries, a couple of Purple-edged Coppers, three Large Coppers, a Clouded Apollo, eight of the highly range-restricted Alcon Blues and several Idas Blue among the more abundant Common Blues.

23-26 June.

The idea was I was then to go to a recuperation centre in the south of the country, carefully chosen near some of the best butterfly lands in Lithuania. I was booked in for 24 nights, what could go wrong? Bureaucracy went wrong, or at least an ineffective Coronavirus testing system! For rehab, I needed confirmation of a negative Coronavirus test result less than 48 hours preceding my arrival. So, off I went and duly got my third Coronavirus test. Went to Druskininkiai and checked into the rehab centre ... but for unknown reason, test result did not arrive! So I had to stay in my room until it arrived. A wait that turned into many days ... no doctor consultation, no rehab procedures, no chance to exercise, no possibility to go out. Got grumpy with them and left ...so actually after zero days of rehab. Freedom, I had a nice day of butterflies along the Belarus border – 28 species, including the first Marbled Whites of the season, growing numbers of fritillaries and heaths and a whole range of blues – tops being Mazarine Blue, Amanda's Blue, a generation one Reverdin's Blue, three Green-underside Blues and two Idas Blues.

27- 30 June. Now back in Vilnius, it is clear that it could be some months before I'm back to normal – the main issue is still pain in arms and neck, sometimes leg, especially at night ...not easy to sleep. And weakness in the arm. If the pain holds off, I can live with the weakness ...says he who dropped his coffee all over the car seat, because of lack of strength to hold it. A bit of a concern that I don't have enough strength in my arm to even lift a coffee cup! Still, butterflies galore – mustering up energy and ignoring pain, I managed trips in the Vilnius area and beyond to Ukmerge and Marcinkony. Splendid stuff – over 43 species, including many new for the year – Moorland Clouded Yellow, Silver-studded Blue, Purple Emperor and Lesser Purple Emperor, an impressive 14 Cranberry Fritillaries, one Nickerl's Fritillary and a Large Heath. So, in conclusion as June comes to an end, my story of Coronavirus in Lithuania

transformed into a personal story of tick-borne encephalitis! It's not been pleasant, but so far I have come through without any of the more serious consequences. In recent days, I have experienced weakness on my right leg and a slight paralysis to my right hand, but I am lucky - there are quite a few in intensive care in Lithuania at the moment with tick-borne encephalitis, one guy has died.