

May 2021. Cool Damp Spring.

Contributed by Jos
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So came May, wet and cool in the most part, but good birds all the same - Pallid and Montagu's Harriers, an excellent range of incoming migrants, plus many top class breeders - not least Whooper Swans, White-tailed Eagles, Little Crakes, Little Grebes, Garganeys and Great Reed Warblers.

Mayday Treats. 1-2 May.

Coldest spring for many years, not much hint of an improvement for the beginning of May … sunny and 12 C on the 1st, reasonable on the 2nd, but set to fall near freezing again in coming days!

Tides of spring push force however, a considerable influx of migrants using the brief respite of the first two days of the month - all new for the year, Pied Flycatcher, Whinchats, Lesser Whitethroat, Willow Warbler, Blackcap, House Martin. Plus increasing numbers of Swallows, a large flock of about 60 Tree Pipits, a second Wryneck in song and one pair of Lesser Spotted Eagles.

And in amongst them, from opposite ends of the national rarity spectrum, two very good species for my land: three male Shovelers on the meadow pools (very common in Lithuania, but only my fourth record); one adult female Pallid Harrier (rare in Lithuania, but also fourth on my land). For added effect, the Pallid Harrier was actually on view at the same time as the Shovelers, cruising across the meadow behind the pools with the ducks. Good butterfly days too. A late season foor these this year, but nine species finally on the wing - all enjoying the sunshine, plentiful Brimstones, Peacocks and Commas, a scattering of Small Tortoiseshells and Holly Blues, one Large Tortoiseshell, one Camberwell Beauty and, new for the year, a half dozen Orange Tips and at least ten Green-veined Whites.

Down Comes the Snow, New Species for my Land. 3-6 May. What rubbish weather ...a layer of snow across the country on the 3rd, turning to rain the next day accompanied by strong wind! Still a continuing push of migrants however, a couple of Garganey appearing on the meadow pools, my first three Wood Sandpipers of the year and the trill of Wood Warblers reappearing in the woodland. Highlight of the days however was in the 5th, a day marked by rather brighter and warmer conditions. High above, a distinctive five-note pip pip pip pip pip, repeated several times over - flying over, heading directly north, one very welcome Whimbrel, a new species for my land (189th species for my plot). In weak patchy sun, my first Map Butterfly of the year too, plus reasonable numbers of Brimstones and Peacocks, along with a few Green-veined Whites and Orange Tips. Glorious Spring. 9-12 May. Finally a few days of high temperatures, mid- to high 20s, glorious sun too. A rapid greening of the land, birches especially coming into leaf, plus flowers of many sort now blooming. Along with it, choruses of frogs, a multitude of butterflies on the wing (Map Butterflies, Small Whites and Wood Whites all new for the year) and many bird migrants arriving.

Early May is truly one of the nicest times of the year on my land - in the open flood forest, alongside breeding Whooper Swans and adjacent Bitterns, Cranes and Marsh Harriers, the reedbeds are now alive with songs and grates of many Sedge Warblers, a Savi's Warbler and, best of all, two Great Reed Warblers (only previous record being single birds recorded in 2017 and 2020). Additionally, as well as Mallard and Teal, several pairs of Goldeneye now on the waters, one pair of Goosanders and a pair of Garganey …. hopefully all will breed.

Elsewhere on the land, Golden Oriole, Red-backed Shrike (straight on the shrike piles) and Thrush Nightingale all arrived, plus plenty of Whinchats, a very healthy number of Pied Flycatchers this year and, less usual, a thunberg Yellow Wagtail. Added extras, a small flock of Ruff and Wood Sandpipers on flood pools in the meadows, one Black Kite and one Montagu's Harrier cruising the meadows, White-tailed Eagle and Lesser Spotted Eagle soaring and four Black Terns passing over.

So Near, So Far. 15-16 May.

Brown Bear, a mere 25 km north-east of my land! Not seen by me, but tantalisingly close with nothing but perfect bear habitat separating this fine beast from my land. Some years ago there would be a Brown Bear in Lithuania every few years, but there is usually one or two every year, largely due to rising populations in Estonia ...still a mouthwatering prospect however to have one so close. Certainly got me to increase the grain at my feeder!

Then stone me, reports of another Brown Bear the next day, this one 30 km southeast of my land! Looking at the photographs, they appear to be different animals, very impressive to have two in Lithuania simultaneously ...I am surrounded by bears

Meanwhile, back on my land, a big brown mammal present too, or two big brown mammals in fact ...not quite as impressive as bears, but still nice nonetheless - two Moose in the wetland. Otherwise, in two rare days of wonderful sunshine, plenty of incoming migrants - Honey Buzzard, Golden Orioles, Red-backed Shrikes, Common Rosefinch,

Thrush Nightingale, Spotted Flycatcher at al. In the flood forest, the Whooper Swans were still incubating, plus Garganey still present and, hawking emerging dragonflies, my first Hobby of the year. Also the welcome return of a Little Crake and yet more increase on the Great Reed Warbler front, three now in song.

Still pretty poor for butterflies however, the cold spring holding many species up. Good numbers of Map Butterflies though, plus plenty of Wood Whites, my first Green Hairstreaks of the year and my first Grizzled Skipper of the year. Little Grebes. 17 May. A little less impressive than the bears, but a pair of Little Grebes turned up today - only previous record on my land was a pair that attempted to breed in 2018. Bad Weather, Top Year. 22 May. My land in Labanoras is a quagmire! Continuing in the spirit of the year, endless rain and pervasive cool weather ...still the resultant flood pools in the meadows have done their stuff - the newly arrived Little Grebes seem already to be nestbuilding, carbon copy of my first record back in 2018. Sharing their pool, one Garganey and one Wood Sandpiper. With the delayed spring, still many migrants yet to arrive - very few Red-backed Shrikes so far, Whinchats still thin on the ground, etc - but first Icterine Warbler this day and several Golden Orioles in song in various quarters. Best news of the day however was, while searching for Red-breasted Flycatchers in a favoured area for them, the finding of a pair of White-tailed Eagles on a nest just off my land. In a dense area of spruce, I had suspected breeding in this area last year and this, but had not actively searched for the nest. Another species I feel deeply honoured to have breeding on the doorstep. Despite the poor weather, it is turning out to be a pretty good breeding season nonetheless ...Pied Flycatchers in good numbers, Spotted Flycatcher too, new breeding species with Great Reed Warblers and Whooper Swans, so too the White-tailed Eagle, plus Little Crake back, Garganey seem to be breeding, the Cranes and Marsh Harriers doing well and the Bitterns presumably so. Butterflies et al. 23-24 May. Despite trashy weather, the season of butterflies is here, or should be in full swing if sun let play ...in sunny spells, several Swallowtails across my land this weekend, plentiful Map Butterflies too, a Grizzled Skipper and still good numbers of Orange Tips, Brimstones et al.

Slightly better weather forecast for the coming days, hopefully some more action on this front. 26 May. Honey and Babies.

Diabolical rain and wind in the early half of the day, fortunately brightening later to a sunny evening. A splendid Honey Buzzard low over my cabin the day's highlight, though the arrival of babies in the flood forest a very close second - Cranes with chicks paddling through rush, nice. Just beyond, couldn't get a conclusive view, but pretty sure the Whooper Swans have hatched their cygnets today - adults together a little to the left of the nestsite, eyeing me through reeds. Need to see them on a more open patch to confirm, hopefully in the next day or two, I'll be dead chuffed. Over on the meadow, also chuffed that my Little Grebes are actively building a nest, second confirmed breeding attempt.