

Lithuania - searching Aquatic Warbler

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First week of June I made with Leena by car one week trip to Lithuania, where I had never visited before. One of my main target was to find Aquatic Warblers from southwestern marshes near Nemuna River delta. Ideal place for accommodation was Silute as it's the nearest town to the sites where Aquatic Warblers can be found. Hotel Gilija was very nice, quiet and it had good restaurant. On top it had a nice summer time "Biergarten".



Great Reed Warblers are numerous in all reed beds, even in small ones.



Picture shows well ideal place for Aquatic Warblers. Such wet and dense vegetation is the place where you can find species. I found species 2km north of Sausgalviai on eastern side of the road and also from Rupkalvai bird reserve just northern side of the road from Silute to Rusne. In both sites I found 2 singing males. One of them I saw well nearby and another one was singing further away. They started singing after sunset, so I did not have any chance to take photos.

Aquatic Warbler were easy to locate based on their song. It had frequently repeated "drrrrrrr" 2-3 times between other simply phrases and the tone was much more monotonic than for Sedge Warbler. The latter species was rather common in the same sites. Aquatic Warbler was one of the easiest missing WP tick from my list.

Very flat marshland was ideal for many other species like Corncrakes which were very numerous. Rupkalvai marshes had also 3 pairs of breeding Black-tailed Godwits. In several places I heard singing River Warblers.

Few Marsh Warblers and Grasshopper Warblers I heard in late evenings as well. Late night I heard a Short-eared Owl calling in Rusne's northern meadows. At Rupkalvai I heard also 1-2 singing Savi's Warbler(s).

To my disappointment I did not see any White-winged Terns. I saw only few tens of Black Terns. Later I learned that many marshes where they can be found, were drier than usually. Terns had left sites already end of May.



Southern Lithuania is good habitat for Lesser Spotted Eagle. This individual was flying on Sausgalviai marshes (a bit bad light).



My first full day was devoted to visit many places at the Nemuna delta area. In the afternoon I visited also well-known bird observatory Ventes Ragas. I did not meet there any birders or observatory personnel. Spring period was over. I can well imagine how good place it will be in autumn when also huge bird trap will be used (see photo).

On my way to Ventes Ragas I visited also Kintai fish ponds. It can provide good number of species in migration time. Now ponds were rather empty except one pond which was almost emptied and provided suitable place for few waders and gulls. There I saw two 2cy Caspian Gulls.

Next full day we drove to Curonian Spit. It's a high sand dune which splits Baltic Sea from Curonian Sea. Major part of the spit is very dry sandy dunes and mainly pine forests are dominating. Here and there are very lush broadleaved forests which had 10+ Greenish Warblers calling.

At Juodkrante I met Finnish honorary consul Krister Castren who is a keen birdwatcher and lived in Lithuania 16 years. He provided many good hints where to search some target species. We walked very nice nature trail just northern edge of the village Juodkrante. By the trail we first heard singing Firecrest which Krister mentioned to

be the most northern site of the species frequent breeding area. Also two Red-breasted Flycatchers and a Golden Oriole were calling. The trail went through a small spruce forest which attracts several species which you don't see on those pine forests.

Juodkrante village is to my mind much nicer than too touristic Nida at the southern end of the Lithuanian part of the spit.

The latter part of the trip was devoted to familiarize to Vilnius old city. On our way to Vilnius we followed Nemuna River. By its meadows we saw 2 Montagu's Harrier males, Black Kite and 2 Lesser Spotted Eagles. Further east we saw 2+1 Little Terns by the river's sand dunes. Several old castles were under renovation west of Kaunas.

In Vilnius central parks I heard several Greenish Warblers. On our return day back home (Saturday) we visited Verkiai Park which is a bit north of Vilnius. There I found a Middle Spotted Woodpecker nest and saw also White-backed Woodpecker.

Old Vilnius center was very nice with walking streets, old history, numerous churches, friendly people, good food and cheap prices compared to Finnish standards. Tens of terraces were packed with people (half were tourists) who enjoyed nice weather and summer. Younger Lithuanian students and youngsters were common on streets. Many spoke rather well English.

When traveling in Lithuania, you cannot forget White Storks which is even much more common than in Estonia where I have traveled a lot. It's good to mention that here and there I heard Serins calling.

Lithuania can provide lots of surprises to birdwatchers as the country has only few tens of birdwatchers. Good finding can be done whenever as Krister also me hinted. He has found 10+ new species to the country.