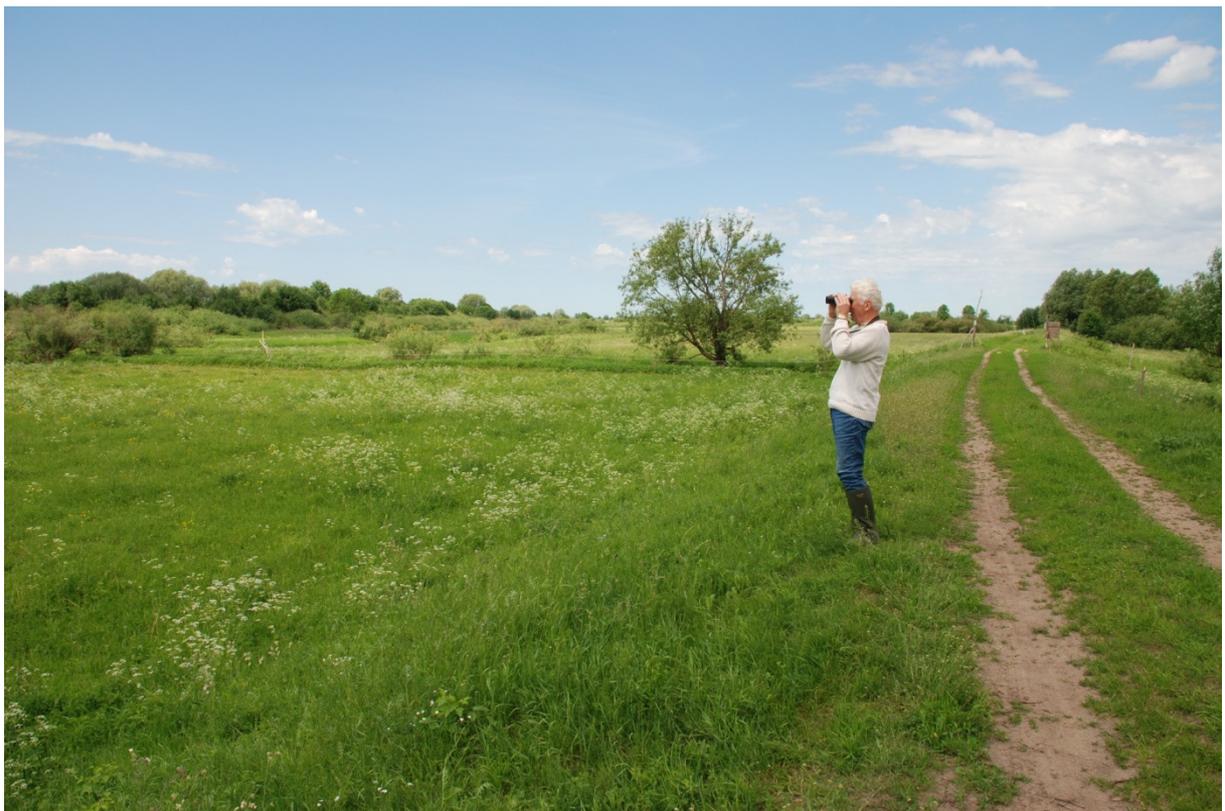


# WESTERN LITHUANIA 5-6 JUNE, 2010

A TRIP REPORT



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This was a short weekend trip to the wetlands of western Lithuania, around the river Nemunas delta.

The target species were *Aquatic Warbler* and *Middle-spotted Woodpecker*, birds we had never seen before. We also wanted to search for breeding *White-winged Terns*. We did not have to leave Lithuania disappointed!

We had arranged with a local birder, Juozas Miskinis ([miskinisj@takas.lt](mailto:miskinisj@takas.lt)) to guide us. We can highly recommend him for guiding service in Lithuania.

### **Trip itinerary and highlights**

We arrived 00:50 in the night to Saturday with a SAS flight from Copenhagen. Juozas picked us up at the Palanga airport and we drove directly to our hotel in the town of Silutes, where we arrived around 02:00.

We stayed at the hotel in Silutes two nights, at a cost of 130 LIT pp and night. The name was Hotel Deims and the standard was ok, but we would actually recommend another accommodation in Silutes, Hotel Gilija, which looked much nicer and with the “best restaurant in town”...

After some sleep and a late wake-up Saturday morning, Juozas took us to the forest of *Dinkia*, about 30 minutes east of Silutes. We arrived here around 9:00, which was not too late since the woodpeckers are active all day. This was a beautiful mixed forest, and some productive stops and walks here and there in the woods resulted in among other things good views of **Golden Oriole**. We checked a couple of nests of Great Spotted Woodpecker before we found a nest of **Middle Spotted Woodpecker**. This was just next to the road in an open area with oaks and aspens, and we got excellent views and photos of the two birds feeding their nestlings. Also **Turtle Doves** were heard and one flew across.



*Middle Spotted Woodpecker*



*Dinkia forest, Middle Spotted Woodpecker habitat*

Just outside the forest, Juozas knew a good spot for **Ortolan Buntings** at *Juknaiciai*, and we found one bird nicely perched on a telephone wire. We continued south towards river Nemunas and made a stop close to the river, at *Kuciai*, with **Rosefinches** in the trees along the river and a **Lesser Spotted Eagle** as well as a **Little Gull** passing by.

After lunch at a restaurant back in the forest *Dinkiai*, we drove back towards Silutes and turned left to *Sausgalviai*. Some kilometres NW of the village, we found ourselves in the middle of a huge colony of marsh terns, just next to the road. An amazing experience with these masses of terns, approximately 600 **White-winged Terns**, 300 **Black Terns** and some 10 **Whiskered Terns** flying around us! In addition, a juvenile **White-tailed Eagle**, a **Black Stork** and a juvenile **Little Gull** were seen flying, and a **Great Egret** was feeding here as well.



*White-winged Terns and Black Terns at Sausgalviai marshes*



*White-winged Tern*

After an hour or so at the tern colony, we continued to the island of *Rusne*. On the way we passed several marshy areas with additional **White-winged Terns** and remarkably big groups of herons (100+). At the NW corner of the island there was a big area of reedbeds and a bird tower. From here nothing remarkable was seen, besides a few more terns, but at least we heard a **Savi's warbler**.

We drove back to the town of Silutes for a cup of coffee, waiting some time for the highlight of the trip – the search for Aquatic Warblers. At this time of the year, the birds are not active singing until an hour or so before sunset, ie from 20.30. Juozas only knew of one sighting of Aquatic Warblers in Lithuania this year, from May 27<sup>th</sup>, so we were a bit nervous they could actually be missed! In fact, we learned the best time for Aquatic Warblers would be end of June or even the beginning of July, when the birds are active and visible also during day-time.

We went back to a grassy field east of the road between *Sausgalviai* and *Silutes*, some 2 km north of *Sausgalviai* (not far from the marshland with all the terns earlier in the day). We parked the car and walked 300-400 metres out on the field and waited for something to happen... Nothing heard during 30 minutes and just before 21.00 we were about to leave for another possible site when Juozas spotted a bird singing. Suddenly the bird was sitting there openly in the grass - a singing **Aquatic Warbler**. An unforgettable moment!



*Sausgalviai meadows – Aquatic Warbler habitat*



*Singing Aquatic Warbler*

Another 3-4 birds were heard and seen before we left for trying a second site, north of the road between *Rusne* and *Silutes*. There is a sign towards "*Rupkalviai birding reserve*" (in Lithuanian...), and turning west after a few hundred metres on this road, we reached a similar grassy field as the first site. Here another 4-5 **Aquatic Warblers** were noted, as well as two **Black-tailed Godwits**. At both sites, the sound of **Corncrakes** were frequent.

Very satisfied, and tired, we turned back to *Silutes* to celebrate with a late dinner and a bottle of wine!

Sunday morning started a bit earlier, and we headed back to the same woods as yesterday, *Dinkiai*, for some more forest birding. We had a nice sighting of a **Red-breasted Flycatcher**, but nothing in particular to add to the list from the previous day.

We left the forest and went to the "*Kintai fish ponds*", just before *Suvernai*, some 10 km or so NW of *Silute*. This was a good site for various waterbirds. **Great Reed Warblers** were abundant and an adult **White-tailed Eagle** passed by.

From here we went straight back to the airport in *Palanga*, in time to catch the 15.10 SAS flight back to *Copenhagen*. Just outside the airport **Serins** were singing.

Satisfied with the short – but very fruitful! - trip to Lithuania we left the country...

This part of Lithuania is very scenic and a perfect place for birding. We can highly recommend a weekend trip during this time of the year.

In Lithuania, White Stork has its highest density in all of Europe, and a trip report would not be complete without mentioning the very high number of White Storks present. Nests were counted in *its hundreds* during the 1.5 days birding!

Fredrik Asplund

## **Bird list**

Mute Swan		
Greylag Goose		
Shelduck		
Mallard		
Garganay	4	Kintai fish ponds
Shoveler		
Wigeon		
Pochard		
Tufted Duck		
Corncrake		
Cormorant		
Great Egret	1	Sausgalviai marshes
Grey Heron		
White Stork		
Black Stork	1	Sausgalviai marshes
White-tailed Eagle	2	Sausgalviai marshes + Fish ponds
Lesser Spotted Eagle	1	Kuciai
Marsh Harrier		
Montagus' Harrier	2	
Buzzard		
Goshawk		
Merlin		
Spotted Crake	1 heard	between Rusne and Silutes
Coot		
Crane		
Lapwing		
Green Sandpiper		
Redshank		
Black-tailed Godwit	2	between Rusne and Silutes
Snipe		
Black-headed Gull		
Little Gull	1 ad + 1 juv	
Common Gull		
Common Tern		
Black Tern	300	Sausgalviai marshes
White-winged Tern	600	Sausgalviai marshes + road to Rusne
Whiskered Tern	10	Sausgalviai marshes
Woodpigeon		
Feral Dove		
Turtle Dove	1 + 1 heard	Dinkiai forest
Cuckoo		
Long-eared Owl		
Swift		

Kingfisher	1	
Black Woodpecker		
Great Spotted Woodpecker		
Middle Spotted Woodpecker	2 at nest	Dinkiai forest
Skylark		
Sand Martin		
Swallow		
House Martin		
Meadow Pipit		
Pied Wagtail		
Yellow Pipit		
Thrush Nightingale		
Redstart		
Whinchat		
Song Thrush		
Mistle Thrush		
Fieldfare		
Blackbird		
Blackcap		
Common Whitethroat		
Lesser Whitethroat		
Sedge Warbler		
Aquatic Warbler	10	
Grasshopper Warbler		
Savi's Warbler	1 heard	
Reed Warbler		
Great Reed Warbler		
Willow Warbler		
Wood Warbler		
Chiffchaff		
Wren		
Red-breasted flycatcher	2	
Pied flycatcher		
Great Tit		
Willow Tit		
Red-backed Shrike		
Magpie		
Jay		
Jackdaw		
Rook		
Carrion Crow		
Starling		
Golden Oriole	2 + 2 heard	
House Sparrow		
Chaffinch		

Goldfinch		
Greenfinch		
Serin	2-3 heard	
Hawfinch	1	
Rosefinch	2 + 5-6 heard	
Reed Bunting		
Ortolan Bunting	1	Juknaciai

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96 species