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SEARCHING FOR AN ENDANGERED SPECIES

Phil Weaver



Ae 6/6 610 519 'Giubiasco', in cargo livery, carries out the morning shunt at Spiez.

PHOTOS: Phil

During our August 2011 family holiday in Switzerland I set myself the task of trying to photograph that highly endangered species, known as the Ae6/6. They are now becoming very elusive to try and capture in the wild and try every trick in the book to avoid being shot. Travelling around their known habitats, they are often visible carrying out their everyday tasks, but as soon as you step off a train they run for cover, and usually aren't seen again until you board another train. An advantage of staying at Spiez is that the morning shunting is, almost unbelievably, carried out by one and as it turned out this was the only place I managed to get an unencumbered shot of one of these elusive beasts. This is the story of my quest.

Knowing their affinity to large marshalling yards my first port of call was to Pratteln, just east of Muttenz yard, on the outskirts of Basel. On pulling into the station one was seen leaving in the direction of Brugg, yet after 90 minutes no more were seen, so now I thought I would try Killwangen-Spreitenbach, just west of Zürich's Limmatal Yard. Passing Muttenz whilst travelling into Basel to get a Zürich train, two were seen at the east end of the yard, yet as we sped through on the fast train they had gone! Travelling then from Zürich to Killwangen-Spreitenbach two or three were seen just past Dietikon, including a rare green one and on arriving at Killwangen-Spreitenbach one was on the flyover entering the yard. My hopes were raised again. Again another fruitless 90 minute wait, although I took 26 photos of different trains and that was probably only about 2/3 of the trains seen. If anyone complains at a model railway show that train after train passing through a station is unrealistic, then they should be sent to Killwangen-Spreitenbach, I have never been to such a busy place in my life. Now having to return to Spiez through Dietikon back to Zürich another was seen entering the Limmatal Yard – aaagh!

On another day, whilst arriving at Spiez station over the Niesenbrücke a rare 'greater red chromium striped' (*maioribus rutilus chromium virga*) sub-species was spotted doing the morning shunt. Despite a quick dash under the subway to photograph it, an intermodal container train had arrived and the rare beast now hid behind it. Still, it was moving around and there was one wagon without a container on it. Better than nothing, I thought, but no, the beast played its trump card. As I went down the platform to the gap, it hid behind the only solitary wagon in the yard! Still there was 30 minutes until the next train to Interlaken, but the intermodal stood firm, under the influence of the Ae6/6. My train arrived and as I boarded the intermodal went on its way to leave my elusive loco in full sight. Again – aaagh. Others were seen at various places but only while I was on a train so were impossible to capture. So ended this year's trip that resulted in only about three good pictures. I did find though that all Labradors in Switzerland will answer to the name of 'Bramble' – *I forgot she is an Irish Setter!* 

Ae 6/6 11424 'Neuchatel' between two of the intermodal wagons at Spiez.

