

TURKISH SILK ROAD TRIP REPORT 2019

ViRA NATURA
TOURS

Day 1 6 May To Goreme

We all arrived from various places to Cappadocia.

Day 2 7 May Cappadocia I

A fine clear morning revealed the remarkable convoluted landscape of Cappadocia – a blend of towers and smooth-eroded hills, some pink some cream. We met with our guide Gaye and set off for a quieter part of this popular region. Our first stop was near a small church and above this the path led to a fine lookout across the landscape including some amazing chimneys capped with dark hats of denser rock. Indeed, it is the rapid erosion of the various layers of compacted ash that have created this landscape, a legacy of the regions intensely volcanic past. There many Alpine Swifts sweeping overhead and a few interesting flowers with tufts of bluish *Trigonella coerulescens*, *Silene conoidea*, *Euphorbia sp* and big patches of *Eruca sativa* that were a magnet for the many Painted Ladies on the wing.

We moved on to another site with an old monastery that still retained some very old frescoes and painted ceilings as well as a very old Seljuk mosque. Here there was plentiful *Hypericum pseudograndiflorum* along the paths. Uta exchanged tips on bean cultivation with a local farmer who spoke a smattering of German before we left. Lunch was in a cherry orchard, thronging with butterflies as well as by chance, being next to a nesting Long-eared Owl which peered down at us the whole time we were there.

Then it was onto see a special plant, crossing the undulating steppes and wheat fields to an innocuous-looking hill. The wind was being a nuisance and at first, we struggled to find any good flowers. But then on the opposite side of the road we found a superb population of the lovely *Iris sprengeri*. This localised species is one of the glamorous oncocyclus irises, with flowers too big for their diminutive leaves. There were a good number scattered across the slopes, sometimes on small groups and the best richly suffused with reddish-pink, with many fine lines. There was even a peculiar chlorotic yellow form. Mingled among all of this was the blue of *Moltkia caerulea* and the odd scarlet *Adonis aestivalis*. From here we drove arriving in time to stop and a viewpoint for some photos of the unique landscape in soft evening light.



Iris sprengeri

Day 3

May 8

Cappadocia II

We began the day in an area of steppe with many purple *Gladiolus atroviolaceus* waving in the breeze, among *Geranium tuberosum* and *Senecio vernalis*. Many other plants grew in the surrounding steppe, which included *Weidemanniana orientalis*, *Papaver arenarium*, purple *Roemeria hybrida* and a plentiful white *Alyssum* sp. More thorough searching also produced slender *Muscari tenuiflorum*, *Alkanna pseudotinctoria* and *Ajuga chamaepitys*. Across the road we found a second rich area with *Scorzonera eriophora* in both pink and yellow forms, *Polygala papilionacea*, pink *Astragalus tigrida* and better stands of *Weidemannia orientalis*. Not much further up the road was a hill top with some fine steppe flora. Here we found plentiful *Genista involucrata* growing with delightful mats of *Convolvulus assyricus* and a *Hedysarum* sp. On a steep slope were superb specimens of one of Turkey's best steppe species *Arnebia densiflora*, with big heads of bright yellow flowers against a spectacular background of eroded hills. *Androsace villosa* was also seen along with the pendant white flowers of *Onosma aucherianum*.

Lunch was back in the town out of the cold wind. Then we set off to visit the Sarahan caravanserai, part of the old Silk Road before the first of our afternoon walks among the weird and wonderful Cappadocian landscape. The white valley not only held some impressive fairy chimneys, but also floriferous shrubs of *Berberis crataeginus*, *Centaurea depressa*, *C. triumfettii* and drifts of *Hypericum pseudograndiflorum*. Time was spent admiring and photographing the weird and wonderful before we drove onto another impressive area – the Red Valley. Here the rocks were on the deep pink side and the smooth sided hills and gulleys created a wonderfully convoluted landscape, nestled among which were little vineyards. Plants included *Euphorbia ancampseros*, *Prangos pabularia*, *Glaucium corniculatum* and *Sideritis lanata*, the latter with tiny black and white flowers. The pink of *Silene conoidea* was abundant throughout.



Arnebia densiflora

Day 4

9 May

Gezbeli Pass and Puren Pass

Today was a long transfer day to get us into the botanically rich edge of eastern Turkey. Driving out we stopped for a big view of Erciyes volcano, before descending to a flat plain that was formerly a lakebed. Flowers were thin on the ground here but eventually we began to climb into the Taurus Mountains, where the limestone was peppered with sparse juniper forests. These gave way to denser pine and cedar before we finally reach the snow patches at just under 2000 metres. Here we were treated to a bulb-feast. Fringing the snows were pretty lilac *Crocus biflorus* subsp. *tauri* in various colour forms along with *Corydalis erdelii*, *Gagea fistulosus*, *Ornithogalum oligophyllum*, *Anemone blanda* and some fine *Eranthis hyemalis*. Uta also found a couple of *Fritillaria pinardii*. There were a few *Scilla sibirica*, but these didn't prepare us for the stunning carpet of the same on the far side of the pass, colouring the turf an icy blue. There were so many fine big clumps. On the other side of the road were the just emerging cymes of *Solenanthus stamineus*. The landscape around was superb with snow-capped ridges contrasting with the fresh green of spring. Lower down we entered extensive areas of oak scrub and a chance stop in one of these produced some good plants with the remarkable black-purple spires of *Verbascum phoeniceum*, drifts of blue *Muscari armeniacum*, spiny and architectural *Gundelia tournefortii* and best of all some superb *Fritillaria acmopetala*, including some stunning red-pink forms.

We moved onto to an area of limestone where the slopes held forests of *Cedrus libanii*. Climbing to the low cliffs we found some magnificent metre-wide plants of *Onosma albio-rosea*, some dripping with white flowers that aged to cherry red and finally blue. Cushions of *Aubrieta deltoidea* grew on the rocks, *Corydalis wendelboi* was widespread and heavy scree held *Hyacinthus orientalis*. I managed to find a population of *Fritillaria amanus* on the rocks with the fading flowers of *Scilla melaina* alongside. Then searching one last area I finally found *Fritillaria persica* with a couple of decent spikes of deep-purple flowers.

Time had marched on so we opted to have dinner on the way at a restaurant in Elbistan – where I have to say we enjoyed excellent and swift service and a good meal. Then it was the final stretch to Malatya and our comfortable hotel.



Fritillaria acmopetala

Day 5 10 May Kubbe Pass and Tunceli

A fine clear day, with only scattered clouds drifting across the Anti-Taurus. Our main location for the day was not far from the city and we were soon climbing into the hills passing flowering roadsides and then reaching the rocky higher steppe where the first scattering of *Tulia armena* could be seen. This is a widespread species, but our main quarry was more exclusive. A quick phone call to my father-in-law confirmed the best location and arriving at the spot there was a prominent sign with a picture of *Iris peshmeniana*, its distribution and instructions not to collect any. The slopes were plastered in a magnificent display of thousands of cream and yellow flowers, which got better and better as we climbed. There were countless photos with superb mountain backdrops to be had. Among all of this finery were many cushions of *Thlaspi tauricola* along with a dainty *Gagea sp* and *Arabis caucasica* in the rock crevices. Reluctantly we descended also finding the lovely *Nonea versicolor* and a *Centaurea sp* at the bottom. The morning was only half complete for now we had to find an even rarer plant, the one and only *Bellevalia chrisii*, which I discovered in 2010. Embarrassingly there had been so much road construction that I couldn't recognise the location at first and had to phone a friend to help! Eventually Uta found the first of many plants, though only in bud. Then lower down the slope were some in full flower including one fine triple spiked specimen. Growing with the *Bellevalia* were the lovely ruby drops of an *Onosma sp*.

Driving back down we bought bread and had a picnic in an apricot orchard. There was still some distance to cover and we were of course running behind schedule, but what can you do when presented with good plants but spend time with them. We pushed on for a couple of hours and then ground to a halt next to a stunning display of hundreds of big *Tchihatchewia isatidea* peppering a roadside bank. It was an incredible sight. This is the ultimate steppe plant and the big inflorescences were a wonderfully complex collection of pink flower whorls. The only downside was we were quite near an army post so couldn't dwell too long.

No matter. Once we'd passed Tunceli a few spikes of *Orchis simia* brought us to a stop and closer searching of the oak scrub produced plenty more orchid wealth, including the delicate *Ophrys cilicica*, pale yellow *Dactylorhiza romana*, *Neotinea tridentata*, the robust spikes of *Orchis punctulata* and plenty of *Cephalanthera longifolia*. A fine end to the day and we sat back for the final stretch to Erzincan.



Iris peshmeniana

A relaxed start saw us driving a little to the north of town at 9.30 and stopping for a stony bank with a fascinating collection of plants. Most striking were the large plants of *Phlomooides molucelloides* with their outsize calyces shielding small yellowish flowers. Alongside these were *Muscari massayanum*, *Papaver lacerum* and *Gundelia tournefortii*. Leaving the town, we began to climb and stopped next for a large population of ice-blue *Pseudomuscari azureum*. Among these were many *Bellevalia paradoxa* and on a nearby slope were soft yellow *Primula elatior* ssp *pallasii*. Descending from the next pass we ground to a halt at the sight of a superb stand of *Paeonia mascula* growing on top of a bank. With a bit of determination, we got to the sweet-scented flowers, which were a wonderful deep cerise. There were also swathes of blue *Muscari armeniaca* especially around our picnic area.

Moving on after lunch we whizzed through the many new tunnels and turned off onto the old road to the Zigana Pass, entering extensive forests of pine and hornbeam before stopping for a stretch of roadside banks with many *Dactylorhiza romana* in both yellow and deep pink forms, as well as *Orchis pallens*, *Helleborus orientalis*, dainty blue to white *Anemone blanda* and *Primula vulgaris*. There was even a hybrid between the latter and *P. veris*. Climbing higher we passed many more hellebores and then stopped at the top where the slopes were carpeted in *Primula vulgaris* and there were big views back down the valley. On the other side of the pass a little gully where the snow had recently left held *Colchicum triphyllum* and pretty purple centred *Cyclamen parviflorum*. Elsewhere on the slope were deep purple *Viola altaica* and the many little pagodas of *Ajuga orientalis*. Alas the lack of sun meant the *Gentiana verna* were all closed.

Dropping down onto the wetter northern slope the landscape was emerald with tall forests of *Picea orientalis* and other trees and then large hazelnut groves. We parked up beside one and explored the meadows beyond where we found many orchids including *Ophrys scolopax*, *O. sphegodes*, *Neotinea tridentata* and *Cephalanthera longifolia*, as well as other meadow plants such as *Polygala anatolica*, *Ajuga genevensis*, *Rhinanthus angustifolia*, pretty *Lathyrus vernus*, whose pink flowers aged to blue and some fine clumps of *Centaurea hypoleuca* on the rockier slopes.

The drive brought us past beech woods brimming with *Rhododendron ponticum* in full flower to our comfortable spa hotel nestled in the greenery.



Paeonia mascula

Day 7 **12 May** **Anzer Yayla**

Our first stop was only a few hundred metres down the road for the delicate blue saucers of *Omphalodes cappadocica* that glided the shady banks. *Galeobdolon lutea* was in the undergrowth nearby. As we drove there were some fine *Rhododendron ponticum* overhanging the rushing Ikizdere River. Stopping by a slope a small path led to a plant of *Aristolochia pontica* complete with hanging Dutchman's pipe flowers. A couple of lovely *Aquilegia olympica* and *Dactylorhiza euxina* were also in flower. Turning off we drove towards Anzer, where allegedly the world's best and most expensive honey is produced (in summer). *Senecio panduratifolia* decorated the rocks in places but it was clear the season was late up here. The reason became apparent as we nearer the village in the fast gathering gloom, there had clearly been a lot more snow this year. A rainstorm swept through, but this had finished by the time we reached the village.

Opting for an early lunch under a large shelter we looked around the village where the odd *Iris histrioides* was found along with *Caltha polypetala*. It was a rather cool lunch as the wind picked up and whistled across the snow! However, there were some great flowers to come. Descending a little we found an area generously sprinkled with lovely *Iris histrioides* in various shades of mid to deep blue. There were hundreds of *Crocus aeneus* too, but alas the cloudy weather meant we had to enjoy their beautifully veined outer tepals only. Also mingled among the irises were many golden-yellow *Trollius ranunculinus*. Another snow patch lower down had many *Cyclamen parviflorum*, clumps of *Viola sieheana* and a few electric blue *Scilla sibirica* subsp. *armena*. The rain came and went as we drove down and then climbed up to a glade of *Rhododendron luteum*. Unfortunately, this late season meant there was only one plant in flower. The rain came back more decisively so we returned to base and the chance of a dip in the warm pool.

Day 8 **13 May** **Ovit Dag and to Erzurum.**

It was a clear blue-sky day and this seemed to intensify the already vibrant greenery of the Black Sea woods. As we headed uphill we stopped for *Rhododendron ponticum* beside the river and then a fine *R. luteum* followed by a stop just to admire the emerald forests and traditional houses scattered across the hillside. Gaining more height, it quickly became apparent there had been huge quantities of snow this year and at the pass there was still a couple of metres to be melted. It was a striking contrast to my last visit where I moved across the open turf to snow patches to look at flowers. However, on the 'drier' southern slopes, snow had begun to melt and we stopped by a riverside swathe of *Colchicum szovitsii* and *Gagea glacialis*. *Muscari armeniacum* was also popping up among turf and *Caltha polypetala* choking the smaller rivulets with big clumps of golden-yellow. There were unbelievable numbers of colchicum,



Omphalodes cappadocica

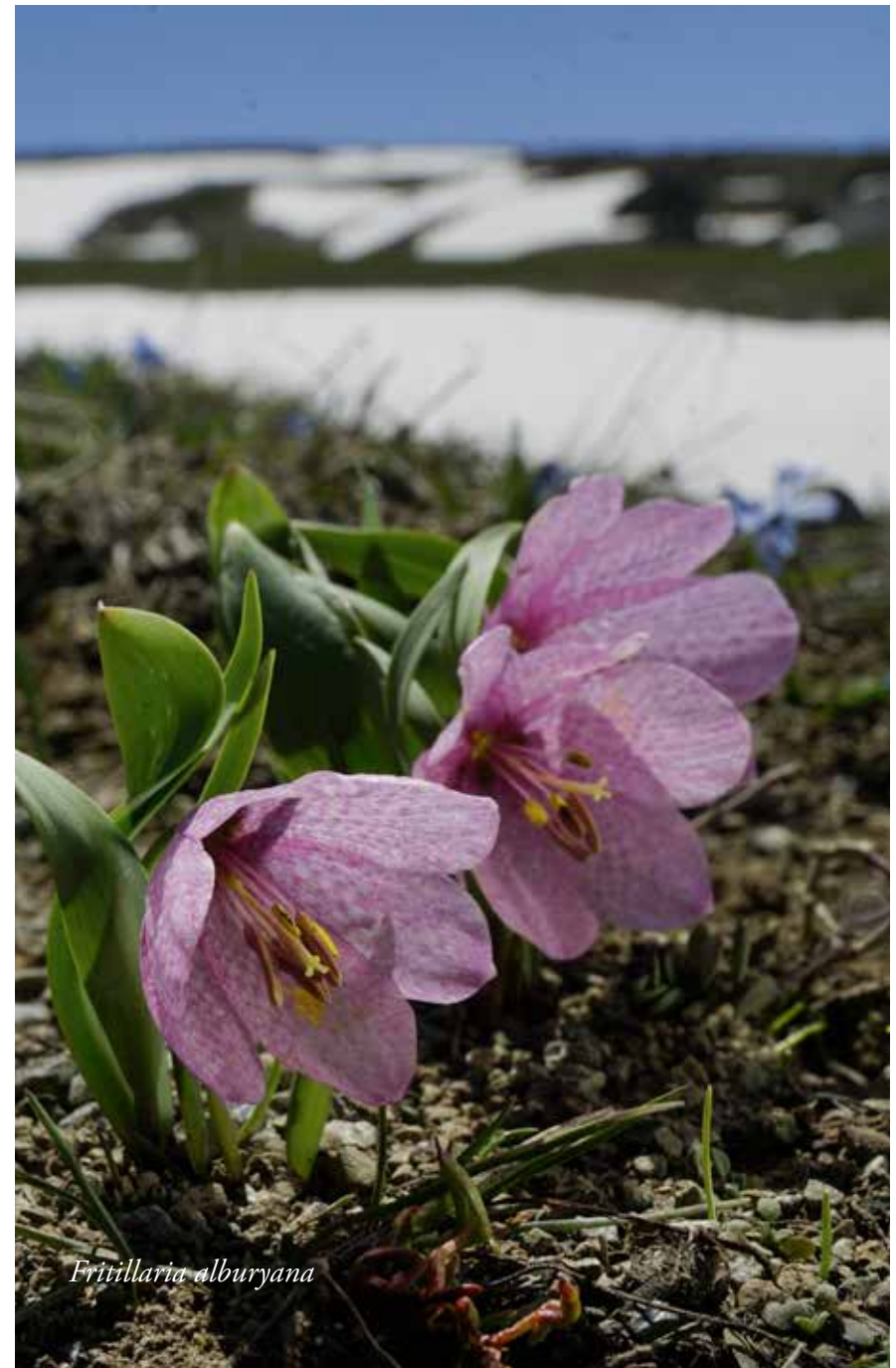
covering every area of open turf. But no gentians!

We drove down a lot further and through a tunnel to where we found *Veronica oltensis* on the rocks and in the stony steppe around was *Onosma tenuiflorum*, *O. araraticum*, *Hesperis bicuspidata* and trailing stems of *Vinca herbacea* with mauve-blue flowers. We bought excellent bread in the nearby town of Ispir and then set off for Erzurum, but a detour meant a delay in lunch as we found the right wiggle to get us onto the road we needed. As we waited for the picnic to be prepared we found *Bungea trifida*, *Tripleurospermum oreades* and fine buns of *Ajuga chamaepitys*. Our next plants were the superb spiny domes of *Onobrychis cornuta* smothered (on one side at least) with cerise flowers.

It was now necessary to see what we could find as the late snows meant there was little steppe flora. Beside a snow patch at the pass was a nice patch of *Scilla sibirica* subsp. *armena* with *Ranunculus kochii* and a few *Crocus biflorus* subsp. *tauri*. Then in a marshy flush lower down were *Primula elatior* subsp. *pallasii* with pink *P. auriculata*. A grassy slope peppered with *Draba bruniiifolia* also held some clumps *Pulsatilla albana*, the lovely mauve bells covered in silken hairs. The landscape was interesting with snow covered hills and stands of naked poplars creating a bristly effect. We were very glad to have seen *Tchihatchewia isatidea* before as the populations here were still in bud and all that was left was to drive onto our ski lodge in the Palandoken mountains.

Day 9 14 May Palandoken

What a good flower day this was. Heading out beyond the city we ground to a halt at the sight of thousands of glowing red *Tulip julia* that carpeted the grassy flats together with the masses of powder blue of *Globularia trichosantha* and in marshy bits, the yellow of *Barbarea minor*. All very primary colour. Also in the meadow were *Nonea caspica*, *Potentilla geranifolia* and the little lilac flowers of *Lagotis stolonifera*. But it was the tulips that drew the eye, a wonderful show to start the day. Not that much further up the road a late snow patch had the stunning deep purple flowers of *Iris reticulata* and rivers of *Caltha polypetala*, with clumps of deep pink *Primula auriculata*. But, the iris was the real cherry on this particular cake - a bonus in this late season. There was a one particular flower I was determined to find. Passing by huge



Fritillaria alburyana

quantities of *Colchicum szovitsii* and *Scilla sibirica*, as well as the odd *Thlaspi sintinesii* we descended a few hundred metres to a likely-looking area of snow patch and turf. The pendant bells of *Fritillaria caucasica* were quickly found along with *Corydalis oppositifolia* and many more *Iris reticulata*. Then a glance up revealed the first of many stunning chequered-pink bells of *Fritillaria alburyana*, surely one of the loveliest of all frits. Searching the slopes, we found plenty of perfect flowers to photograph and enjoy. A wonderful alpine bulb slope that had just about everything.

Heading back down after lunch we stopped for rocks with many neat clumps of *Draba rosularis*. Then it was onto a wet meadow the other side of the city. Alas, what the snow giveth (*Iris reticulata*) it also taketh away and there was not a single *Bellevalia forniculata* to be seen, only the near ubiquitous colchicums.

Day 10 15 May Coruh Valley

Before leaving Erzurum, we visited the interesting Cifte Medrasi there, with its intricate carving and fine architecture. There was a fine snowy mountain backdrop. Driving out we descended to Tortum and almost immediately found our first good stands of the endemic *Iris taochia*, in both purple and yellow forms. Growing with these was *Saponaria prostrata* and sprawling plants of *Scutellaria orientalis*. The latter was to be almost ever present during the day. Another area of steppe had some superb big domes of *Onobrychis cornuta* with bushes of a *Cerasus sp* which were attracting many Painted Ladies. Also on the slope were pretty tufts of *Polygala papilionacea*, *Onosma tenuiflorum* and more irises. There were further stops for the steppe flora including cushions of endemic *Veronica oltensis* and then near the reflective Tortum lake for stands of *Centranthus longiflorus*, *Linaria coriifolia*, *Coronilla orientalis*, *Salvia huberi* and *Colutea cilicica*. The latter became increasingly common as we progressed, forming big bushes of red-lined golden flowers. *Glaucium corniculatum* also grew in number and there was a good plant near our picnic site – which was chosen at a last resort as the huge increase in construction traffic meant we had little option.

In fact, we had to abandon our planned route and retrace our steps to Yusefeli. Even here the construction had destroyed some plant sites and we continued onto a quiet side valley instead. An hour was spent gently wandering downhill, mainly in the shade, finding good encrustations of *Saxifraga moschata* in flower, the peculiar asclepiad *Periploca graeca* and then fine plants of *Campanula olympica*. However, the prize plant



Iris taochia

of *Campanula choruhensis* eluded us with all of the plants still in frustratingly advanced bud in the late season. There was a good clump of *Onosma sericea* as we boarded the vehicles and started down, but then we caught site of large white flowers on a cliff. It was *Campanula choruhensis*, all be it a bit far away. A couple more followed that were a lot closer were found too. Then it was on to Savsat, the new dam adding sixty kilometres to our journey. Passing through countless tunnels we eventually neared Savsat seeing stands of *Astragalus galegiformis* along the way and then arriving at little Switzerland with tidy fields and spruce forests beneath snow-streaked peaks.

Day 11 16 May Cam Pass

A gorgeous morning, breakfast was taken overlooking an idyllic pastoral landscape with plentiful bird song and a couple of fine *Orchis purpurea* subsp. *caucasica* growing near the car park. Driving out we stopped for a flowery roadside with *Hesperis transcaucasica*, *Chamaecytisus hirsutus* and tiny *Viola kitabeliana*. Moving a little higher a snow patch had *Scilla rosenii* with elegant reflexed tepals as well as *Petasites albus* and plentiful *Primula elatior* subsp. *pallasii*. The latter's cousin *P. veris* was also around in big bright yellow patches as we climbed, stopping for a dramatic view of the Kackar Mountains. Then it was on to bulb heaven. Near the melting snows were hundreds of *Colchicum trigynum*, rivers of golden *Caltha polypetala* and ice-blue drifts of *Scilla rosenii*, in places blending with carpets of deeper blue *Scilla sibirica* subsp. *armena*. It was a stunning scene, with perfect blue skies above.

A little lower down as a slope were hundreds of *Pulsatilla albana*, including a couple of yellow forms and these grew with abundant *Draba brunifolia* and orangey *Potentilla ruprechtii*. Tucked under the rocks was *Scrophularia chrysantha* and the streams had fine clumps of *Primula auriculata*. Better was to come. Arriving at our lunch site we quickly found the first of many stunning blue *Gentiana verna* subsp. *pontica*. On the opposite side (and the slope near the vehicles) were slopes plastered with hundreds of amazing chocolate bells of *Fritillaria latifolia*, the inside of the flowers a wonderful maze of red and yellow. With these were both white and pink *Corydalis nariniiana* and pale-yellow *C. angustifolia* as well as sheets of *Scilla rosenii* near the melting snows.

Our final plant of the day was *Iris aphylla*, though it took a while to find any of the



deep purple flowers on this late season. But find them we did and then we drove onto Kars stopping only for a pond with hundreds of raucous marsh frogs.

Day 12 17 May Sarikamis & Horasan

Yet another fine clear day. We had been very fortunate with the weather during the vast majority of the tour, and today was to be no exception. The rounded pine-clad hills near the Sarikamis have a sizeable brown bear population, but there was little chance of one of these today. Instead we settled for a damp fields with three species of blue bulbs – *Muscari aucheri* being the most abundant, alongside dark blue *Bellevalia paradoxa* and a smattering of icy-blue *B. forniculata* – which despite its specific epithet never seemed to hybridise with its cousins. Then we went into the Scot's Pine plantations and stopped in a wonderful flower area. Star of the show was undoubtedly the abundant *Fritillaria michailovskii*, a simply wonderful bulb with golden-rimmed brown bells. They were present in delightful drifts across the lower slope and seemed to be pollinated by a hefty yellow wasp. Elsewhere were plenty of the more restrained *F. caucasica* and colonies of soft yellow *Dactylorhiza romana*.

Lunch was taken among the pines and then we set off on the remainder of our circuit drive, stopping first for a few *Iris caucasica* on a stony hillside and the next for another slope with plenty of woolly *Rindera lanata* and *Nonea caspica*. Unfortunately, the late season meant the colonies of big-leaved *Allium akaka* we stopped for next were only in bud. But there was another cherry on the cake. Stopping in an area of steppe it seemed first that there were no *Iris iberica* in flowers. Then we found a few opening flowers a couple of reasonable ones, but the beetles seemed to have damaged most of the blooms. Then Martin found a pristine specimen by the road and we formed an orderly queue to photograph this. There were in fact many more irises as we progressed with their prominent white flowers backlit in the afternoon sun.

Day 13 18 May Ani and Ararat

The morning was spent exploring the extensive archeological site of Ani, which sits right next to the river border with Armenia. Walking around the various red stone churches and other buildings (in various states of repair) there was also *Nepeta mussenii* in flower on the orange-lichen encrusted rocks. Storm clouds threatened during lunch but the rain didn't materialise and we drove on south



Fritillaria michailovskii

to an area of flat steppe where we found a good number of wonderful *Iris iberica* in flower with *Bellevalia sarmatica* and *Leopoldia caucasica*, whilst on the opposite side of the road were masses of *Moltkia caerulea* and both *Geranium tuberosum* and *G. stepporum*.

Our final stop of the day was for great views of the towering Agri Dag (Mount Ararat) that rose out of the surrounding marshy lowlands. The last clouds drifted from the summit not long after we arrived as the light played across its vast slopes.

Day 14 19 May Tendurek Dag and Muradiye

Breakfast was in full view of the snowy bulk of Agri Dag. We then headed towards another huge volcano, Tendurek Dag, stopping halfway up for a view of the former peak rising out of the steppe lands. Our first flora stop was for a large population of *Adonis wolgensis*, the bushy plants festooned with large yellow flowers. Closer to the remaining snows were many *Puschkinia scillioides*, *Ranunculus kochii* and a few *Fritillaria pinardii*. A rich assortment of insect pollinators was working the *Puschkinia* flowers. Next up was an area of lava flows (and there are some immense flows around this mountain), where we found a few *Crocus biflorus* ssp *tauri* and then abundant and lush *Puschkinia scillioides* with *Bellevalia paradoxa* and a lot more *Fritillaria pinardii*. A group of locals were also there, busy collecting *Eremurus* and *Allium* leaves to eat. Not far away was a slope with cushions of *Androsace villosa* too.

Continuing south we stopped by a water meadow with lots of *Primula algida* and then a lovely meadow packed with *Muscari aucheri* and buttercups that created a wonderful patchwork of yellow and deep blue. Lunch was at Muradiye Falls close to where we found some fine colour forms of *Iris iberica*, including some with prominent purple veins and/or yellow standards. *Leopoldia caucasica* was abundant there too along with *Malabiala lasiocarpa*. Another area of rocky steppe nearby had plenty of intense scarlet *Diphelypaea tournefortii* bursting from amongst the leaves of its *Achillea* host plant. There was also wispy *Stachys lavandulifolia*, a few *Ixiolirion tartaricum*, yellow *Astragalus caraganae*, woolly *Rindera lanata* and the inflated seedpods of *Leontice leontopetalum*.



Adonis wolgensis

Moody skies threatened rain but it never really arrived and our last stop was a dry one. Close to the road were wet flushes brimming with the magenta spires of *Dactylorhiza umbrosa* and a few *Polygala anatolica*, whilst up on the slopes was the silken purple beauty of *Iris barnumiae*, another of the seductive *Oncocyclus* group. *Bellevalia longistyla* was also there with *Salvia anatolica* and a variety of *Astragalus* species. A fine finish to a productive flower day and we had time for crucial wine/helva buying on the way through Van to our hotels on the shores of the eponymous lake.

Day 15 20 May Karabel Pass


Our final day in the field and our final delve into Turkey's remarkable botanical richness. Driving along the shores of Lake Van we turned inland and began to climb into the hills. Flashes of red drew our attention to the slopes where we found a number of *Tulipa sintinesii*. Meanwhile, below on the other side of the river were superb drifts of *Puschkinia scilloides*, punctuated by *Ranunculus kochii* and odd big clump of the impressive *Colchicum kurdicum*. Further on another slope with snow patches had a good selection of bulbs with the golden bells of *Fritillaria minima* and its more sombre cousin *F. kurdica* alongside pretty pink *Tulipa humilis*. We had hoped to picnic next a natural garden of flowers, but this odd year saw our location under a metre of snow and rather than tulips there were more *Colchicum kurdicum* popping through the snow.

Back on the other side after lunch we found an interesting rocky area with plenty of *Corydalis oppositifolia*, *Fritillaria minuta* and *Puschkinia bilgineri*. Bella then found the first of a colony of *Tulipa koyuncu* (a yellow species) alongside more *T. humilis*. There was one more plant to try and find and we drove onto a graveyard where we found a decent number of *Iris paradoxa* in flowers with *Eremurus spectabilis* and *Allium akaka* to round off the flowers.

Day 16 21 May Return flights

Various departures took us home.





For information on our tours
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