



Flora of the Silk Road by Christopher Gardner and Başak Gardner, 2014, IB Tauris, £35, ISBN 978-1-78076-941-7

The Silk Road is a complex of ancient trade-routes running from Istanbul to the Far East with secondary routes to the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Its history, archaeology, and sociology have attracted much attention but its rich flora has been neglected despite being in one of the world's megadiverse 'hotspots' for plants. Chris and Başak Gardner have visited parts of the routes over 50 times in the last 15 years and amassed a unique image-library of their plants and landscapes.

This large-format book presents exquisite photographs of 545 species. It is divided into six areas comprising 16 regions. Each species has useful text about taxonomy, ecology, distribution, etc. There is a short history of the Road and a very useful account on taking good plant photographs in the wild.

The photographs are of a consistently high standard, varying from close-ups and portraits, to plants in landscapes. There are also wonderful landscape, architecture, and habitat views. Many fascinating and poorly-known plants are illustrated, for example, *Desidera baiogoinensis*, *D. flabellata*, *Solms-laubachia retropilosa*, *Pedicularis batangensis*, *Callianthemum alatavicum*, *Eremurus sogdianus*, *Fritillaria stenanthera*, *F. eduardii*, *Dionysia aretioides*, *Corydalis rupestris*, *Linaria michanxii*, *Crocus wattiorum*, and *Cyclamen intaminatum*. Selecting the plants to include must have been very difficult but the Gardners present a well-balanced and aesthetically pleasing selection of desert, steppe, woodland, cliff, and alpine species. Occasionally I was baffled by nomenclature, e.g. *Erophaca baetica*

ssp. *orientalis* turns out in the text to be *Astragalus lusitanicus*. A note about the nomenclature used is needed. It would have helped to have inset maps to show where the 16 regions are. It is difficult to locate Jabal an-Nusayria or the Anti-Lebanon mountains on the broad-scale map on the inside covers.

Chris and Başak Gardner have produced a masterpiece of great interest for all fascinated by the Silk Road flora. The image-reproduction quality and book design are superb. With 406 pages and over 500 stunning photographs, the book is well worth buying, enjoying, and treasuring. It should stimulate many to explore the routes of the Silk Road and to enjoy their amazing flora.

John Birks is a keen plant photographer with a particular interest in alpinism world-wide. He is also a palaeoecologist and has recently retired from the University of Bergen.