

The logo for VIRA NATURA TOURS features the company name in a white, serif font. The word "VIRA" is on the top line, "NATURA" is on the second line, and "TOURS" is on the third line. A white, curved line arches over the text from the right side, framing it.

VIRA NATURA  
TOURS

# LILIES OF THE BLACK SEA TRIP REPORT

2017

*Lilium kesselringianum*

Day 1            20 June – To Amasya

Arrival into Amasya was unavoidably late, since the only flight was at midnight! However, all would be revealed tomorrow.

Day 2            21 June – Amasya

The morning light revealed the pleasant historic town of Amasya with its' elegant wooden riverside buildings, clock towers and on the limestone cliffs immediately behind a series of rock cut tombs. The morning was spent walking around this old quarter, also including a visit to the museum. Lunch was high above the town with a grand view of it all, polished off with some superb sweet cherries.

The botany got going in the afternoon when we visited an orchid-rich site an hour out of town. Among the light woods were a few perfect spikes of *Himantoglossum* affine growing alongside *Ophrys cornuta*, *Epipactis helleborine* and the red helleborine *Cephalanthera rubra*. A little further up the track and we found *Ophrys apifera* and a stand of very good *Dactylorhiza osmanica*.

Day 3            22 June – Akkus Valley

One of Turkey's most range restricted lilies, *Lilium akkusianum*, is centred around the Akkus Valley and this was today's target. The surrounding area was a Mediterranean enclave with plants such as *Arbutus andrachne* and *Cedrus libani* at its' most northerly distribution and along the roadsides were plenty of *Phlomis russeliana*. The vegetation changed from oak and cedar to beech forest as we reached the wetter versant. Local forest guides escorted us to where they said there were many lilies flowering this year, but at first glance, there was nothing. Then after looking more carefully among the bracken we found the first perfect white trumpets of *Lilium akkusianum* with a few *Platanthera chlorantha* alongside. An even better stand was found a bit further along the road where several spikes of superb lilies grew together, fighting it out with nettles and bracken. A great start to our lilies.

From here we descended again and then began to fairly long transfer to Ordu on the Black Sea coast. There was a stop on the way for a fine stand



*Lilium akkusianum*

of *Dactylorhiza osmanica*, *Polygala comosa* and in the woods a few *Cephalanthera longifolia*. But we needed to cover ground to reach Ordu in good time and set ourselves for the next day.

Day 4            23 June – Eğribel Pass

Long valleys stretch inland from the coast, lined for large stretches with hazelnut groves where a few *Campanula persicifolia* poked out and *Sedum stolonifera* grew on the rocks. These gave way to spruce forest higher as the valley became deeper and increasingly impressive. On some of the cliffs we could see the first soft yellow *Lilium monodelphum* var. *armenum* and on first main stop of the day was in more accessible slope with a number of these. There was plenty more besides including the cerise form of *Anacamptis pyramidalis*, blue *Salvia forskhalei*, various crane's-bills, as well as *Orchis purpurea caucasica*, *Stevenella satyroides* and tucked in the shrubs a few *Paris incompleta*. Continuing uphill we found a good lunch spot with the odd *Lilium ciliatum* and lots of good meadow flowers such as *Geranium psilostemon* and some good *Dactylorhiza urvilleana* including an unusual bicoloured pink and white form. However, the main event had yet to arrive.

Not far up the road was a stunning population of hundreds of *Lilium ciliatum*, with so many of the dark-centred flowers that it appeared as though so many eyes were looking down at us. The slope was steep but this didn't stop us getting up into the lilies, pushing past the huge leaves of *Heracleum platytaenium* and fine stands of *Aster caucasica*. Near the road was plenty of golden *Lathyrus aureus* and clumps of blue cornflower *Cyanus nigrifimbriatus*. The views from the upper slopes of lilies, misty forests and mountains were superb, but alas time was moving on an after a quick cup of tea and snack we drove back down to Ordu.

Day 5            25 June – Sumela Monastery

There was some ground to cover in the morning to reach Trabzon and then climb up towards the famous Sumela Monastery. A botanical stop



on the way produced lots of *Saxifraga paniculata* on the rocks. The light rain made our visit briefer than planned, but we all got to see the frescos and monastery. The rain continued as we ate a tasty trout lunch before the final drive up to our rustic cabins surrounded by lush vegetation including *Lilium ciliatum* in the car park.

Day 6            26 June – Zigana Pass

The morning was spent ambling up the track to find various stands of *Lilium ciliatum* and a host of other flowers including the peculiar globe orchid *Traunsteinera sphaerica*, purple-veined *Geranium ibericum* and *Gymnadenia conopsea*. another area had both *Lilium ciliatum* and *L. monodelphum* growing together, including one plant of the former with thirty flowers. Dainty golden *Vicia croceum* grew nearby and on the rocks, was the pretty *Sedum villosum*. Despite the light rain it was an excellent flower morning and we managed to secure lunch under cover at the hotel. The climate of the area is typically wet in summer, but crossing the pass after lunch the rain dissipated and the landscape was rockier and drier with oaks replacing the beech and spruce.

Climbing back up to a second pass we stopped for some of the abundant *Digitalis lamarckii* and also found a superb colony of dense flowered *Epipactis helleborine* on an area of rough scree. A more delicate species *Dactylorhiza iberica* choked a wet flush with some very prettily-patterned forms and another slope nearby had a thriving population of the striking *Morina persica*, with whorls of white to deep pink flowers. There were some mixed populations of *Lilium ciliatum* and *monodelphum* in the woods higher up along with *Aconitum orientale* and *Geranium sylvaticum*. Then we reached the subalpine slopes seeing more and more golden-yellow *Rhododendron luteum*. Indeed, over the pass was masses of this sweetly-scented shrub colouring the slopes yellow. Searching among the more open stands we found some good *Platanthera chlorantha* and the diminutive *Monanthes uniflora*. Lower down *Rhododendron luteum* was mixed with that notorious brute *R. ponticum* but at least here it was in its natural habitat.

Day 7            26 June – Uzungol

Our next lily lay to the east and we drove along the coast before turning inland once again and climbing towards Uzungol. Shortly before the town we scoured the meadows and



*Digitalis lamarckii*

sure enough there was a few *Lilium ponticum* with both yellow and orange forms, the flowers with strongly reflexed tepals and delicately speckled with purple. The weather was on the soggy side but we managed to find a sheltered lunch spot and then drove a bit higher to another small population of lilies. *Dactylorhiza urvilleana* was also common with many tall spikes above heavily spotted leaves. With the weather not improving and lilies found we drove down and along to our comfortable hotel.

Day 8            27 June – Ovit Pass

A superb plant day began with a very good population of *Lilium ponticum* growing on a steep meadow. The exhibited a range of colour forms from egg yolk yellow too tangerine. Moving higher there were some wonderful clumps of *Campanula aucheri* with big blue bells (we had already seen white-belled *C. alliarifolia* lower down near our hotel) and orange *Papaver lateritium*. At the pass, the turf was studded intense blue *Gentiana verna*, *Primula elatior* var. *meyeri*, purple-blue *Corydalis conorhiza* and some wonderful big chocolate-coloured bells of *Fritillaria latifolia*. *Primula auriculata* was beginning to flower alongside the streams where we also found plenty of bright yellow *Caltha polypetalata* and the last *Scilla sibirica* in the snow beds.

In the afternoon, we drove to a side valley a spent the time walking through a botanical wonderland of thousands upon thousands of *Anemone narcissiflora* growing with stands of *Pedicularis atropurpurea* and pastel blue *Aquilegia olympica*. Shrubberies of *Rhododendron caucasicum* still had some ivory trumpets on and the scene was all the more magical for the mists that came and went, sometimes revealing big views back down the valley.

Day 9            28 June – To Laset

An unavoidable long transfer was needed today, in part because of the massive dam construction project along the Coruh Valley. Crossing over the pass we drove down stopping for some magnificent stands of intense scarlet *Papaver orientale*. *Dianthus calocephalus* was also common in the meadows. In the narrower rocky sections of the valley we found *Pelargonium endlicherianum*, *Glaucium corniculatum* and various other steppe species. Pushing on we reached the ruins of a Georgian church for our picnic.

The winding road then took us to Yusefeli, a town that will be completely inundated in a few years (the while village is being moved uphill). Then after negotiating the dam we drove on and up into the rather Swiss-like countryside around Savsat, with flower meadows and spruce trees. Our prize for the long journey was well worth the effort, a superb population of *Lilium kesselringianum*. The large

*Lilium ponticum*



yellow flowers were speckled with red and some showed distinct banding on the tepals. They emerged from meadows packed with *Rhinanthus angustifolium*, related soft orange of *Rhynchosorys orientalis* and pinks of *Orchis coriophora* and *Polygala major*. Afterwards we settled into our individual bungalows set amidst the relaxing rural landscape.

Day 10            29 June – *Lilium szovitsianum*

Our last field day produced arguably the finest lily in the region. We began by stopping for another area of *Lilium kesselringianum* also finding pink *Tanacetum coccineum* and *Sedum villosum* and there were fine views across the alpinisque landscape. Then we drove for an hour or so across a big wide landscape more befitting of Central Asia. Arriving at a small village we walked the mile or so across increasingly flowery meadows to a slope with many impressive spikes of *Lilium szovitsianum*, some with twenty flowers on. At their best, the flowers are the largest of any lily in Turkey, variably spotted with red and in fact quite similar to *L. kesselringianum*. Many other superb flowers were around with clumps of *Geranium pratense*, *Trifolium alpestris*, *Linum hypericifolium* and the stunning big black-centred scarlet flowers of *Papaver pseudo-orinetale*. Clearly the meadows were going to be good for some weeks with superb plants such as *Centaurea macropcephala* still to come.

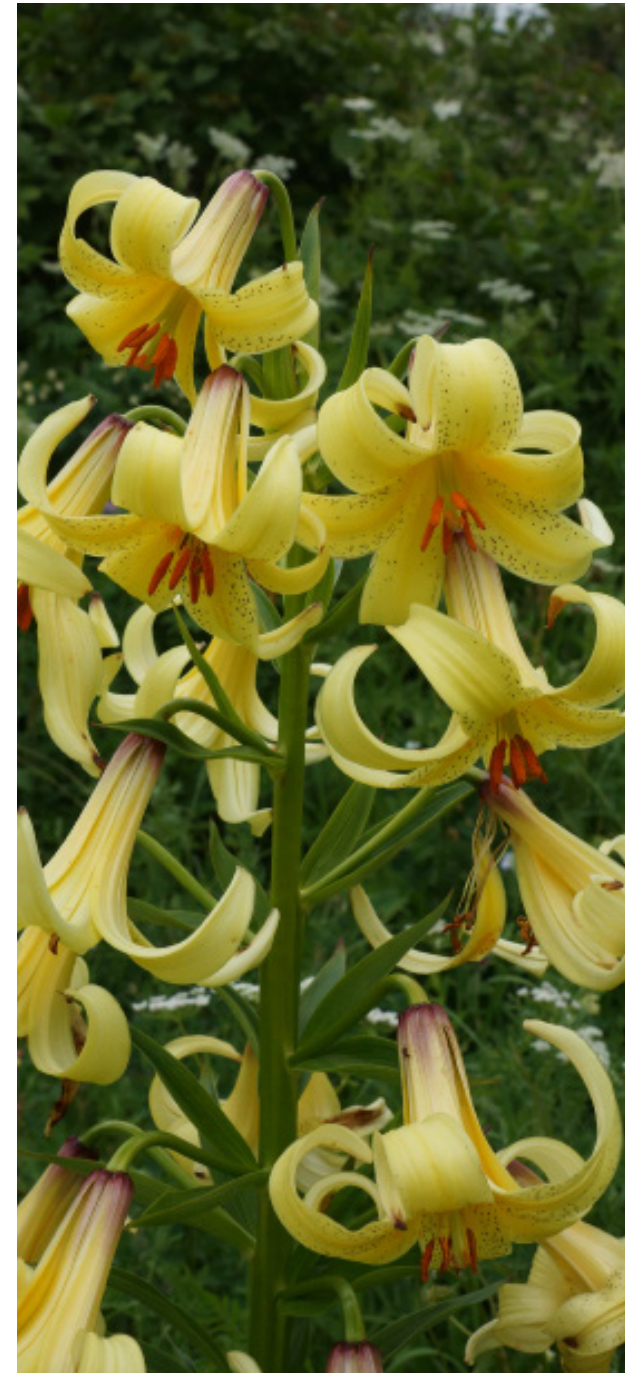
There was time on the way back to stop in an area of woodland with many fine spikes of *Limadorum abortivum*, *Platanthera chlorantha* and *Vicia crocea*.

Day 11            30 June – Flights home

We left in good time to reach Kars airport for our flight to Istanbul and then onward flight home.



*Lilium szovitsianum*





*Aquilegia olympica*

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