

ANATOLIAN DECISIONS



Galanthus elwesii, Antalya



Anemone coronaria, Xanthos



Ophrys speculum, near Kas

When is the best time to go to Türkiye? Where is the best place to go? Two questions we hear often. My usual reply is you need to go to Türkiye at least six times (at the very least), quite simply because this country offers not only so much to the plant minded, but if you have an interest in antiquities, geology or enjoy good food there are further layers to delve into. Türkiye is the perfect botanical storm. Not only are there three climates, but on top is its position at geographical and biological crossroads with influences from west, north, south and (very strongly) east. The warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea lap the south and west, the rising Taurus Mountains creating sufficient rain shadow and elevation of the Anatolian Plateau that the westernmost steppe begins near Ankara and sweeps east (eventually to China). In turn, this is buttressed to the north by the evergreen lands of the Black Sea, a region where it can rain any day of the year. Mountains flank the country and criss-cross the land, in places riven by mind-boggling erosion or punctuated by huge volcanoes.

As a result, there is almost always some part of the country worth visiting. For example, when the north is blanketed in snow the Mediterranean is starting into life, the first bulbs of spring merging and for those given to crocuses, the south-



Cyclamen alpinum, Antalya



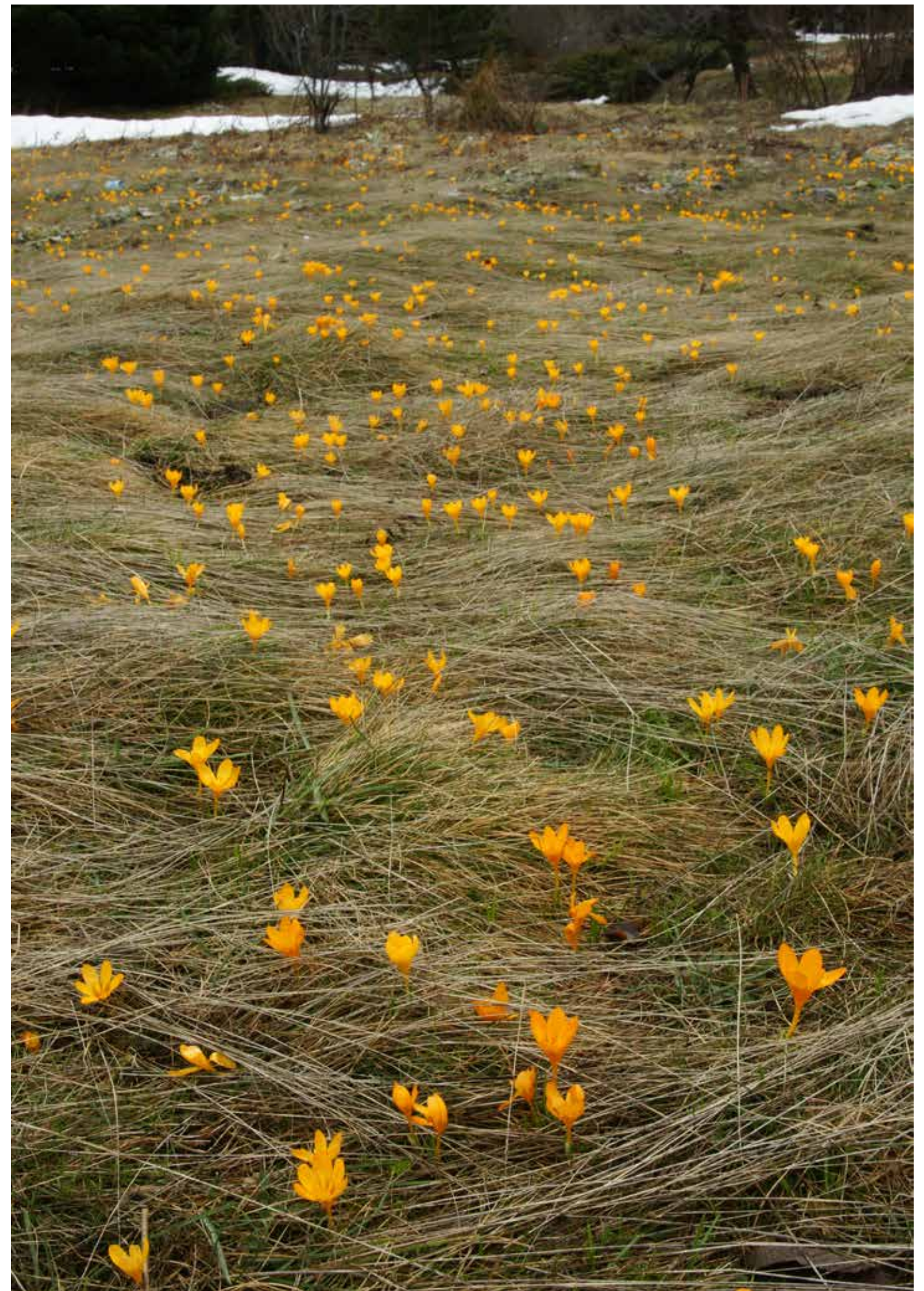
Crocus pulchricolor, Uludag



Tulipa armena, Dedegol Dagi

west will confuse and amaze, joined by that classic of the season, *Galanthus elwesii*, as well as cedar forests coated in countless *Cyclamen alpinum*. In the lowlands orchids appear among a random assortment of *Anemone coronaria* colours, spurges come into their own with an architectural assault of their own, the honey-scented flowers and forthright forms a quintessential part of the regional scene in spring. Travel to the northwest a month later and spring has sprung there with drifts of golden-yellow *Crocus gargaricus* mingling with violet *C. pulchricolor*, woods plastered in countless primroses that swirl around *Helleborus orientalis* and cerise whorls of *Cyclamen coum*. The Med keeps on going well into summer if you know where to look, but magical May is indeed magical, when the addition of magnificent peonies, more and different bee orchids, many lovely bulbs from fritillaries and tulips to fragrant *Muscari racemosa* and armies of asphodels and *Gladiolus anatolicus*. The Taurus Mountains are coming to life with alpine domes of *Onobrychis cornuta* smothered beneath a magenta pea flowers, elegant pink, orange and even rare fragrant poppies (if you know where to look). And if the plants ever become boring (if that is possible?) then there are dozens of historical sites to lose oneself in.

Inland, Anatolia is fast catching up, the land finally warmed and the amazing array of steppe flora starting to dazzle, from



Crocus gargaricus, Uludag



Fritillaria imperialis, Tunceli



Saxifraga kotschyi, Karabet Pass



Puschkinia scillioides, Karabet Pass



Tchihatchewia isatidea, near Tunceli

mats of *Convolvulus assyricus* to citrine fists of *Arnebia densiflora*, the confusing spires of *Tchihatchewia isatidea* or limestone rocks bursting with the regal *Fritillaria imperialis*. The flamboyance of the oncocyclis irises, especially *Iris iberica*, never loses its appeal, they are a wonder of the botanical world, white standards waving in the breeze amid the stark lava landscapes with immense strato volcanoes spreading across the horizon. Other silken beauties provide the supporting cast as do millions of snowmelt bulbs with icy drifts of *Puschkinia scillioides* and plunging views from passes still shedding their snows, punched through in places by robust *Colchicum kurdicum*, whilst sheer limestone flashes yellow with hard tight mounds of *Saxifraga kotschyi* and pink tulips brighten the ash grey stones. The eclectic remains of Ishak Pasa are still poised above the old Silk Road that made its way east to Persia and beyond. And then there are the exciting new excavations at ancient Karahantepe and Gobekletepe to whet the appetite of culture vultures.

By June the sun-drenched lands of Anatolia and the Mediterranean are now starting to warm (a lot) and by July is decidedly toasty. What better than to go north, especially the north-east. The deep, green valleys are



Daphne glomerata, Ovit Dagı



Papaver lateritium, Anzer yaylasi



Geranium ibericum & *Polygonum bistorta* var. *carnea*, Anzer

still traditionally managed and unpolluted by fertilizer, which means species-rich meadows still stretch as far as the eye can see, in places hemmed in by dense shrubberies of *Rhododendron caucasicum* or the dark ranks of oriental spruce. The second half of June is lily-time with six beautiful species in flower, together with orchids and snowy drifts of *Anemone narcissiflora*. A month later and the rest of the cast have caught up creating a variable feast of colours, each slope a different and gorgeous variation on the last and the whole the scene alive with bees, butterflies and big chirping bush-crickets. July is a joy and even August still throngs with gentians and berry-laden bushes. By now the first hint of autumn will be in the air, the season is shorter here in the north and snow can arrive by October, but certainly by November to wrap up the high tops and slowly spread its way down.

Which brings us full circle, for just as it gets too chilly and flowerless in the north than the Mediterranean is throwing a late season party of its own with some of the loveliest bulbs in the region such as *Crocus mathewi* appearing after the first rains. And hang on until early November and secret valleys have its cousin *Crocus wattiorum* popping up among rock crevices near pretty tufts of *Galanthus peshmenii* as a last hurrah. Well almost, there is a very secret valley where I go to see snowdrops on Christmas Day, but not even Santa knows this place.

Crocus mathewi, Antalya

