

**NARCISSUS OF
ANDALUCIA
2024**

Narcissus bujei

Day 1 To Nijar

There was a lunchtime Malaga meet and after a bite to eat and coffee we drove along the coast to our hotel up in the foothills at Nijar. Dropping our bags there was time to visit Cabo del Gata for a short coastal walk, seeing extensive populations of *Chamaerops humilis* (European fan palms) and a lava dyke that cut through the cliffs to the sea below. The odd *Antheriscus maritimus* braved the dry conditions.

Day 2 Sierra de Filabres & Cazorla

A fine, sunny morning and we stopped first for some of the robust clumps of *Cistanche lutea* that were erupting from the dry ground, having thrown up thick crusts of soil on their way up. They were quite magnificent and one wondered just how they gained sufficient sustenance to produce these huge spikes from the straggly shrubs they were parasitising. On the opposite side of the road *Convolvulus althaeoides* scrambled over the verge and bristly spreads of *Echium humile* dotted the dry ground. The journey north involved many stops for the interesting desert views, with pastel-painted slopes and a Western-movie feel to the landscape (there is actually is a filming location nearby), as well as a thriving colony of a rich yellow form of *Cistanche lutea*, bushy *Helichrysum stoechas* and the rather unusual primrose relative *Coris monspeliensis*. From here we then climbed higher, reaching a somewhat cooler area with more oaks where *Narcissus cantabricus* subsp. *monophyllus* was flowering, the dainty trumpets speckling the macchie and slopes. A little gem.

Lunch was in a little side turn and then we drove, stopping for drifts of the abundant *Moricandia arvensis* and the reflective waters of a reservoir to break up the journey. Reaching Cazorla, we wound our way up into the hills and then caught sight of the first diminutive *Narcissus hedraeanthus* growing in a seep. More followed, as did *Helleborus foetidus* and fine views across the landscape before reaching the comforts of the Parador nestled among the pines.



Cistanche lutea

Day 3 Parque Natural Despenaperros

A fine clear morning as we made our way slowly out of the valley, stopping for a few *Scilla verna* on the rocks with bushes of flowering *Salvia rosmarinus* (syn. *Rosmarinus officinalis*), followed by an area of woods with plentiful and large clumps of *Helleborus foetidus* growing with *Daphne laureola*. *Erodium cicutarium* decorated the rocks at a viewpoint before we descended to Cazorla and drove out through extensive (and seemingly endless) olive groves. It is tragic how so little native vegetation has been left between the vast expanse of olive that coat the landscape like braided hair. We did find a found patch of native vegetation and it had many interesting plants including sweet-scented *Coronilla valentina*, *Allium neopolitanum*, *Muscari neglectum* and flowery bushes of *Cistus albidus*. Not that there was not some colour under the olives, but it was essentially swathes of annual mustards.

A welcome coffee break followed and then we made it to Parque Natural Despenaperros, an area of good natural habitats, where we climbed into hills to bushes of white *Cistus ladanifer* and pink *C. albidus* growing side by side. The former had very large white flowers, mostly with red-purple spots, but some were pure white. Then, as we rounded a bend, we saw our first *Narcissus triandrus*. There was great excitement and as it turned out far too much time spent on so few, even though they did grow with the pretty dwarf shrub; *Cistus clusii*. Further on were hundreds more *Narcissus triandrus* in delightful drifts among the trees. There was also the bonus of a herd of twenty ibex that posed well for photos before we stopped again for even better patches and clumps of narcissus. *Saxifraga granulata* grew among them on the mossy banks as did *Erophaca baetica* and we stopped for a fine stand of this as we drove down. By now, the rain had finally arrived, but luckily we got what we came for and from here drove directly back to the hotel.



Narcissus triandrus

Day 4 Antiquera & Embalse de Guadalhorca

A wet start as we drove out, pausing for a revitalising coffee on route, and glimpsing patches of rich pink colour in the distance. Continuing on towards Antequera, there was a productive stop before the town for pristine spikes of *Ophrys fusca*, rich pink *Moricandia moricandioides*, both *Reseda lutea* and *R. phyteuma*, *Anacamptis collina*, the attractive local endemic *Linaria verticillata* subsp. *anticaria* and *Cynoglossum cherifolium*. Google maps took us on a convoluted route through the pleasant town but could not get us to the nature reserve, whose gate was locked. Instead went to nearby; Torcal de Antequera, an area of amazing limestone rocks formations. Architectural *Euphorbia characias* and *E. nicaeensis* grew from among the boulders and crevices, along with stubborn tufts of *Chamaerops humilis*. There were some extraordinary views across the deeply riven and split geoscape. Moving on to the area around a large reservoir and dam the geology changed but still created some fascinating rock formations. We then found an excellent patch of habitat with lovely drifts of snowy *Iberis pectinata*, plentiful *Dipcadi serotinum* in both greenish and bronzy forms, a few *Muscari comosum* and lovely *Linaria becerae* in dainty patches in the sand and on the rock sheets above.

It was not much further on to Ronda and our pleasant hotel for the next few days.

Day 5 Sierra de Alcaparain & Montejaque

A wet, wet day with constant rain! It was going to be a challenge to get much botany done, but undaunted we set off for an area of woods and mountains, stopping on the way at a viewpoint(!) where quite a bit of *Scilla hispanica* grew in the rocks. Conditions were atrocious and it was tricky to get any photos with wind and rain. Moving on we found an area of pine and macchie where with a bit of searching (and slightly less rain) we managed to find *Ophrys fusca* and a colony of *O. scolopax* as well as a flowering plant of *Phlomis lychnitis*. The next location was unfortunately now fenced off and in the midst of being destroyed by a digger! It was time



Iberis pectinata

for somewhere warmer and drier so we found a café nearby and had a good lunch of fried fish, calamari and coffee.

Another orchid site drew a blank so we returned to Ronda and then continued onto an area of spectacular karst scenery. Here our luck really changed and we found hundreds of pristine *Orchis olbiensis*, lots of *O. fusca* and a few *O. tenthredinifera* together with the striped bells of *Fritillaria lusitanica*. A late-flowering *Iris planifolia* was a lucky bonus. The roadside further on thronged with drifts of big-flowered *Ranunculus rupestris* and the soft blue of *Vinca difformis*. A second area of limestone had lots of *Ornithogalum reverchonii* and a few rather distant *Narcissus cuatrecasii*. A single *N. papyraceus* was found a bit higher up, but there was little else and it was still raining hard. A tight wiggle through the pretty (but narrow) streets of the village brought us back to the ‘main’ road where we could see around fifty griffon vultures in the air. On the return journey we picked up a couple of good spikes of *Himantoglossum robertianum* to round of the day and these were photographed in the only brief dry window of the whole day!

A hint of blue appeared by early evening...fingers crossed.

Day 6 Grazalema & Montejaque

There was certainly less rain about first thing, but squally showers were still sweeping in from time to time and it was not warm. We wound our way through an area of cork oaks with many trees clearly showing signs of past harvest (the lower trunks a rich cinnamon brown) whilst the upper branches were still swathed in thick, riven bark encrusted with lichens. Our first location nestled among the limestone massifs and was actually a wash out, the previous days of rain having soaked the ground so that we found very little except one tuft of *Linaria platycalyx*. Along the road there were nice things with fine clumps of *Centaurea pullata* (waiting to open) and *Scrophularia sambucina*. *Vinca difformis* was also floriferous and abundant and we stopped next at an area with some superb contorted oaks (*Quercus rotundifolia*) with drifts of the aforementioned periwinkle as well as *Scilla hispanica* bursting from a rock crevice. Further on and a wet slope had a smattering of *Narcissus bulbocodium* (sadly a bit rain-battered)



Orchis olbiensis

and a solitary *Neotinea tridentata* subsp. *conica*. Lunch was in the shelter of some large oaks and then we drove a short distance to where hundreds of fragrant *Narcissus jonquillus* brightened the pastures and roadside verges.

The weather was improving all of the time and our afternoon around Montejaque was much better than everything from the last day and a half. Dozens of griffon vultures hung in the sky as we explored the orchid-rich limestone knolls with plentiful *Orchis olbiensis*, *Ornithogalum bourgeanum*, *Ophrys fusca* and the odd *O. tenthredinifera* and some fine *Fritillaria lusitanica*. Equally good was a pleasant walk along a twisting section of road with impressive karst scenery on one side and cliffs smothered in flowers on the other. *Ranunculus rupestris* was abundant and joyous, mingling with *Saxifraga granulata*, tufts of *Fedia cornucopia* and lots of *Orchis olbiensis*, whilst rivers of mauve-blue *Vinca difformis* flowed over and down the rocks. Though it was a rerun of yesterday, it was much more enjoyable today, although ironically there were times when taking pictures that we wanted the sun to go in again! No pleasing photographers. A second visit to the cliffs near the village also allowed more time to appreciate the *Ornithogalum reverchonii*, many ferns and loose cushions of *Saxifraga bourgeana*. Delicate white-flowered *Omphalodes linifolia* grew in the verge below, which in many places was dominated by robust, leafy clumps of creamy *Smrynium olusatrum*.

Day 7 Sierra de las Nieves

A day of fine sunny weather (at last) albeit with a cool breeze from time to time. We set off for the scenic hills and woods of Sierra de la Nieves, driving into cool oak woods where many *Paeonia broteri* could be seen in bud (some very advanced) and there were a couple of *Neotinea tridentata* subsp. *conica* too. Leaving the trees the road climbed into rocky limestone hills where we could see the first golden *Narcissus assoanus* sprouting from the boulders. A glance across the slope also revealed a golden haze atop an outcrop and walking past many other perfect narcissi on the way we pushed through the low trees and climbed the knoll to where a stunning carpet of hundreds of *Narcissus assoanus* smothered the rock, too thick in many spots to take a step. A second knoll a bit lower down was easier (and



safer) to scale and though there were fewer flowers here it was still wonderful.

Driving higher still we reached cooler slopes with *Helleborus foetidus* and *Daphne laureola*, where virtually every leafless hawthorn was host to big bunches of *Viscum cruciatum* (a mistletoe). A flash of yellow revealed the first *Narcissus bujei*, with a few more upslope. Time was spent reaching these, but we need not have bothered. A couple of hundred metres further on and a dazzling stand coloured the turf, some of the big trumpets reflected in the water of large puddles. It was a fabulous display and we were all ‘drunk’ with narcissus before too long.

Lunch was in the shade of some large *Pinus pinaster*, after which we took a pleasant walk into the hills, following a wide track into the pines. The moist, grassy verges were liberally sprinkled in the lilac stars of *Romulea bulbocodium*, with some nice tufts of three or four flowers together here and there. Beyond, were raw stone slopes and ridges and slopes clothed in stands of dark Spanish fir (*Abies pinsapo*). We walked on towards these, finding more fine patches of *Narcissus bujei*, this time with fine mountain backdrops. The drive out found *Erica australis* and *Lavandula stoechas* in an area of sunny macchie and there were occasional groups and tufts of *Narcissus assoanus* as we drove down, wending our way back to the hotel a bit earlier than usual, but it had been a very satisfying day and chilling out for a couple of hours was very relaxing.

Day 8 To Tarifa via La Janda

Fine clear weather was promised and duly arrived with classic blue Mediterranean skies, bringing vibrance to the delightful countryside of oak forests, mountains and pastures. Bidding farewell to our convivial hosts in Ronda we wound our way through the cork oaks and then detoured back to where we had seen *Narcissus bulbocodium* two days ago. The flowers had dried out now and perked up a bit and there was abundant *Erodium cicutarium* colouring the ground in places. Climbing up to Grazalema, we had a stop to photograph this classic white village as griffon vultures circled ever closer. the road continued to a higher pass with more vultures and fine views out across the landscape. A couple of *Narcissus assoanus* peeped out



from among the dwarf shrubs. Continuing across the pleasant landscape we traversed past lush green fields and roadsides brimming with various mustards and *Fedia cornucopia*, then reached areas of macchie and cork oaks with *Cistus salviifolius* and *C. albidus*. A coffee stop and then lunch in the shade of some hefty oaks followed. Close to these were a couple of huge *Pinus pinea* with broad, mushroom crowns.

A little further on there was a roadside with large clumps of cerise *Hedysarum coronarium*, abundant *Borago officinalis* and sprawling masses of *Echallium elaterium*, along with stands of *Glebionis coronarius* var. *discolor*. The latter became more and more common as we drove. A flash of white on a slope revealed a population of *Narcissus papyraceus* subsp. *panizzianus* and we managed to find a few close ones to photograph (and smell) in a field full of asphodels, borage and daisies. Turning onto a smaller side road showy *Iris xiphium* was flowering alongside the beefy heads of *Scilla peruviana*, a real brute of a bulb. With these was the blood-red pea; *Tetragonolobus purpureus* and *Scrophularia sambucina*. The roads became narrower and we found fine stands of *Cerinth major* with purplish bracts and tubular purple flowers, followed by a superb spread of *Scilla peruviana* with many perfect spiralling heads of mauve-blue, avidly attended by honeybees. The wind was picking up and it was no surprise given the ranks of towering turbines that lined the flat expanses. We made one last breezy stop for a colony of *Moraea sisyrinchium* that was flowering on a grassy slope. Many more *Scilla peruviana* could be seen along the roadside as we drove, but now it was time to make for our pleasant beachside hotel.

Day 9 Barbate & Tarifa

An enjoyable and productive last day with a remarkable array of different flora. Driving along the coastal road we began with a stop in a large area of protected littoral flora, the sandy flats swathed in a dense carpet of *Lotus creticus*, punctuated by big clumps of *Pancratium maritimum* leaves. Also among the abundant golden *Lotus* flowers grew *Silene colorata*, hundreds of *Dipcadi serotinum*, some pretty *Limonium sinuatum* and the first of many handsome pink *Centaurea sphaerocephala*. The latter became increasingly common at our next locations. The first of these was just beyond Barbate, where the roadside was lined with floriferous hummocks of *Silene littorea*. Further searching found a treasure trove



Acis trichophylla

of other plants with spreading mats of white *Lobularia maritima*, a stately *Galactites tomentosa* with variegated leaves and superb plants of *Anagallis monellii* bursting with deep blue flowers.

It was equally good at our long stop among the architectural umbrella pines where we found the green *Gennaria diphylla*, colonies of *Anchusa calcarea* pollinated by large fast moving bumblebees, *Ophrys tenthredinifera*, scrambling stems of *Aristolochia baetica* and then gorgeous drifts of snow-white *Acis triphylla* and there were many patches of this lovely flower scattered throughout. Shrub flora was also good with *Halimium commutatum*, *Cistus salviifolius*, *C. albidus*, *Ruta angustifolia* and flowery *Lavandula stoechas*, whilst herbs such as *Tuberaria guttata* with purple blotched yellow flowers grew among large clumps of *Armeria macrophylla* and patches of white-flowered *Cerinth major*. There was also, a good number of lovely *Antirrhinum tortuosum* scrambling through the woody flora with pristine pink spikes of snapdragon flowers. This intriguing species use leaf petioles to curled around shrub branches, much as *Clematis* does. A few *Scilla verna* subsp. *ramburii* brought up the rear as we headed back for a quick lunch. A revitalising coffee followed, but our attempt at visiting Trafalgar failed, it was too far to walk so instead we drove east towards Tarifa, stopping for a good clump of *Iris xiphium* before climbing up to an area of cork oaks on sandstone. It was here we found the remarkable carnivorous plant; *Drosophyllum lusitanicum* studding the rocks with vigorous tufts of slender leaves, each lined with hundreds of sticky insect-snaring glands. Among the contorted and twisted oaks (both *Quercus suber* and semi-deciduous *Q. faginea*) some crowded with ferns in this more humid microclimate, we also found a population of *Rhododendron ponticum*, the next nearest colony being northern Turkey! This is a relict population from wetter times when this vigorous shrub once grew from Spain to Georgia.

From here we returned to base to prepare for tomorrow's onward journeys, enjoying a good final dinner.

Day 10 Flights

Malaga airport was just a two hour drive from Tarifa, on a clear day with sierras poking through the morning mist, reminding us of where we had been and seen the delightful narcissi of Andalucia.



Drosophyllum lusitanicum

Abies pinsapo in the
Sierra de las Nieves

viranatura
tours 

For information on our tours
please contact

info@viranatura.com