

BULB BLITZ



Crocus gargaricus



Crocus biflorus subsp. *pulchricolor*

Each area of Turkey has its standout flora and the north-west is arguably richest in early spring when an avalanche of bulbs, primulas and hellebores bursts from the ground. My typical trip there builds slowly, teasing with a few *Crocus chrysanthus* and *Anemone coronaria*, and picks up speed once we reach more wooded areas where *Galanthus gracilis* grows with plentiful *Corydalis wendelboi*. There is a denser-flowered variant, subsp. *congesta*, which I find in some area near Bolu, sometimes in a rich plum-pink. They grow amidst an abundance of *Crocus biflorus* subsp. *pulchricolor*, which in turn can be found thoroughly blended with the egg-yolk yellow of *C. gargaricus* on Uludag.

It is these golden crocuses that are the most confusing in the region, with at least six taxa on show and one needs to look carefully at styles, anthers and leaf width to be sure which is which. Uludag is a prime area for bulbs, a big hulk of limestone that rises above the busy city of Bursa. Access to the higher areas is easy enough with grassy clearings filled with crocus and woodlands holding some lovely colour forms of *Primula vulgaris*, everything from

Corydalis wendelboi subsp. *congesta*





Primula vulgaris



Helleborus orientalis



Iris junonia



Ophrys speculum

white to the deep pink of subsp. *rosea*. Lower down there are also lots of *Anemone blanda* and a bit of careful searching among the shady scrub can even produce early flowering specimens of *Fritillaria pontica*.

However, there are good things to see even before one reaches Uludag and on my last visit to the area I even found a stunning population of *Iris junonia* that was new to me, growing at the base of and within deep cracks of the limestone. It came in both violet and yellow forms, growing alongside *Hypericum origanifolium*. Both of these colours are embodied in another early iris to found nearby, *Iris pumila* subsp. *attica*, the best plants forming stunning spreading clumps. They often grow in quite austere areas with scattered, stunted junipers, though sometimes they share their home with little specials such as *Ophrys speculum*, surely one of the most beguiling of the bee orchids.

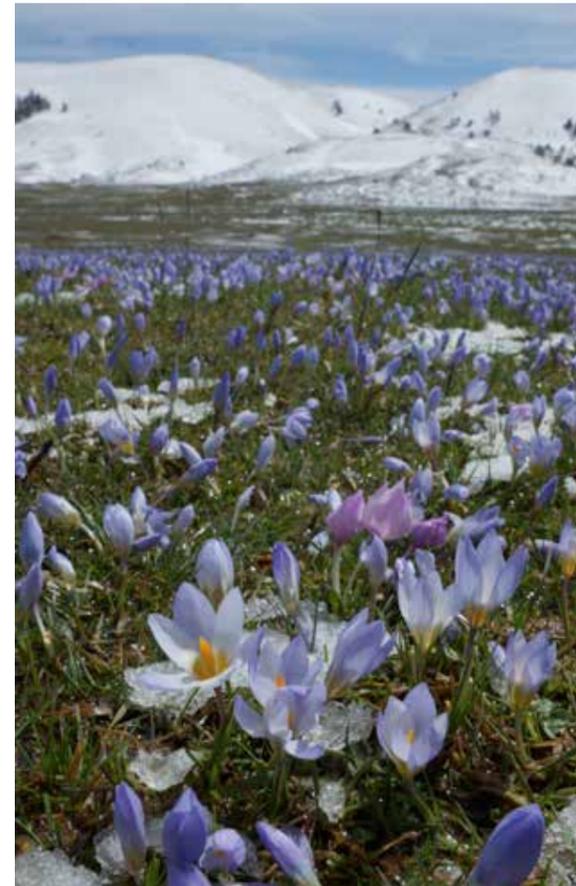
Beyond Uludag, the beech and spruce forests surrounding Bolu and Lake Abant offer a rich hunting-ground for bulbs. *Cyclamen coum* is abundant, and at its loveliest popping up through late snow falls. *Helleborus orientalis* is also very common, the creamy white flowers slowly aging to blush pink on some forms and shady banks and riverside flats have fine populations of *Galanthus plicatus*, often near the big bottlebrushes of *Petasites hybridus*. Endemic *Crocus abantensis* grows around Lake

Iris pumila subsp. *attica*





Cyclamen coum



Crocus abantensis



Fritillaria pontica

Abant, in places in huge populations that coat the turf in soft blue. Catching such as display at its best is tricky and timing is everything. On one visit we rolled up to this big show just an hour too late and the flowers were already closing. No problem we thought, next morning we will return to a floral feast. Unbelievably, it snowed that night and smothered the entire display! Though the daytime temperatures rose and most of the snow melted, the air was still too cool for them to open. Without help that is. I've had too many sulking crocuses on tours, so I have developed a tried and tested method of encouraging flower opening using a big plastic bottle put over the flowers for an hour in the sun. So long as the sun has enough strength it invariably works and at least allows some sort of photo to be taken.

And if it gets too cold, we can head back to whichever of the very comfy hotels we are staying in that fringe the lake and soak in the thermal swimming pool to warm up again. Luxury with flowers on tap, what more do you need?

Galanthus plicatus

