

BUSY AS A BEE



Ophrys fuciflora subsp. *candica*



Ophrys iricolor



Ophrys lutea

This season is early this year, and it makes for some chasing around to try and catch everything at its best. Fast-melting snow has bulbs all around and the Mediterranean lowlands have orchids and many other plants already in full flower. Orchids begin to appear in February with the various species flowering through to May (even June). Some of the most enigmatic are the bee orchids (*Ophrys*), with their complex lip shapes and patterns. These vary a lot and there is great debate as to how many species there are with the most recent treatments erring on the side of common sense and having fewer variable species with distinct subspecies and varieties. Around Antalya there are around ten species, all of which are quite distinct, and on Friday I found five of these. The first *Ophrys iricolor* grew in rather scruffy phrygana (degraded macchie), the distinctive large flowers suffused with wine-red. They grew with an abundance of *Anacamptis papilionacea* (butterfly orchid) on serpentine rubble.

Before I found more bee orchids there were some impressive spikes of giant orchid *Himantoglossum robertianum*. This stout species may look rather dowdy and sombre coloured, but more than makes up for this on a

Ophrys umbilicata





Lavandula stoechas

warm day with its delicious, sweet fragrance.

A small colony of *Ophrys umbilicata* was next, and these grew with *Anacamptis morio* subsp. *syriaca* in a rather precarious location. Sadly, many sites in our area have been destroyed or damaged over the years as clumsy touristic infrastructure and the expansion of orchards consumes more and more land. Part of my reason for exploring was to locate new populations. Fortunately, my next find seemed more secure, perched on a bank at the edge of a pine wood. Here both *Ophrys lutea* and *O. fusca* grew together. *O. fusca* is very much a miniature version of *O. iricolor* and the latter is considered a subspecies, though I personally find this odd, since it is some consistently large and similarly coloured, whereas the former varies wildly.

Enough bee orchids for a while, since the highlight of my day was not an orchid but the stunning display of *Tulipa orphanidea* that was on offer near the coast. I would normally expect them in flower ten days or more later, but here they were, glowing in the afternoon sun and lighting up the rocky slopes alongside bushes of *Lavandula stoechas*, with each dense inflorescence of tiny near-black flowers topped by mauve bunny-ears.



Anacamptis papilionacea

Himantoglossum robertianum (left)



Gelidonia coastline

Onosma strigosissima

There were also bushy plants of bristly *Onosma mite* with sulphur drop flowers, but these rather paled to the superb clumps of more heavily armed *Onosma strigosissima* I found farther along the coast. This species has the added attraction of changing its flower colour with age, so each unfurling cyme has lemon, amber and cinnabar flowers. Rugged serpentine slopes also had the wonderful, inflated fruits of *Muscari racemosa*, a species I would normally expect to just catch in flower at this time, but not this year.

All of this was knitted together with frothy drifts of *Ricotia sinuata* and wandering along the beautiful coast path there were stunning views across the towards the snowy heights of Bey Daglari. There was one last treat with a colony of *O. fuciflora* subsp. *candica*. This species has a pronounced and extended column and most of the plants had the typical pale (even muddy) pink sepals but here and there were pleasant variations with rose-suffusion. Other variants and species will be in flower in a month, and I'll do the rounds again then.

No time off in Lycia!

Tulipa orphanidea (left)

