

CANYON RARITIES & SCREE GIANTS

Verbascum spondiotrichum



What has surprised me this year in the Taurus is just how many good plants choose to flower when the weather is at its hottest. Truly tough plants. Some like *Echinops spinosissimus*, *Vitex agnus-castus*, *Nerium oleander*, *Myrtus communis* and *Daucus carota* are very common and widespread. There are also some plentiful grasses on show at this time including the handsome *Sorghum halepense* and the immense *Arundo donax*, the latter commonly mistaken as a bamboo and the source of the 'reed' in wind instruments such as clarinets. However, other plants are rare and local, confined to a few areas such as the deep canyons and crumbling cliffs that dissect the foothills around Tahtali Dag.

Two such species occur within fifteen minutes walk of our house. Descending through the rather botanically poor pine woods, the canyon-land holds many more species. In places big bushy plants of soft-leaved *Verbascum spondiotrichum* hang from the degrading rock faces. The attractive yellow flowers have dangling purple anthers, and compared to many of the big, brash members of the genus, this is a delicate gem. The last maidenhair ferns somehow obtain



Echinops onopordum



Echinops onopordum



Digitalis ferruginea



Allium ampeloprasum



Pelargonium endlicherianum

enough moisture from the cliffs to retain some foliage. Altogether less dainty are the bold silver leaves of endemic *Echinops onopordum*, without doubt the most handsome foliage of the genus, and the modest flower heads are decorated with soft lilac flowers. It would make a fine feature plant in the garden, provided the right rocky slope or cliff was available to grow it on. Indeed, photographs rarely reveal the effort required to obtain them. The flowering *Echinops* was hanging from a canyon wall and it was photographed as I balanced on a narrow (20cm wide) concrete beam projecting out over the canyon. Not one to show my mother (or wife)!

Next day I was once again on my way to Saklikent, and area which has proven remarkably rich this season. A peculiar area of blocky scree that 'flowed' through a patch of forest held the beautiful and showy *Pelargonium endlicherianum*, one of the few members of this mainly South African genus to occur in the Mediterranean.

Big stands of *Onopordum bracteatum* were getting ready to burst into flower - maybe in a weeks time and *Echinops spinosissimus* was plentiful in various colour forms. The deep maroon balls of a rather striking onion, *Allium ampeloprasum* grew on very tall stems by the roadside too. But the real action was much higher. I passed by rocky slopes with stands of rusty flowered *Digitalis ferruginea* in perfect condition (the photo shown here was actually taken above our house the following day, just as the first morning light struck the spires, contrasting them strongly with the dark shadows of cedar trees).

Cresting the ridge at 2200-metres a big stretch of heavy scree and boulder-strewn slopes drew me like a moth to a flame. Various scented thymes threw up pleasant scents as I crossed the lower slopes eventually reaching an area with plenty of one of my favourites - *Morina persica* - a dramatic and spiny large herb with white flowers than age through various shades of pink. However, further, across was the main event, very large clumps





Ferulago trachycarpa



Black pines

of *Ferulago trachycarpa* that grew on the scree itself. Indeed, they were confined to it and are one of the largest herbs I've seen growing on such habitat. Occasional domes of *Acantholimon ulicinum* appeared and *Teucrium montanum* knitted patches of stones together as the fruits of *Prunus prostratus* ripened red in the strong sun. Impressive stands of *Onopordum sibthorpiatum* and tufts of *Eryngium bourgatii* were everywhere as I completed my loop around the mountain, the sun softening and offering better landscape colours.

There is still plenty to had in the hills even now, but I doubt I'll get a more architectural collection of plants together anywhere.



Teucrium montanum



Eryngium bourgatii