

EARLY BIRDS



Crocus babadagensis



Crocus biflorus

With the Mediterranean season already well underway, it quickly becomes a case of getting to the various locations to catch the choice gems that appear so early and disappear just as fast. Some bulbs in particular are actually very widespread, but flower at a time when few botanists visit Turkey and so go almost unnoticed. Chief among these are the various crocuses and colchicums. And in years of little or no snow, such as this year, they are even earlier.

I decided to go to see the area near Kas this week and not only for bulbs, this is also the prime time for the handsome domes of *Euphorbia dendroides*, an architectural woody spurge that is engulfed in lemony bracts at this time, each bearing honey-scented glands that are a magnet for early honey bees. Indeed, I came across several apiaries nestled among the biggest stands of these. They are only found in this corner of Turkey, from Kas to the far southwest and on into southern Greece, providing a pleasant accent to the macchie. Their cousin *E. characias* is commonly found with them and there were plenty of patches of lower-growing *E. rigida* too, another stalwart of early spring and which colours a vivid red come the autumn.



Colchicum sp



Euphorbia dendroides



Galanthus elwesii



Colchicum szovitsii



It was above where *Euphorbia dendroides* was photographed that I went in search of early geophytes. Grassy pastures were soaked from rains and maybe the dusting of snow there had been, and these areas were plastered with drifts of soft pink *Colchicum szovitsii*, often in sizeable clumps. Rocky flats had plenty of pretty white *Crocus babadagensis* with pleasantly speckled outer tepals - a species very reminiscent of *C. candidus* and frankly a lot of the new crocuses are utterly confusing and thus I prefer to refer to older classifications. Much as orchids before them a flurry of interest and splitting has created a taxonomic muddle that will need sorting out and refining.

Other areas had more of the same, but this time mixed with many elegantly striped *Crocus biflorus* forms (now classified as *C. reichingeri*) that shone with backlit sun. Easily missed among these was a dainty little *Colchicum* sp, which for now at least eludes identification falling between the stools of *C. minutum* and *C. burtii*. More straightforward to identify was *Galanthus elwesii* and this crisp snowdrop grew in quantity among the cedars and on mossy encrusted boulders.





Hyoscyamus aureus



Amygdalus graecus

I had a three-hour drive home from here, but there were still early birds to see on the way. The untidy small shrubs of *Amygdalus graecus* are not a beauty, but I could see them studding the rock macchie and at this season they are a haze of palest-pink, smothered as they are in red-centred flowers. In one particular cave a large specimen grew with a colony of much showier *Hyoscyamus aureus*, the fresh, leafy plants opening the first of their striking purple-eyed sulphurous flowers. Delicate *Cymbalaria microcalyx* is also flowering now, trailing from rock crevices and bearing delightful little snapdragon flowers with golden eyes beneath 'surprised' violet eyebrows.

The cave overlooked Phaselis Bay where the sun was setting, with the silhouetted ridges of the Lycian coast stretching away in the distance. An ideal place to wind down and that is what Alexander the Great chose to do when he wintered at Phaselis in 333 BCE. These very same species were probably flowering here then and they have endured a lot longer than any empire.



Cymbalaria microcalyx