

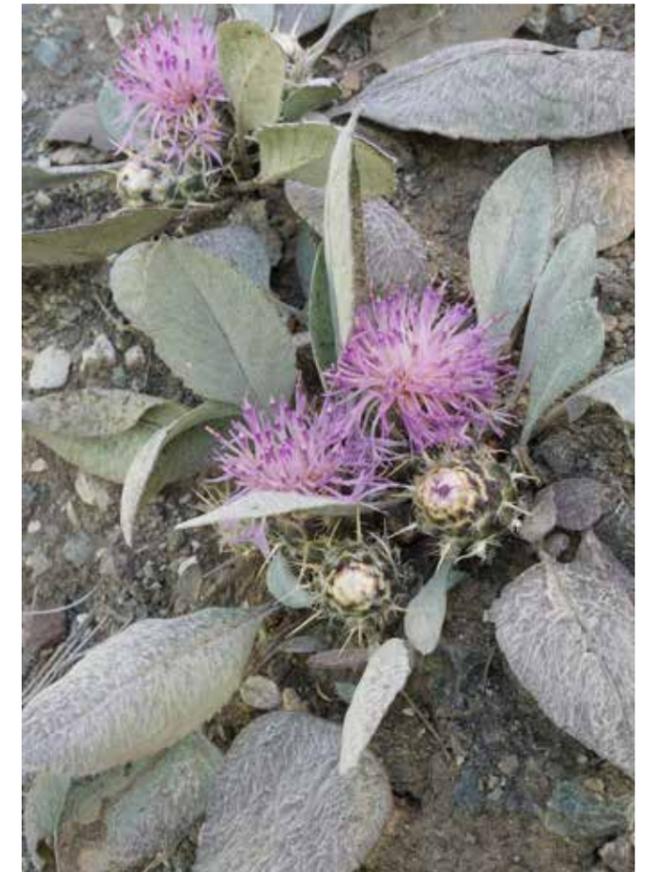


ENDEMIC DELIGHTS

Astragalus macrocephalus subsp. *finitimus*



Glaucium alakurensis



Centaurea urvillei

Lockdown over and it was time to head for the hills for more botanical therapy. Today I was accompanied by a local botany student, Aysen Candir. She had spent two years studying a tract of cedar-clad Taurus, recording over four hundred species in just 500 hectares. In fact the Taurus is the most diverse region of Turkey, and our south-west corner has over 600 endemic species (i.e. not found anywhere else on Earth). And Aysen had added three more to that list!

She had offered to show me where her treasures grew and just finding the location was a challenge enough, navigating a maze of mountain dirt roads and passing wonderful stands of endemic *Verbascum nudatum* and big clumps of *Centranthus longiflorus* bursting from limestone boulders. A bank encrusted with the stemless cornflower *Centaurea urvillei* with pink flowers and cob-webby leaves and a magnificent plant of *Astragalus macrocephalus* subsp. *finitimus* delayed us a little longer.

Eventually, we found ourselves wandering up a stony track towards a huge sweep of scree. There were some wonderful *Cercis siliquastrum* in full flower, backlit with the dark ridge of the mountains behind. Then growing within the bed of the stony track were neat mounds of *Glaucium alakurensis*, one of Aysen's newly described endemics. If that was not enough she had also found two more undescribed endemic species from the same patch

Pimpinella sp.





Cercis siliquastrum



Daphne oleoides



Polygonatum multiflorum



Cicer isauricum

of scree. *Ricotia candiriana* was named for her late father and the third species has yet to be formally described and named it's that new! Whilst it's fair to say this particular *Pimpinella* sp lacks showy flowers (you can hardly see them) it has the most wonderful leathery glaucous leaves that would look great in any scree garden.

More surprises awaited. The road now turned into a (very) rocky track, just about within the bounds of my non-4WD car, and we entered a magnificent tract of old-growth Cedar of Lebanon forest. If there was ever a misnamed tree this is it, there are and always have been far more cedars in Turkey than the Lebanon. Cedar of Turkey is more correct! It was clear to see there had been hundreds of big peonies in flowers a couple of weeks ago. This is not unusual for cedar forest. However, we stopped in a pleasant grove to look for something more unexpected - here and there grew solomon's seal, *Polygonatum multiflorum*, a plant I'd usually associate with the wetter, cooler north. Big spikes of *Orobanche anatolica* also appeared along the track and there was a second species, purple flowered *O. baumanniorum*, which would be in flower soon.

Moving up higher we found the delightful lilac flowers of *Cicer isauricum* (another endemic) and then reached the end of the road. A short walk took us up to an astonishing tree, a 1700-year-old cedar

Orobanche anatolicum





Cedrus libanii



Asyneuma michauxoides

with a huge stout trunk. It was clearly still in good health and looked good for another few hundred years. Just above the trees thinned and open montane steppe took over. Some rocks had fine spreading mounds of *Daphne oleaoides* in flower and four ibex came to take a look at us. Mists were swirling in now so it seemed prudent to head back down and start on the return. The elegant spires of yet another endemic, *Asyneuma michauxoides* broke up the descent and there were *Cercis* flowering against the grey boughs of cedars and superb stands of the statuesque thistle *Onopordum sibthorpii* waiting to burst into flower. These and various other teasers in bud were enough to have me planning a return in ten days time. My more in depth exploration of the Taurus Mountains during this oddest of years has been a botanical revelation and seen many new plants and reached some wonderful new areas.

We hope some of you can join us wexploring some of them sometime in the post-COVID-19 world.