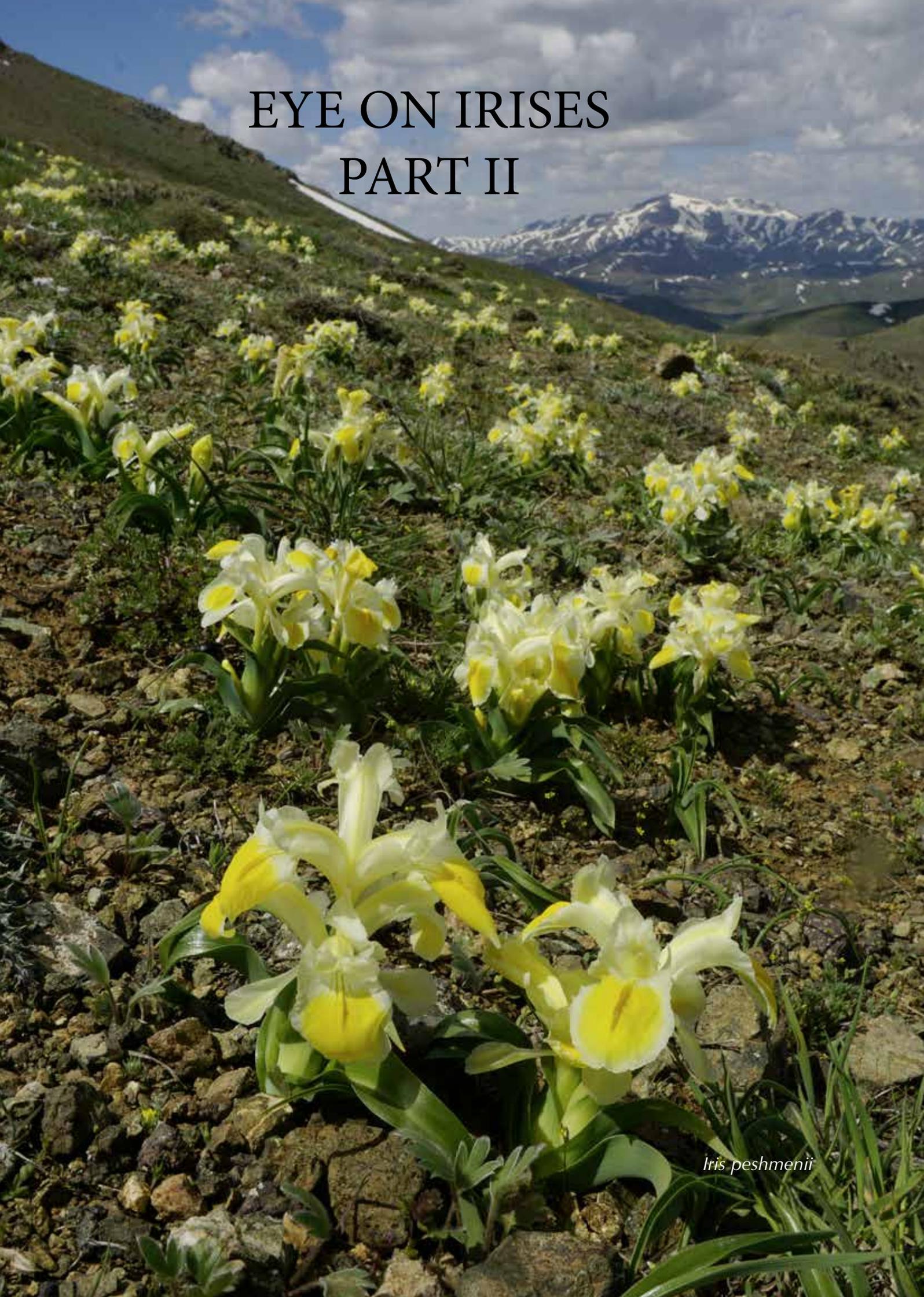


EYE ON IRISES PART II



Iris peshmenii



Iris aucheri

I can think of few places where a greater variety of irises can be seen than Turkey (together with neighbouring Armenia and Iran). Once the glamour (and clamour) for ultra-showy *Oncocyclus* has subsided, there is still a huge range of different species of other groups to see. For many, the junos, stand out as another desirable and distinctive group. More correctly called scorporises, they arrange themselves somewhat differently and have leaves in a different plane to other irises. Their true heartland is arguably Central Asia, but Turkey has some wonderful species of its own, foremost being the stunning *Iris peshmenii*, confined to just one mountain south of Malatya. In a good year they form wondrous displays of thousands of plants. What is heartening with this species is the location is well-known and a big painted metal sign proudly proclaims how important the plant is and quite rightly requests none are stolen. It shares its home with another exceptional plant - *Bellevalia chrisii*, also endemic to this one mountain.

Other junos are more widespread, and few have as great an impact as *Iris aucheri* which carpets limestone slopes near Gaziantep (and elsewhere) in shades of sky blue to sapphire in spring. In the same area can be found the lovely *I. persica*, whilst around Cappadocia is *I. galatica* and in



Iris iberica subsp. *lycotis*



Iris caucasica



Iris persica



Iris attica



Iris imbricata

parts of the central Taurus the violet to blue *I. stenophylla*, though I have never seen any of these in the same abundance as *I. aucheri*, truly a sight to behold. The somewhat dowdy green-yellow of *I. caucasica* does sometimes occur in quantity too, though more often in scattered colonies. It is widespread, stretching from central Turkey, east to Armenia and Iran and shown here colouring a slope near the famous Tatev monastery in Armenia. This country has another yellow iris that can be found in impressive displays too; *I. imbricata*. We have now drifted onto the more robust Pogon irises, whose ranks include the familiar *I. x germanica*, and in the Taurus, variably coloured *I. junonia*. The latter is typically found in shades of violet, but can be yellow (or even white). The same is true of *I. taochia*, a narrow endemic to the Coruh Valley where it brightens dry rocky steppe-clad slopes near Tortum. This switching of colours is commonplace in the section Iris, other examples including the smaller *I. pumila* and its pretty cousin *I. attica*. This is in part because they dupe their pollinators and offer no nectar. To ensure bees continue to visit flowers

Iris taochia





Iris junonia



Iris histrioides



Iris aphylla

they come in different colours! Not all do this of course. Deep violet *I. aphylla* occurs only in this colour and grows in grassy steppe among big boulders in the windswept landscapes of the Kars highlands, the coldest part of Turkey. Grim in winter maybe, but return in high summer and there is a feast of colourful meadows in this under-visited area of the country. Incalculable numbers of *Gladiolus kotschyanus* (also in the family Iridaceae) fill the grasslands in July.

Not that a bit of cold bothers many of these tough geophytes, and a good layer of snow is often what they need to see out the winter and hunting around the fringes of melting snow in spring is always worthwhile. It is then that one finds the rich purple of *Iris reticulata* (a plant I find almost impossible to photograph well) in parts of eastern Turkey and east to Iran, where it can sometimes be blue. A true blue is the gorgeous *I. histrioides* that colours snow patches in north-east Turkey, such as here at Anzer yaylasi alongside *Crocus aereus* and *Trollius ranunculinus*. *Iris reticulata* appears in the with lovely *Fritillaria alburyana* and *Tulipa julia* and indeed, what is also appealing about searching for beautiful irises is select company they keep.

Iris reticulata

