

EASTERN PROMISE TRIP REPORT 2022

viranatura 
tours

Iris paradoxa

Day 1 15 May – Zigana & Hamsiköy & Journey to İlkizdere

Arriving one day early to our hotel in Trabzon there was great sunset view to before a relaxing night to prepare us to for our forthcoming field days comfortably.

We packed the car and started driving to Zigana Valley aiming to go to the top before it got cloudy or rainy. However, we did have two very short stops on the way. One was at the Maçka graveyard to see the *Iris germanica* decorating the graves and the other by the main road with *Asphodeline lutea* and some unnamed *Verbascum* and *Astragalus* species.

We reached to the top in good time and spent a while there. Our plan to go a bit higher on an off road track was stopped by a big lump of snow blocking the road so we decided to walk around instead. The hillside was very colourful because three colour forms of *Viola altaica* ssp. *oreades* were almost everywhere. *Gentiana verna* was also shining with its spectacular blue colour and we also noted *Gentiana pyreniacum*. We found some snowmelt areas where *Colchicum szovitsii* and *Crocus aerius* were flowering. Tiny *Cyclamen parviflorum* was also very common once your eyes get used to see them.

Once we were satisfied here we drove a few kilometers down to the southern side of the pass and in the *Pinus sylvestris* forest we encountered other plants like (one) flowering *Cyclamen coum*, the purple form of *Dactylorhiza romana*, *Orchis pallens*, *Helleborus orientalis*, *Cardamine raphanifolia*, *Centaurea hypoleuca*, *Polygala anatolica*, *Linum nervosum* and *Viola siehana*.

Rain started so we decided to drive back towards Hamsiköy. We searched our location for *Orchis stevenii* before finding a lunch spot, and although we couldn't find the *Orchis* we noted *Geranium asphodeloides*, *Geranium pyreniacum*, *Ajuga orientalis*, *Neotinea tridentata*, *Lathyrus vernus* and *Lathyrus laxiflorus*. After lunch driving back on the main road we had another quick stop to see *Platanthera chlorantha*. Our last stop was by a big road junction where *Serapias orientalis* seemed to really enjoying living there. Lovely little pink flowered *Silene gallica* was also noted here.

We drove to hotel seeing tea plantations along the way and finally entered the valley where our thermal hotel sits.



Cyclamen parviflorum

Day 2 16 May – Anzer Yaylası

Being in northeast Turkey and not experiencing the rain would not be right. All geared for the rain and started our drive to one of the most flower rich 'yaylas' in the area especially in the summer. Today we are expecting to see a special *Iris*.

As we were driving our eyes were caught by the nicely perched on the rocks *Senecio pandurifolius*.

We drove along a strong stream and valley where was covered with all shades of green. The contrast between the bright green of *Carpinus orientalis* and the dark green of *Picea orientalis* was creating a show. We drove almost to the tree line and some of the roads we wanted to go were closed by the snow. There was also fresh snow around and we could feel the cold. At another area we found a large snow patch with good plants growing around it including the special *Iris histrioides*. Others seen here were *Crocus aerius*, *Gagea glacialis*, *Trollius ranunculinus*, *Viola siehana* and *Scilla siberica* ssp. *armena*.

After spending some time here we found a village cafe to warm up and have some tea. It wasn't raining now but everywhere was wet so instead of a picnic we found a little restaurant in the valley and had the locally farmed and delicious trout. From here we drove back to İkizdere Valley and had several stops along it. Many plants seen like big stands of *Dryopteris dilatata*, *Ranunculus cappadocicus* (beautiful leaves), *Rhododendron luteum*, *Rorippa austriaca*, *Oxalis acetocella*, *Viola odorata*, *Myosotis sylvatica*, *Chelidonium majus*, *Cardamine bulbifera*. On our last stop we saw the *Aristolochia pontica* and *Dactylorhiza urvilleana*, *Polygala vulgaris*, *Saxifraga cymbalaria*.

Day 3 17 May – Ovit Pass

A sunny day welcomed us and after a great breakfast with fresh omelettes and fruit we headed for 2640 m Ovit Pass. Not far from the hotel we had a quick stop for a plant pretending to be a stream itself - *Omphaloides cappadocica*.



Next we headed for the pass. The road to the pass was closed yesterday and we were told it was open today so instead of taking the 14 km tunnel road to other side of the pass we chose to go from the old road to the top. It was an exciting drive through snow tunnels and we made it to the southern side of the pass and walked around in various places to find all the snowmelt bulbs. Big drifts of *Muscari armeniacum*, *Colchicum szovitsii*, *Gagea fistulosa* (now *fragifera*) and *bohemica*, *Ornithogalum oligophyllum*, *Primula algida*, *Caltha palustris* and *Scilla siberica* ssp. *armena* were everywhere.

It was fairly chilly so we drove further down to have lunch and also we wanted to find *Paeonia mascula*. We searched all the hillside where we normally see them but there was no luck. A little stop by the road side we noted *Vicia alpestris* and *Saxifraga kotschyi* on the rocks.

We drove towards Mor Yayla and found a nice sunny spot for lunch. The table was set on the car thus we had an 'indolent' lunch this way. Interesting plants seen included *Solananthus stamineus*, *Nonea pulla*, *Corydalis oppositifolia*, *Aethionema speciosum* and *Viola kitabeliana* were some of them. We did see a big plant of *Paeonia mascula* in bud.

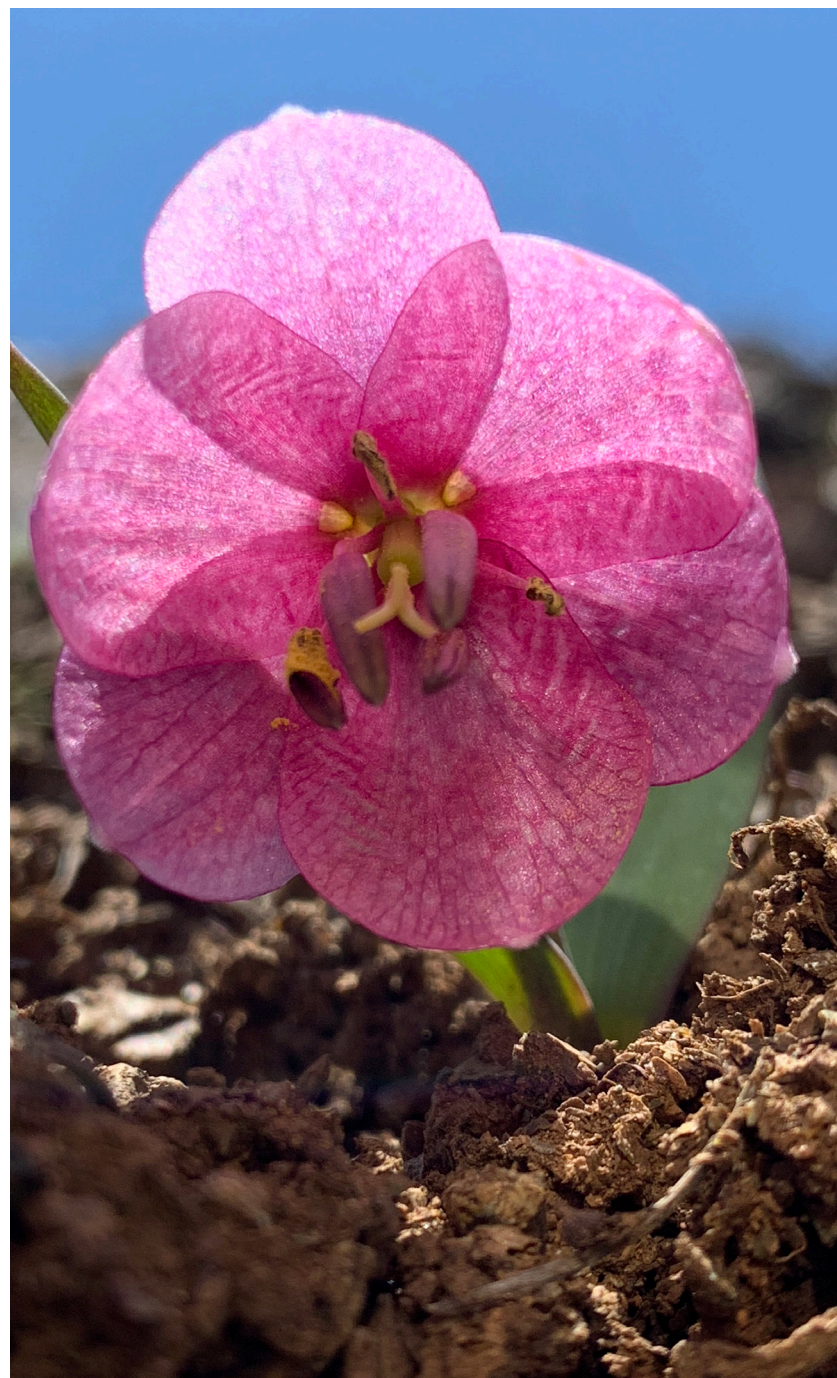
After lunch we drove back to the pass and found *Primula algida*, *Cerastium purpurescens*, *Barbarea minor* (wonderful scent), *Draba bruniifolia*, *Ranunculus dissectus* and *Potentilla crantzii*.

It wasn't getting any warmer so we drove back to the hotel.

Day 4 18 May – To Erzurum via Kop Dağ

Our drive to Erzurum detoured via Kop Mountain, so we left the lovely lush green İlkizdere Valley early, drove through 14 km long Ovit Tunnel and reached much drier looking habitats but when you have look closely you come across so many species. We first stopped briefly to see *Hesperis cappadocicum*. A little bit further on the road to Bayburt we had another stop that turned out to be very plant rich stop. Wonderful steppe flowers were everywhere from the endemic ones like *Tripleurospermum fissurale*, *Lamium galactophyllum*, *Veronica oltensis* and other ones like *Gladiolus atroviolaceus*, *Asperula orientalis*, *Moltkia coerulea*, *Aethionema arabicum* and *membranaceum*, *Salvia multicaulis* and *Saponaria prostrata*.

It was a very nice drive through picturesque valleys with poplars along the stream, and flowing hills around. Finding a nice lunch spot we had a peaceful picnic. From here we didn't stop until we reached the Kop Pass. It wasn't as snowy as we expected



Fritillaria alburyana

so we found our wonderful spot which is home to one of the sweetest frit; *Fritillaria alburyana*. We spent quite some time here skipping from one to other wanting to capture all of them. There were also *Fritillaria latifolia*, *Corydalis oppositifolia*, *Crocus biflorus* ssp. *tauri* and *Pulsatilla albana*.

Having still a long way to go we finally left the beauties on their pass and drove further. After Kop Dağ, the habitat changed again and there were vast flat areas, one part of it covered with dark flowered *Bellevia paradoxa* (*pyncantha*).

We arrived in Erzurum in good time and the weather was very nice and shining so we decided to take another route to see *Iris taochia*. A fast drive on the main road took us directly to the location. In one gulley we only saw hundreds of leaves but nothing in flower, moving half kilometer further there they were several in flower. This species come in different colour and we found several shades from dark blue, yellow and brownish red. The dry hillside was rich in plants and we noted *Astragalus aduncus*, *Onobrychis cornuta*, *Campanula involucreta*, *Chesneya elegans* and *Scutellaria orientalis*.

We arrived at our ski hotel before dinner time.

Day 5 19 May – Palandöken Mountains

Despite the rainy weather report we woke up to a very sunny day and we were on the road to the magnificent Palandöken Mountains by 8.30.

Not far from the city of Erzurum we had our first stop by the red dots covering the green carpet. *Tulipa julia* was everywhere we could see. We spent sometime here trying to get the best shots. There were some other plants like *Scorzonera mollis*, *Lagotis stolonifera*, *Globularia trichosantha*, *Rindera lanata*, *Solenanthus stamineus* and *Lamium amplexicaule*.

There was many more plants to see so we headed for the top. Shortly after we started to climb the snow patches appeared on the hills which made the view even more dramatic than it was. The pass is 2885 meters high and it was pretty chilly but despite that we had a little search around. As we walked we started to see tiny sweet pink cushions of *Thlaspi sintenisii* here and there and *Scilla siberica* ssp. *armena* by the snow patches.

Snow was still covering extensive areas so we decided to descend to the southern side of the pass. Not far from the pass we stopped by a little snow-melt stream and that was the spot for the day. So many species were seen here. *Fritillaria alburyana*, *F. caucasica* and *F. pinardii*, *Iris reticulata*, *Primula elatior* subsp. *pallasii*, *Primula algida*, *Thlaspi ochroleucum* and *sintenisii*, *Euphorbia denticulata* and *Ranunculus kochii*.

After enjoying all the species we left this location to see a beast of a flower. There it was - *Thciahatchiwea isatadea*. Chris decided to call it simply 'Chewbacca' and we all accepted it.



Iris taochia

Lunch was taken at a great site by the road. We were surrounded by more tulips but some of them had amazing peachy colour. There were also *Scrophularia chrysantha*, *Iris caucasica* and *Barbarea minor*. On the way back we couldn't resist and stopped for the big patches of *Draba rosularis* on the steep rocks. Our last stop was to see the wonderful display of *Pseudomuscari forniculata* in a field near Erzurum town. We managed to dance around the dark rain clouds and didn't step on each other's foot.

Day 6 20 May – To Kars via Sarıkamış

Our mountain view from the hotel was totally covered by dark clouds this morning. Thankfully we were there yesterday in the sun. After breakfast leaving the dark clouds behind we started driving east towards Kars through vast agricultural fields. The road (apparently built recently) was so smooth and large. Vast fields started to change to more steppe habitats. Driving at reasonable speed we spotted big heads of this amazing iris - *Iris iberica* subsp *elegantissima*. The hillsides were dotted with them and we wanted to examine them all and spent some time in the area. There were other plants too; *Alkanna orientalis*, *Nonea pulla*, *Bungea trifida*, *Ajuga chamaephytis* and *Astragalus angustiflorus*.

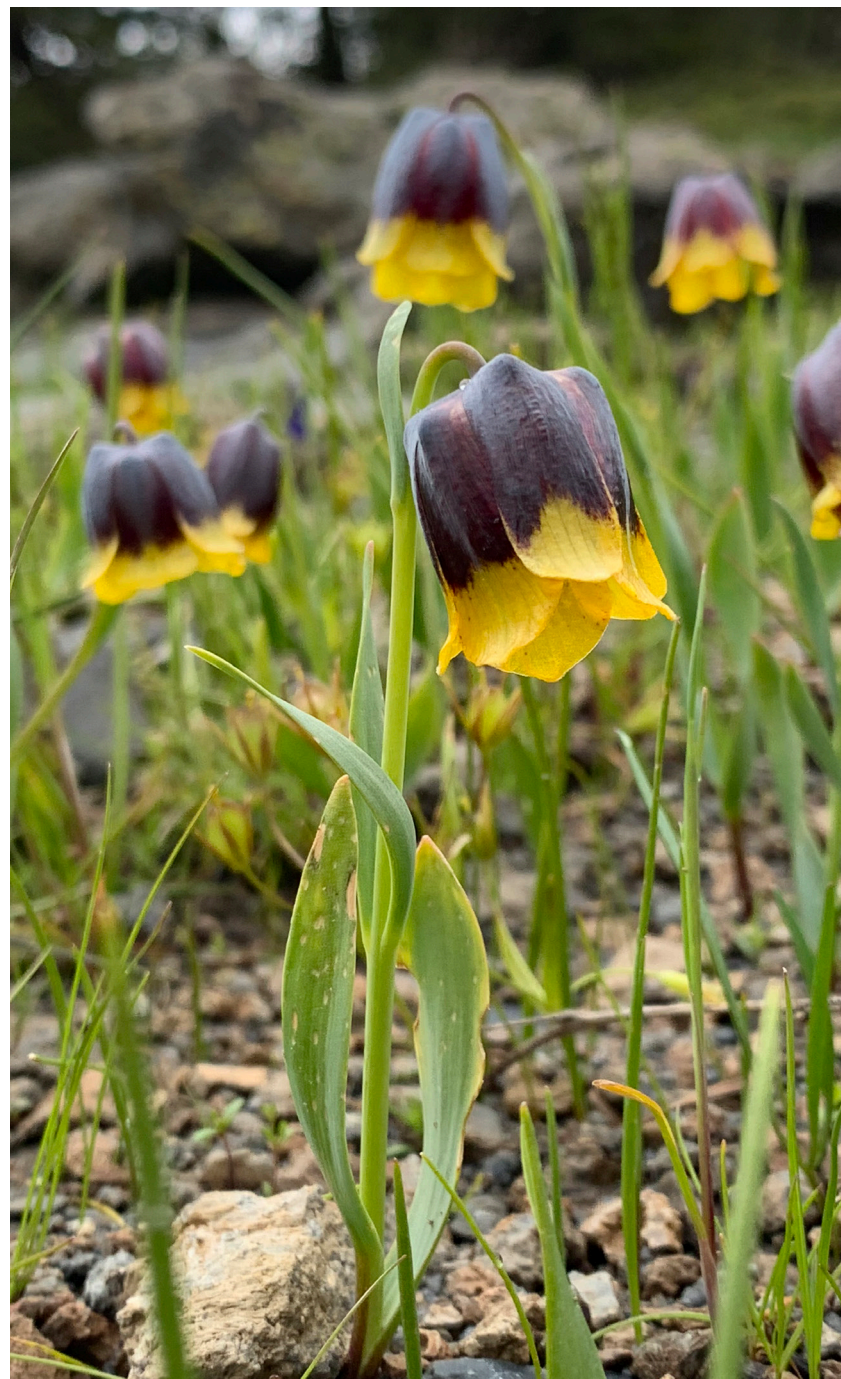
Not far from here we spotted some more good *Iris* clumps and couldn't resist stopping one more time. The habitat was slightly different and new plants were seen among the irises such as *Coronilla orientalis*, *Scorzonera phaeopappa*, *Cerastium armeniacum*, *Roemeria refracta*, *Papaver lacerum* and *Silene supina* subsp *pruinosa*.

We were so lucky with the weather so far with rain clouds around us but not on top of us. But, as we got closer to Sarıkamış it started to snow! By the time we reached our location for *Fritillaria michailovskyi* it was properly snowing. It didn't stop us getting out of the car though and the frits were in prime condition. *Sempervivum armenum* was also very handsome.

Because of the snow lunch was taken at a local restaurant in Sarıkamış and then we drove on to Kars to our hotel located in the city centre.

Day 7 21 May – Çam Pass

After a snowy end to yesterday we woke up to a beautiful bright day. Charging our energy with a great breakfast we left the hotel to go to the mountains. Our aim was to go to the Çam Pass between Ardahan and Şavşat. We broke the one hour



Fritillaria michailovskyi

journey with a short stop by the roadside. Chris has been spotting little blue dots as we were driving and they turned out to be *Linum obtusatum*. We also noted a new plant *Erysimum uncinatifolium* and several *Veronica gentianoides* in flower. After a pleasant drive we reached the Çam Pass where there was very fresh snow everywhere including on the electric wires. Not far from the top we stopped and started to search and after less than three steps we saw our first *Fritillaria latifolia*. Almost all of them were damaged. We thought the mice had had a go at them when stuck under the snow. Not to worry as we found very fine specimens farther on. The hillside was actually very colourful with plants like *Draba bruunifolia* and *Ajuga orientalis*. *Scilla rosenii* was the star of this location. We noted both *Corydalis angustifolia* and *Corydalis nariniana*. *Primula veris*, *Primula elatior* subsp. *meyerii* and *Primula algida* and *Pedicularis caucasica* too.

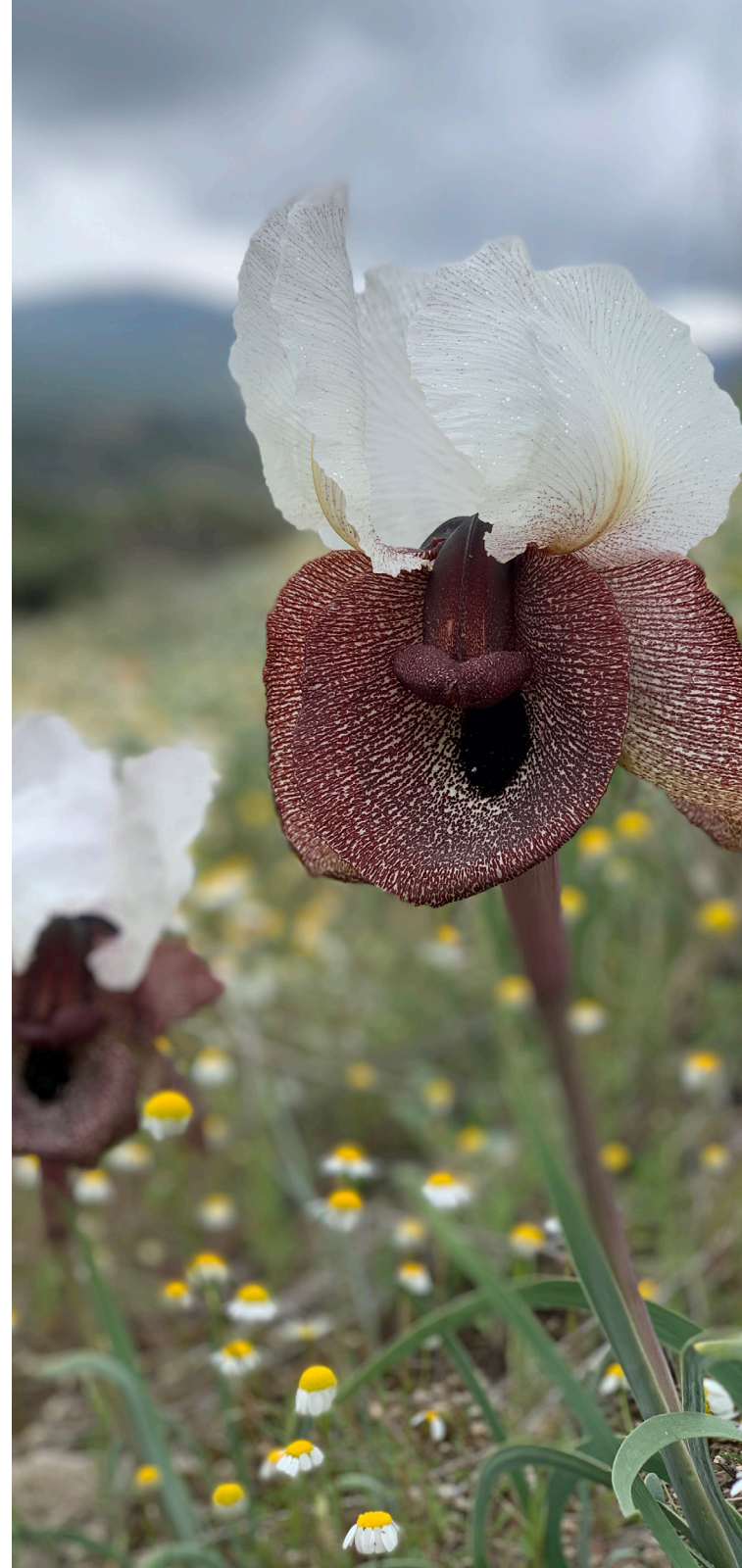
After spending a couple of hours on the wonderful hills it was lunch time. We drove a short distance to find a comfortable flowery spot. We found our first *Androsace armeniaca* a few meters far from the car. Driving on towards Çıldır Lake we searched for *Iris aphylla* but alas, on this late year we found it but only in leaf and there was clearly some time until they would start flowering. From here we took the back road to Kars driving around the large Çıldır Lake. It was a very nice drive on the winding roads and there was a nice tea break to refresh us. Mount Ararat gave us incredible clear views on the way, hinting at where will be staying tomorrow.

Day 8 22 May – To Doğubayazıt & Ani

A half an hour drive from Kars took us to Ani, a ruined medieval Armenian city on the Armenia/Turkey border, a UNESCO World Heritage Site and has impressive city walls and many churches and some other buildings that are under restoration. After spending some time here we started to drive towards Doğubeyazıt via Iğdır. We were very lucky with the weather as we had incredible views of Ararat Mountain during our journey. Several stops were only to photograph this huge mountain. Alongside the road were mainly fields but the steppe areas in between the fields were very rich and we photographed almost every plant with snowy Ararat behind. Plants included; *Iris iberica* subsp. *elegantissima*, *Bellevalia sarmatica*, *Moltkia coerulea*, *Leopoldia caucasica* and *Ceratocephalus falcatus*.

Lunch was also taken, as expected, with the great views of Ararat. We also visited a roadside graveyard to look closely to all the irises and the papery looking *Amberboa moschata*. Another roadside stop was for *Sophora alepercuroides* and a Roller on the wire. Ararat was very close now. Our last stop before arriving at the hotel was at Çili Pass. Many people were enjoying the good weather apparently as there were many picnickers in the area who were all very hospitable, offering us all sorts of food. Some photos were taken altogether and we also saw more *Iris iberica* subsp. *elegantissima* there.

Iris iberica subsp. *elegantissima*



Day 9 23 May – Tendürek Pass & to Van

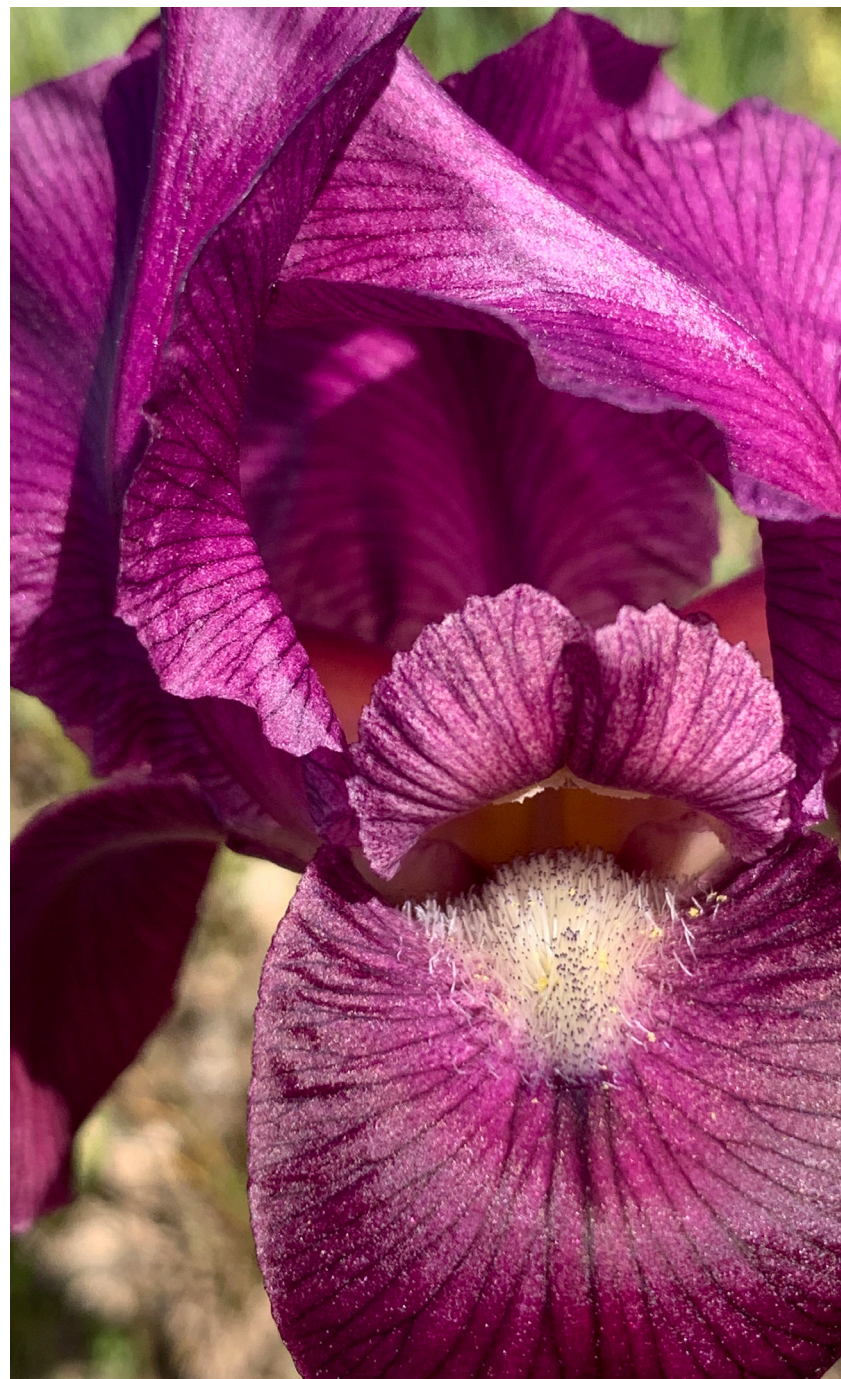
Between Doğubayazıt and Çaldıran lies the Tendürek Volcano and we drove through the extensive jagged lava plain to get to our plant locations. Although it is under military observation, no one bothered us while we were having a good time in the plant rich fields. First we checked the Tulip site, *Tulipa julia*, *Fritillaria crassifolia*, *Iris caucasica*, *Corydalis oppositifolia* were seen. There was also *Allium akaka* leaves and buds.

The next field was colourful with plants like *Fritillaria crassifolia*, *Fritillaria caucasica*, *Puschkinia scilloides*, *Bellevalia pycnantha*, *Ranunculus kochii* and *Ranunculus grandiflorus*. Unlike yesterday the weather was a bit cold today so we didn't want to spend too long at Tendürek and instead drove to Muradiye Waterfalls. Before seeing the waterfall we checked the nearby areas and found the impressive parasitic plant; *Phelypea tournefortii*. The steppe was very rich with plant species like; *Astragalus angustiflorus*, *Astragalus caraganae*, *Ixilirion tataricum*, *Leontice leontopetalum*, *Salvia poculata* and *S. macroclada*, *Stachys lavandulifolia*, *Rindera lanata* and *Silene spergulifolia*. After spending time with the plants we were hungry and had a picnic lunch by the waterfall.

Driving closer to Van the weather got warmer. We did several stops along the lake, one for the flamingos and second was for the more colourful roadside plants like astragaluses, euphorbias and poppies. But the nicest stop was for silky purple *Iris barnumae* that dotted a hillside. One last quick stop was made to see *Orchis palustris* and *Dactylorhiza umbrosa* before we reached at our hotel right next to the lake. My sister Işık Güner joined us for the next 3 days and also Martyn Rix and his daughter Harriet happened to be in Van so they joined us for a cheerful dinner.

Day 10 24 May – Karabet Pass

Karabet Pass is one of the best passes in the Van area. It is very bulb rich, as well as view rich and easy to reach. The only down side for us was the rainy weather. Despite this we drove up (together with Martyn and Heather who had joined us for the day) almost to the top and searched the area. The main interest were the fritillarias. There were many thousands of *Fritillaria minima* and eventually we spotted some *Fritillaria minuta*. *Colchicum kurdicum* was so beautiful as always and so to was *Puschkinia bilginerii*.



Iris barnumae

It started hailing so we drove down towards Çatak and checked the hillside where *Iris sari* and *I. paradoxa* hybrids are found. They were all in bud but *Tulipa sintinesii* was superb. A little gulley was covered with them along with *Bellavalia longistyla*. Next we drove towards the Zernek Valley stopping at various locations. Our first stop produced *Eremurus spectabilis*, great individuals of *Allium akaka* and many *Iris paradoxa* as well as *Ixilirion tataricum* and *Gladiolus atrovioleaceus*. Another stop was even richer with wonderful groups of *Iris paradoxa*. Everyone was on the floor lying down trying to get best pics. *Astragalus latifolia*, *Malabaila lasiocarpa* and *Hedysarum erithroleucum* were also seen there. After rain, wind, hail and more wind we refreshed ourselves with delicious tea looking at the view of Hoşap Castle. Having Martyn Rix with us and being so close to a *Bellavlia rixii* site (named after him) we thought it is a 'must' to go to Güzeldere Pass. It is a great pass but always under close watch of army. Luckily this time they left us alone so we spent a relaxed time there. We found endemic *Tulipa koyuncui*, *Iris pseudocaucaucasica*, *Centaurea vanensis*, *Thlaspi kurdicum*, *Androsace villosa* and the star plant *Bellevalia rixii*. It was a great finish to the day.

Day 11 25 May – Akdamar island and Karabet again!

Işık decided to stay behing to paint the *Iris pseudocaucaucasica*, Martyn and Harriet left to go back on so it was just us and today we wanted a cultural start. A short drive to Gevaş and then a short boat ride we arrived in the Akdamar Island where the 10th century Church of the Holy Cross and Armenian monastery ruins stands. There are impressive stone reliefs of Biblical scenes on the church exterior. There are many almond trees planted on the island. All the almonds were in the green (sour) state that Turkish people love to eat them in, including me. After walking around, having tea and coffee and picking some unripe almonds we took the boat back and then dedided to go to Karabet Pass again because the weather today was so bright and there were no clouds on the mountains. An attempt to take a short cut had to end as we are told that the road was closed by snow but had great *Dactylorhiza umbrosa*. Luckily we didn't go so far so turned back and took the usual drive up to the pass, over to the west side to a wonderful spot.

A little natural rock garden was full of bulbs and other plants. The view from this spot is very impressive too. Some parts of the ground was covered with *Fritillaria minuta* and *Fritillaria kurdica*. *Tulipa humilis* were finally seen in full bloom all open and sunbathing. *Tulipa julia* was scattered around too. Again *Colchicum kurdicum* was superb, though *Iris caucasica* was still in bud here but both *Puschkinia scilloides* and *P. bilginerii* were in good flower. We enjoyed the flowers and the views in great light today, but soon it was time to go back and get ready for our domestic flight to Cappadocia.



Day 12 & 13 & 14 / 26 - 27 - 28 May - Cappadocia

We had a leisurely morning as our flights to Kayseri was just before lunch time and a leisurely arrival just before dinner time. The one hour journey was quite productive and we noted *Hedysarum varium*, *Salvia verticillata* and *Salvia cryptantha* and *Glaucium grandiflorum*. After arriving our cave hotel in Göreme we went out to have our dinner

The next day started the day early and drove to Love valley to see the most impressive rock formations of Cappadocia. Dry looking valleys were actually quite rich with plants. *Lathyrus brachypterus*, *Rosa hemispherica*, *Linum austriacum*, *Senecio eriocalycina*, *Hypericum hyssopifolium* ssp *elongatum*, *Potentilla recta* and *Muscari tenuifolium* were some of the plants in Love Valley. The weather was hot unlike in Eastern Turkey and we enjoyed it. Lunch was traditional 'gözleme' which is filo pastry filled with various fillings like cheese, potato or even chocolate. To avoid the midday heat we visited a ceramics museum with collections from past and present.

We checked more steppe areas after lunch and saw many specialist and endemic species including; *Arnebia densiflora*, *Salvia blepharochlaena*, *Convolvulus assyricus*, *Onosma aucherianum*, *Astyragalus pelliger*, *Gypsophila venusta*, *Erysimum thyrsoideum*! and *Gundelia tournefortii*.

Chris and Veronica had a balloon ride very early in the morning. I said goodbye to them and left to go to Ankara for my best friend's wedding and left them in good hands to have culture day around Cappadocia.



Salvia blepharochlaena

For information on our tours
please contact
info@viranatura.com



Aquilegia alpica