

FOOD FOR THOUGHT



Iris aucheri



Bongardia chrysoma



Bongardia chrysoma leaf

This time last April we set off on a whim, something we took for granted, and something that's simply not possible this year. My father-in-law Adil Guner had posted pictures of a shimmer of blue coating the mountains near Gaziantep. It was the sight of countless *Iris aucheri*, a fabulous juno, which we had never seen in flower. We had to see them!

Gaziantep is a city in the south-east that is also a major culinary experience. By chance there was a daily flight from Antalya direct to Gaziantep, what more could we want, flowers and good food. So the whole family was packed up so their parents could charge off in one of their crazy flower trips and a short flight later we were there.

Food began the order of the day with a visit to one of the noteworthy restaurants in the city and a multi-course feast, even though I spent most of the evening marshalling the ever active Aren, our two-and-a-half-year-old ball of energy. Restaurants it seems are for running in at full speed. Turkey being Turkey though, everyone was totally at ease with not just our son, but other children racing about, the waiters fully used to swerving and dodging to avoid them. Not a tut was heard.

We only had one morning to go and find the



Veronica debilis



Euphorbia denticulata



Iris sari (photographed in late April 2011)



Corydalis henrickii



Onosma albo-rosea

other target and set off after breakfast the next day armed with the precise instructions from the professor. And sure enough when we arrived and glanced up at the right slope there was a generous coating of blue on the upper slopes.

We hiked up with that excited buzz you get from finding a great new plant, passing by the peculiar flowers of *Bongardia chrysocoma* (and its lovely leaves) and pretty bicoloured *Veronica debilis*. The irises were sensational. It was near impossible to choose which to photograph first and we had to work quickly as the light was changing fast. Shots of the landscape in the sun were followed by a hike further up to capture them in the shade, which really brought out their sumptuous blue. Here and there they mingled with the attractive spurge *Euphorbia denticulata*, a species with a quite fabulous flower structure.

Wedged in the rocks were patches of *Saxifraga cymbalaria* and delicate spikes of *Corydalis henrickii*, whilst rocks higher still had the wonderful ivory droplets of *Onosma albo-rosea* that aged to ruby-red and then deep indigo. Big clumps of *Helleborus vesicarius* studded the slopes too, and although their nodding reddish-green flowers are rather disappointing compared to their cousins, they are followed by wonderful inflated seed-capsules.

Driving out we stopped to look for the showy onocyclus *Iris sari* (I had photographed them here before), but they were still in bud this year. Can't win them all and it had already been a wonderful morning in the mountains.

Now it was time get back to lots more delicious food.



Saxifraga cymbalaria

