



THE HIGH TOPS

Asperula nitida



Anthyllis vulneriana



Aethionema polygaloides

A succession of alpine gems rolls out through the season, first the snow melt specialists such as crocuses, scillas and eranthis, then as the air warms, more and more herbs burst into life. The advantage of revisiting locations means you get to see this progression and it's changing cast.

This week I have visited two superb above the treeline locations, which on the map seem rather close to one another. However, whilst commonalities exist there are many differences between each location. I began with a return to Ak Dag (White Mountain) hoping to see the thousands of *Papaver pilosum* in bloom. However, although similar species were in flower in more coastal mountains, on Ak Dag the season was a couple of weeks later and only a few were in flower. No matter, instead there were lovely tight mats of *Asperula nitida* were growing on stony tundra ridges, there was pretty *Anthyllis vulneriana* in the rocks, along with plentiful *Omphalodes luciliae* and tufts of *Aethionema polygaloides*. And, the odd plant of *Hypericum aviculariifolium* gave a flash of colour near crevices wedged with white *Arenaria tmolea*.

Strolling along a stony ridge there were a couple of specimens of a rather odd plant -

Asyneuma junceum





Ak Daglari



Androsace sericea



Pedicularis cadmea

newly described *Asyneuma junceum*. It seemed worth trying to find more and a second stony ridge indeed had more of these 'hedgehog-like' alpines. It has to be said we had no idea what species they were at the time, and it was only after consulting Hasan Yildirim (the Turkish *Asyneuma* specialist) that we found out its name. What is more no specimen exists in any herbarium so they were delighted when I returned to Ak Dag a week later to collect one for them. A wee contribution to botanical science.

That second week the higher stony flats and rocky outcrops at 2700-metres had plentiful *Androsace sericea* in low mats or neat buns wedged in the rocks, all smothered in yellow or red centred white flowers. Healthy tufts of *Pedicularis cadmea* grew alongside and the views of this highest range in the western Taurus were magnificent. The many slopes, screes and aspects yielded different plants such as golden *Ranunculus brevifolius*, though it is the wonderful leaves that are the best feature of this species. Yet another scree run had the pretty, outsize pea flowers of *Valvilovia*



Ononis adenotricha





Lamium cymbalarifolium



Lamium cymbalarifolium



Genista albida



Ebenus boissieri

formosa and the drive down revealed lovely tight domes of *Ononis adenotricha* and dinner plate sized mats of *Saponaria pumilio* in full flower.

Only a hours drive from here and the road rumbles up to another exposed ridge on Susuz Dag, with a commanding view of the valleys below. Despite the short distance, this more coastal area is quite different and there is hardly a plant in common up here! Scattered across the rocky spine are purple *Polygala supina* and then the exquisite lime-green and ochre of *Ebenus boissieri*, the tufted flowers often lying on the ground, in places amidst the abundant *Genista albida*. The latter 'ran' like rivers of gold on some slopes, crowding every crevice and rocky nook. An altogether different delight ran through the heavy scree below and it was the plant I had set out to see on this mountain - *Lamium cymbalarifolium*. A classic alpine scree plant, it popped up between the stones crowded with outsize pink flowers.

Driving home I could see the swelling flower buds of some impressive thistles, something to chase in a couple of weeks. This peculiar year has given me this rare chance to experience all corners of the Western Taurus in all seasons and I intend to visit as many high tops as I can during the summer to discover the many seldom seen later flowering plants that live there.

Ebenus boissieri

