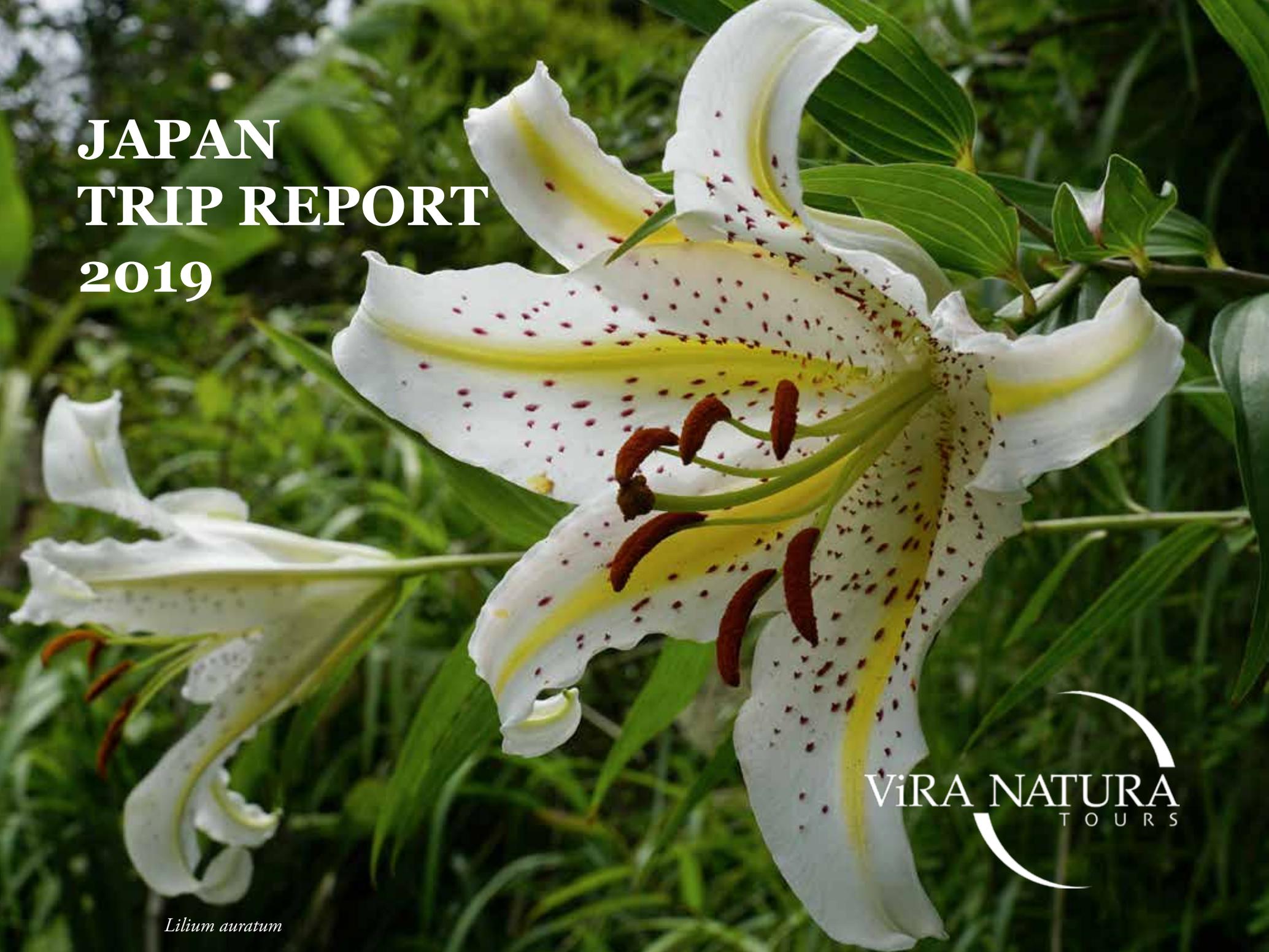


JAPAN TRIP REPORT 2019



Lilium auratum

ViRA NATURA
TOURS

Day 1 24 June To Tokyo

We all arrived from various places to Cappadocia.

Day 2 25 June Katsu'ura & Naruto-Togane

We left the airport hotel at 8.30 and meandered down to the coast, with the roads getting narrower and narrower. The vegetation was dense and evergreen, but here and there arching stems laden with the pinkish bells of *Campanula punctata* hung from the roadside and then we saw the first magnificent *Lilium auratum* tempting us. Indeed, having parked our car we had walked barely a hundred metres when we encountered a perfect, fresh specimen of the latter, the strong scent wafting on the air, the anthers plump and red. What a flower. A pleasant coast walk led past various headlands with wind sculpted shrubs, whilst the interior of the forest had an architectural understorey of *Fatsia japonica*. There was lots of bluish *Hydrangea macrophylla* in flower as well as more lilies and the fruits of an *Arisaema* sp. we found more *Campanula punctata* and the peculiar primulaceae *Lysimachia mauritiana*, along with some nice ferns and the mottled leaves of *Tricyrtis hirta* and *Lilium maculatum* in bud too.

After a pleasant picnic lunch of various Japanese goodies, we drove on along the coast passing areas of dune and long beaches before turning inland to visit the one remnant of the boglands that once blanketed this area. Here we saw four species of sundew with *Drosera indica*, *peltata*, *rotundifolia* and *spathulata* tucked among the vegetation. More prominent were the many tall purple *Iris ensata* that waved in the breeze. From here we drove back towards Tokyo to a hotel near the station for tomorrow's bullet train ride.

An excellent sushi meal was enjoyed close to the hotel.

Day 3 26 June Takashimizu & Komado Marsh

We caught the early morning bullet train to Shinshirakawa and had intended to head straight out, but unfortunately, we'd left some luggage on the train! This had to be collected right away by Hiro, so the rest of us waited a couple of hours in a nearby hotel until he returned. And then we sped to Takashimuzu



Campanula punctata

Natural Park, arriving just in time to get in and spend a while with the astonishing *Lilium rubellum* population there, with thousands of pristine pink lilies on show, spread across meadows and lapping up to the woodland edges. It was a glorious sight.

There was still time after to head to a nearby Komado Marsh with many interesting plants. On the way, there were fine stands of *Rodgersia podophylla* and *Hydrangea petiolaris* spiralling around tree trunks. Reaching the area, we first walked through a stretch of woodland seeing *Paris tetraphylla* and *Monotropastrum humile* on the way before arriving at the wonderful expanse of bog land with the masses of sphagnum broken by drifts of fresh green ferns. There were flashes of red-pink from the little bushes of *Rhododendron molle* subsp. *japonicum*, taller *Veratrum stamineum* with milky-white flowers and many lovely purple *Iris sanguinea*. Patches of *Lysichiton camtschaticense* had finished flowering but still looked good, with the tiny *Vaccinium oxycoccos* spreading across the mosses and the pink belled *Menziesia multiflorum* too. We would have happily wandered for another hour or more but the light was fading so we turned back and then drove onto our traditional guest house for the night. We enjoyed a very tasty Japanese dinner with all manner of new dishes most of which, though unfamiliar were delicious. A serenade of tree frogs sent us to sleep (along with some fine Asahi beer).

Day 4 27 June Mount Asakusa

This would not feature in the tour as the route as we now consider the route too challenging. Nonetheless I include it here for those that we along on the reccy trip.

Rain had been forecast so we departed early, winding around a large reservoir to the parking area. Setting off the first section was a bit rocky and awkward but then improved as we walked through lovely woodland with the buzz of cicadas in the air. There was the unusual saprophytic orchid *Yoania japonica* and then as



Rhododendron molle subsp. *japonicum*

we climbed each steeper section the flatter bits in between offered up all sorts of interesting plants. There were stands of *Weigela hortensis*, green-and-white striped *Arisaema ovale*, a slender golden orchid *Oreorchis patens* and a tantalising *Cardiocrinum cordatum* in bud. This is not mentioning the constant lush greenery all around with bamboos, ferns and evergreen shrubs such as *Daphniphyllum macropodum* and *Trocodendron araloides*. There were the first tufts of *Schizocodon soldanelloides* with gorgeous fringed pink flowers and then we came upon the delightful *Diphylleia grayi* with pure white flowers. Not much further on was perhaps the best sight of the day, several large shrubs of *Magnolia kobus* in full and glorious flower, the snow-white blooms looking wonderful with the ridges of mountains beyond.

We finally made it to the ridge with fine views onto the snow streaked Mount Asakusa and surrounding landscape. Here we started to see more and more *Lilium rubellum*, with some fine groups further on. There was, also pretty drifts of *Cornus canadensis*, more *Schizocodon soldanelloides*, and *Paris tetraphylla*. The predicted rain never really arrived and we arrived back down in by early afternoon for a latish lunch. Driving on there were stops for *Hydrangea petiolaris*, *Filipendula multijuga*, *Hosta sieboldiana* with spikes of whitish flowers. Some regenerating chocolate was bought along the way too.

Day 5 28 June Hachimantai National Park

A fine clear day, with only scattered clouds drifting across the Anti-Taurus. Our We took the bullet train to Morioka and met up with our good-natured local guide who drove us to Hachimantai national park via a good lunch. We then spent the rest of the afternoon in a wonderful area of forest and bogland with many good plants include abundant *Helionopsis orientalis*, fine bushes of *Viburnum furcatum* with lacey white flowers, our first lovely *Glaucidium palmatum*, ruby-coloured *Rubus vernus* and then marshy areas with plentiful dainty *Primula nipponica*. As we continued around the boardwalk there were some good patches of pure white *Lysichiton camtschaticense*, low mats of the dwarf shrub *Sieversia pentapetalum* smothered in white flowers, the pink bells of *Andromeda polifolia* and views across the misty landscape of stunted trees and pools. Then climbing a bit, we found a fine *Paris japonica*, the white flower having matured to a pleasant pinkish tone



Schizocodon soldanelloides

and next to this were more, fine *Glaucidium palmatum*. We had taken our time and had a great afternoon, but there was still time to see *Dactylorhiza aristata*, *Gymnadenia conopsea* along with some good views of distant Mount Iwate rising from a cloud sea and the misty forests. Driving down we stopped for *Pedicularis verticillata* and then for another fresh *Paris japonica* on a bank. By now the mists had really come in and the trunks swathed in flowering *Hydrangea petiolaris* looked ghostly.

Day 6 29 June Mount Iwate

A bit of huff and puff today was superbly-well rewarded. We set off up Mount Iwate through lush emerald forests, climbing slowly at first and then a little steeper, stopping to see a colony of *Liparis koreojaponica* and its rather drab cousin *L. krameri*. There were stands of *Pyrola asarifolia* and then the first purple flowers of *Clematis alpina* subsp. *ochotensis*. And then the prize, which is surely one of the world's finest alpine plants – the stunning *Dicentra peregrina*. There were hundreds scattered across the black cinder slopes among stunted birch trees, sometimes growing with yellow *Viola crassa*. It was hard to choose the best and there flowering was at an absolute peak of perfection. A solitary *Pennellianthus* (*Penstemon*) *frutescens* was also found.

Time was spent with the *Dicentra* before we pushed on into wooded area once again seeing more and more lovely *Glaucidium palmatum* as well as the attractive cream and orange flowered shrub *Weigela middendorffiana*. Our guide went on ahead to scout and after a while called us on. He then showed us a hidden colony of superb *Glaucidium palmatum* tucked away beneath the firs. It was a magnificent sight with many perfect flowers stretching up the slope. Heading back down the rain kicked in at about half way, but by then we were well satisfied with the day's flowers and returned to the guest house for a cold beer.

Day 7 30 June Hachimantai & to Hokkaido

There was time in the morning to visit a good population of *Paris japonica*. However, it was located in a very wet area and though our host gave us rubber boots these all seemed to leak profusely as we waded through snowmelt and pushed past bamboo to reach the plants. The plants themselves were superb, though as we arrived the rain came down and photography was a bit tricky under umbrellas. Squelching back to the car (the rain having stopped) there were a couple of *Asarum sieboldii* with



Dicentra peregrina

peculiar little brown flowers. We drove back to the guesthouse for a warming coffee and a chance to dry some clothes. Then we left for the airport, stopping for some fine *Hydrangea petiolaris* that were climbing up tree trunks and then again for some superb *Cornus kousa*, the boughs weighed down with white-bracted flowers.

Lunch was near the airport and soon we were flown northwards to Sapporo and then drove three hours north to Asahikawa in our hire car.

Day 8 1 July Mount Kurodake.

There were some beautiful *Lilium pennsylvanicum* right outside the hotel and across the road near the river, the richly-coloured flowers heavily speckled with red. We took the cable car up and found some good *Fritillaria camtschatcensis* between the cablecar station and the next chair lift, and there was a pleasant garden laid out with native plants too. The chairlift took us over patches of *Primula cuneifolia* and lovely flowery bushes of *Weigela middendoriana* and on arrival there was *Mertensia pterocarpa* too.

Unfortunately, much the rest of the day didn't quite work out as we'd hoped. Much of the following would not feature in a future tour, but is included here for those that came along this year. The trail we had planned to walk still had lots of snow and this meant negotiating some tricky snow patches and not seeing much in the way of flowers until we reached the top where *Anemone narcissiflora* was in bloom. The rocky high plateau had plenty of *Diapensia lapponica* and lower down were a few *Rhododendron aureum*, but there was little else and the thick mists meant we couldn't appreciate the landscape.

Retracing our steps, we walked down and photographed the *Weigela* near the chairlift. Francis, Hiro and I walked down to the cablecar station, but found little of interest. Fortunately, our evening meal was very good and we were in good spirits after a beer or two.

Day 9 2 July Mount Akadake

An altogether better day. Driving to the trail head there were many superb bushes of *Weigela middendoriana*. The route was easier going than yesterday, but still involved plenty of climbing. There were also some huge snow patches of course, but using our yaktrax and crampons this was straightforward enough. It was much more flowery



Fritillaria camtschatcensis

today with bushes of *Ledum palustre*, a sprinkling of *Primula cuneifolia* and the dainty lilac-pink bells of *Phyllodoce coerulea*, as well as good *Rhododendron aureum*. We also had some views of the landscape too, with sweeps of forest and stony summits as the mists came and went. It grew progressively clearer as we climbed, reaching *Dicentra peregrina* after two hours. There lovely plants were joined by yellow *Patrinia sibirica* and *Pedicularis oederi*. The trail climbed further past little drifts of *Primula cuneifolia* and *Rhododendron* before reaching the rocky flats above. Here there were abundant *Diapensia lapponica*, with some superb cushions, as well as pink *Loiselueria procumbens*. The eventual summit area was a high, wild plateau with big views across the area of the many summits and some colourful rhyolite ridges.

As we ate lunch a tame red fox with long moulting golden fur came very close to us, no doubt hoping for a titbit. Tucked away in one nearby area was a population of *Lagotis yesoensis*, the only place it occurs in the world. These grew with pink *Oxytropis japonicus*. After this we started down, photographing plants and landscapes as we went. The drive out included stops for stands of floriferous *Weigela middendorffiana* and the unusual variegated leaves of *Actinidia kolomikta*. Then a bit further on was a good population of *Lilium pennsylvanicum* that was photographed before the rain swept in.

Day 10 3 July To Wakkanai

We enjoyed a slower start to the day after our last two more active outings. Leaving Asahikawa, we drove an hour to another area of bogland and took and walk. There was less to see here than our previous bog locations, with only *Ledum palustre*, plentiful *Drosera rotundifolia* and some pleasant reflective pools. There was a quite a way to go to reach our ultimate destination near Wakanai, so we drove on stopping only for some lunch supplies and a stand of the very common *Filipendula kamtschatica*. We eventually reached an interesting coastal area with a peculiar plant community of *Sasa palmata*, *Rosa rugosa*, sprawling vines of *Vitis cognettiae* and the plentiful golden trumpets of *Hemerocallis dumortieri*. From among all of this rose the architectural forms of *Angelica ursina* and the whole combination of plants was quite remarkable, each plant managing to successfully fight for its place among the dense vegetation. Further along there were many more *Hemerocallis dumortieri*, at times mixed with *Lilium pennsylvanicum*. On the other side of the road was a stand of *Iris ensata* and these were very common further along the road, with the late afternoon sun glowing through the purple flowers.

We checked in to our comfortable hotel and then hunted down a restaurant.



Lagotis yesoensis

Day 11 4 July Rebun Island I

The early ferry crossing was calm, but misty, though this cleared as we went. Reaching Rebun, we drove north to our guesthouse and left the bags. Then we continued to the northern headlands and set off on a rather breezy walk. There were the first spires of *Pedicularis chamissonis* var *hokkaidoensis* and the feathery-petalled *Dianthus superbis*, however, though the coastal landscape was pleasant much of the vegetation was now very familiar so we moved on to try somewhere else. This proved to be no different and we were beginning to wonder where all the much-hyped flowers of Rebun Island were!

After lunch, we drove south stopping right beside the sea for a thriving population of *Mertensia maritima* that was draped over seaside rocks. A wet seep had *Hosta sielboldiana* in flower, alongside *Allium maximowiczii* and *Ligularia hogsonii*. Our next stop was in a more wooded area, but it offered us nothing we hadn't seen on the mainland, so we returned to the guesthouse (via the abandoned airfield, which did at least have lots of *Hemerocallis*) for a refreshing beer.

A varied fish dinner was enjoyed by all.

Day 12 5 July Rebun Island II

Today's exploration proved more flowery than yesterday. Our first walk took us first through woodland with the last spikes of the unusual orchid *Cremastra appendiculata*, and on up to some stonier slopes with *Leontopodium discolor*. But, it was our second walk that was the best. Almost immediately we encountered large waving drifts of *Pericaria bistorta*, and mingled among them were *Nepeta subsessilis*, *Geranium erianthum*, emergent *Heracleum lanatum*, the occasional *Trollius ledebouriana* and spikes of *Pedicularis chamissonis*. The views down to the coast were superb and it was a very pleasant walk. We also found the island endemic *Oxytropis macrantha*, *Polygonatum humile*, pink *Achillea ptarmica* and *Saxifraga nelsonii*.

We felt we'd seen and walked enough so we drove down to the port and found a café for coffee and cake before boarding the ferry back to Wakkanai.



Pedicularis chamissonis

Day 13 6 July Sarobetsu Wetland & to Hakuba

We left early the next morning to fit in a visit to the big *Iris ensata* population we had seen a couple of days ago when driving to Wakkanai. There were hundreds of big purple irises on show and we saw even more when we drove on to a local wetland reserve. Here they were mingled with the last flowers of their blue cousin *Iris laevigata*, as well as white *Veratrum stamineum* and many *Hemerocallis dumortieri*. There were also a couple of *Pogonia japonica* too. Driving to the airport the roadsides were lined with great 'hedges' of *Filipendula kamtschatica* and stately *Angelica ursina*.

Our flights took us south again, ultimately to the industrial town of Matsumoto, nestled with the green hills of the Japanese Alps. Collecting our car, we drove to the most northerly location of a lovely lily. Reaching the site, we climbed a long flight of stairs and then explored the trail network that spread across the slope. It didn't take long to find the first beautiful pink trumpet of sweetly fragrant *Lilium japonicum*. They were scattered among a clearing and along the paths. Climbing into the trees was *Schizophragma hydrangeoides*, their inflorescence indeed rather reminiscent of *Hydrangea petiolaris*. Driving down we found *Hydrangea paniculata* and some very deep purple-pink bells of *Campanula punctata*.

By now it was decidedly gloomy and we drove on towards our guesthouse, stopping for dinner en route.

Day 14 7 July Hakuba I

After a rustic night, we took an early breakfast, organised ourselves and then began our walk. The route took us through the now familiar Japanese lush woodland, finding some superb reddish-leaved forms of *Rodgersia podophylla*, white *Aconitum iinumae*, spreading shrubs of *Cornus controversa* and wonderfully flowery bushes of *Weigela hortensis*, all with the brooding backdrop of the mountains. Climbing a bit higher we encountered *Paris japonica*, but this was nothing compared to what was to come. The odd *Glaucidium palmatum* was found and there were ever increasing quantities of white-flowered *Diphylleia grayi* mixed in with the crisp reddish shoots



Paris japonica

of *Rodgersia podophylla*. Then more *Paris japonica* appeared, with first two or three together and then some stunning drifts near the mountain hut. They continued above this and were quite wonderful.

The track continued up for a bit further until it reached the renowned snow field that extended for over a thousand metres up the valley. a patch of *Glaucidium* clung to the slope opposite and among this were a couple of distant *Primula yesoensis*. It wasn't possible to reach them but fortunately there was one in perfectly good flower below the mountain hut as we walked back down. There were further stops to photograph *Paris verticillata*, *Viburnum plicatum* and various other delights as we walked back down.

It was only early afternoon so we drove onto a cable way, seeing pink *Hydrangea serrata* on the way. The gondola whisked us up to 1830 metres, the chairs passing low over the abundant vegetation below with great swathes of *Aruncus dioicus*, *Veronicastrum xxx*, *Hosta sieboldiana* and *Euphorbia togakusensis*. following a trail at the top we quickly found *Primula farinosa*, *Gentiana thunbergii* and the pretty pale-yellow flowers of *Epimedium koreanum*. Pink wands of *Pedicularis chamissonis* var. *japonica* waved in the breeze and there were expansive views of the area as the mists came and went. Dainty *Swertia tetrapetala* was seen and there were some nice clusters of *Pinguicula vulgaris*. Alas, the only *Lilium medeoloides* we saw near the cable car station was in bud, but about to burst! We looked around for more but no luck only the pretty bells of *Enkianthus campanulatus* instead.

Day 15 8 July Hakuba II

Today we went to up to another subalpine area in the hope of finding *Lilium medeoloides*. And indeed, it was one of the first plants we found, but once again in bud and at least a week away from flowering. We spent time walking around the extensive bog with *Gentiana thunbergii*, *Veratrum stamineum* and a few *Lysichiton camtschaticense*. Wooded areas had plentiful *Schizocodon soldanelloides*, *Diphyllea grayi* and some good clumps of the lovely *Glaucidium palmatum*. Late snow patches even had a sprinkling of *Primula cuneifolia* too. It was a pleasant (if busy) area with beautiful birch trees and misty firs.

We walked down the road between the cable car stations to try and find the lily, but the habitat was all wrong, though we did find *Magnolia sieboldii* in flower. Descending



Hosta sieboldii

via the gondola we had time to try one more area, another wetland, where there were *Cardiocrinum cordatum* only a few days from opening and *Lilium lancifolium* a long way from opening. The mauve flowers of *Hosta sieboldii* and the long arching stems of *Polygonatum odoratum* var. *maximowiczii* provided some compensation and there was a *Gastrodia elata* in the car park before we left.

The bullet train whisked us to Tokyo in a couple of hours.

Day 16 9 July Izu Oshima

Our last planned field day was to one of Japan's offshore islands – Izu Oshima, only two hours away by hydrofoil. Arriving at the green island our driver drove us from the port and almost immediately we saw the first big lily. He then stopped us beside a fine colony of magnificent *Lilium auratum* var. *platyphyllum*, the two-metre long stems hanging out from the banks, weighed down with their colossal, scented flowers. There were more superb groups of this most remarkable plants as we drove up. A higher area of cinder fields beneath the volcano held a bizarre plant community with islands of *Polygonum* and *Miscanthus* among the dark rock. And among these were big stands of *Lilium auratum*, some over two metres tall. The flowers were still at least a week if not more from opening, but it was fascinating to see them in this stark environment.

An excellent sushi lunch was enjoyed before we set off for lily number two, which had already seen by the roadside. However, along the coast there were more a better *Lilium maculatum*, growing alongside the orange of *Hemerocallis fulva*, spreading mats of *Vitex ovalifolia* and the pinkish-beige bells of *Campanula punctata*. The waves were breaking on the rugged coast with sheer cliffs and coloured ash layers. A wonderful spot.

Days 16&17 10-11 July Kyoto

Our bullet train left at 8.20 and had us down into Kyoto in a couple of hours. After a snack, we began our tour of the many gardens and temples there, all wonderfully groomed – with the exception of the golden temple which was a truly awful tourist trap!



Lilium maculatum

Days 18 12 July Kyoto & Amino

The incomparable moss garden at Saiho-ji Temple this morning rather put the others in the shade - a work of art. And to complete our trip we drove a couple of hours to the Sea of Japan where we enjoyed another of Japan's unusual coastal plant communities, with the reflexed tepals of *Lilium leichtlinii* growing in a carpet of seaside bamboo with *Hemerocallis citrina*. The latter opens in the late afternoon (and night) as it is moth-pollinated, and we stayed around long enough to see some opening. It was a very pleasant scene, waves, beach and lilies all combined.

An excellent Japanese dinner completed our culinary experience of the country. Indeed, the food is a quintessential part of any visit here and we had tried and eaten an uncountable number of dishes and new foods.

Days 19 13 July Flights home

Breakfast and then the superb shinkansen (bullet train) north to the capital and connections to airports for the journey home.





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



Magnolia kobus