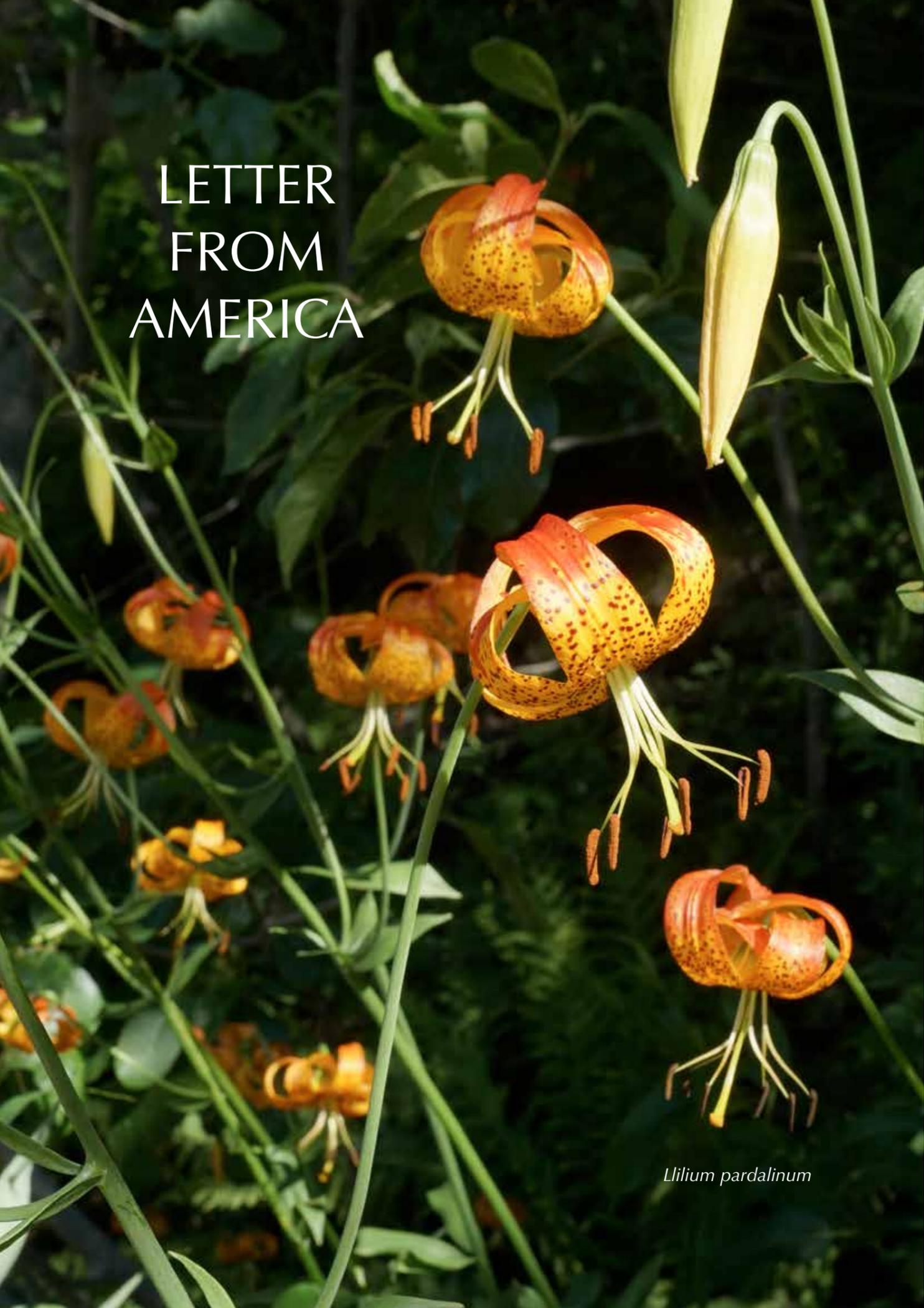


LETTER FROM AMERICA



Lilium pardalinum



Lilium parvum var. *crocatum*

The ravages of COVID-19 have left many of us with fewer options than before, no doubt resulting in us finding many a nook and cranny we didn't know existed in our local areas. Much the same happened to us, it's just our local area is quite large. However, as you know our business is showing wonderful flowers in wild places and it has been frustrating not being able to research new holidays during this time. Thankfully, the 'land of liberty' (the USA) is open for business, and I set off to look at the summer flowers in California, in particular the lilies. I was well aware it was an unusual season, with lower-than-normal rainfall and then a heatwave cooking states immediately to the north. However, my experience of lilies is they are tough and persistent, managing to flower regardless and at more or less the same time of year. You have to remain optimistic in this current world.

A lengthy flight and overnight at the airport saw me driving east the next morning, planning to rendezvous with a local lily enthusiast. The parched surroundings meant I didn't feel tempted to stop until I'd driven beyond Sacramento and begun to climb into the Sierra



Swallowtail pollinating *L. pardalinum*.

Nevada. I took the odd wrong turn but eventually met Barbara, who had kindly brought me some tasty gazpacho soup for lunch. She passed on her map with lots of notes and gave me some lily-finding tips. Unfortunately, California road construction thwarted my first attempt, but luckily, I had already spotted my first lily - the modest *Lilium parvum* var. *luteum* as I drove to meet Barbara. It got better, when a flash of orange as I drove along the freeway turned out to be a colony of magnificent *L. pardalinum* with a variety of colour variations and the amount of spotting. Some of them were taller than I was, thriving on the moisture of the seep they grew in and in perfect condition.

I overnighted somewhere bland and then headed for the hills, ostensibly to reach the lush northern coastal areas. The route passed through sun-baked grasslands and blue oak woodlands and then began to climb. I stopped for a wonderful woolly thistle *Cirsium occidentale* var. *candidissimum* on the way and there were some fine views across the Coast Ranges. In a wet flush was another colony of *Lilium pardalinum*, along with a few slenderwhite *Platanthera dilatata* orchids.



Cirsium occidentale var. *candidissima*



Castilleja exserta subsp. *latifolia*

However, if the lilies were not striking enough the huge swallowtails pollinating them created a dazzling scene and I spent as much time trying to capture them at work, their underwings becoming coated in rich red-brown pollen. I made to the coast and spent some time in the low dunes, which were covered in the pink bobbles of *Eriogonum latifolium*, trailing yellow *Abronia latifolia* and dense tufts of peculiar *Castilleja exserta* subsp. *latifolia*. Something about broad leaves going on there (*latifolia* = wide-leaved)! From here I struck inland and lily heaven. Rising into an area of cool woods the verges were peppered with gorgeous *Lilium kelloggii*, my joint favourite Californian lily. This lovely flower was delicately marked inside with red sprinkles and yellow stripes, from which outsize reddish anthers dangled. And there was barely a spent flower to be seen, they were all so fresh. Further on were denser stands, in fact in places the verges couldn't be walked on without crushing lilies. Interestingly, big swallowtails were pollinating these lilies too, which explains the huge protruding anthers. It was hard to leave but these research trips are manic affairs and I now sped onto another prime site an hour and a half hence. It was very warm, and I didn't fancy camping at 30+ degrees, so reaching the



Dichelostemma ida-maia



Abronia latifolia & *Eriogonum latifolium*



Dawn forests, Onion Mountain



Lilium kelloggii



Lilium columbianum



Lilium rubescens

mountain turnoff I climbed up to the cool of 1400 metres and spent the night camping in blissful solitude, save for hooting horned owls. The stars were fabulous in the crystal sky.

It has to be said I wish I bought a better mattress with me. Waking very early, I saw in the dawn and had a 4 km walk before breakfast. Then it was flower time, although the first thing I found was not a lily but the lovely creamy-green-tipped cerise tubes of *Dichelostemma ida-maia*, a rather graceful bulb. The gorgeous cherry red bells of *Lilium bolanderi* were next (the other half of my joint favourite California lily) and I found quite a few including some of the yellowish variant. But, for me it is the uniquely coloured red form that wins. Lower down and the tracksides were full of lovely *L. rubescens*, the flowers opening ivory and aging to pink, creating a delightful contrast. I spent another night up in this peaceful place, seeing in another dawn with fine views across the Coast Ranges. I stopped for *L. rubescens* again when I left and caught the first flowers of sweet-scented *L. washingtonianum*.

The cooler climes of the coast (where summer fogs keep the temperature well down compared to inland) were next and I saw more lilies along the coastal road than I've ever seen, with thousands



Lilium bolanderi



Misty redwood forest, Jeddiah Smith



Penstemon laetus



Castilleja applegatei



Lilium pardalinum subsp. *vollmeri*



Veratrum insolitum



Lilium washingtonianum subsp. *purpurascens*

of *Lilium columbianum* in flower, covering the banks in bright orange. They looked amazing with the immense towering redwood trees behind. These trees are worth the visit alone and some wonderful tracts still remain. However, I had more lilies to find first and headed high on the back roads, finding more *L. kelloggii* and *L. bolanderi* and then at a small bog was *L. pardalinum* subsp. *vollmeri* (with its characteristic narrow leaves) growing alongside the extraordinary domed pitchers of *Darlingtonia californica* (but more of them later). I opted to sleep high (and cool) again and camped near a population of *Lilium washingtonianum* subsp. *purpurascens*. There were some impressive spikes of *Veratrum insolitum* too, growing in an area of burned-out forest.

The next morning was spent revelling in the redwoods (*Sequoia sempervirens*) with fabulous giant trees and misty, moss-covered boughs of maples and other trees. Moving north through Oregon I found several more populations of *Lilium pardalinum* subsp. *vollmeri* and then climbed into an area that had recently been devastated by fire. The scale of these burns is vast and has to be seen to



Lilium pardalinum subsp. *wigginsii*



Calochortus macrocarpus



Mentzelia laevicaulis

be believed with whole mountains and valleys denuded of trees as far as the eye can see. The rub is fine displays of other plants quickly fill the gap and found some nice meadows full of *Sidalcea* sp., as well as *Lilium washingtonianum* subsp. *purpurascens* and some fiery drifts of *Castilleja applegatei*. A little lower down was *L. pardalinum* subsp. *wigginsii* (broader leaves, generally orange flowers) and there were lots more of the latter on a side valley I found, which has lots of other plants too including gullies full of sweet-scented *Philadelphus lewisii* (very similar to the well-known mock orange, *P. coronarius*) stands of robust *Aruncus dioicus* and a lovely combination of blue *Penstemon laetus* and pale yellow *Eriogonum nudum*.

I took a break from lilies the next day and pursued their relatives the mariposa lilies (*Calochortus*) instead. Although most species in this wonderful genus flower in May/June, there are a few stunners that flower later. Unfortunately, my first attempts were fruitless, and I began to wonder if the dry season meant none were flowering. However, I did see the fantastic bristling fireworks of *Mentzelia laevicaulis* (giant blazingstar) along the way and there were also some good stands of *Asclepias speciosa*, a rather impressive plant with complex



Asclepias speciosa



Darlingtonia californica



Darlingtonia californica



Ipomopsis aggregata

round flower heads. Plant hunting requires persistence and despite the huge wildfire progressing up the flanks of Mount Shasta the road was open and allowed me to try another location, where, as I drove up a very rough track the first beautiful pale pink *Calochortus macrocarpus* waved in the breeze, glowing with backlight. There were many and they were stunning and worth the 35 degrees heat I was having to photograph them in! Well satisfied, cooler climes beckoned, and I went up into the hills to camp.

My camp was next to an incredible bog with thousands of *Darlingtonia californica* and the next morning before sunrise I was photographing these and the slender white orchid *Platanthera dilatata*. During the day I drove about and found many seeps with *Lilium pardalinum* subsp. *shastense* growing in, often in association with the *Darlingtonia*, or alongside bogs with hundreds of golden spikes of *Narthecium californicum*. The lilies seemed rather variable, and I wondered if there was a mixture of *L. pardalinum* and *L. kelleyanum*, which I also found further on.

Sadly, it was time to start heading south and I spent my last day exploring Lassen



Lilium shastense



Lassen geothermal area



Aconitum columbianum



Veratrum californicum



Lupinus albifrons beneath Lassen Peak

national park. A trail through the forest led to some higher meadows with lots of *Veratrum californicum* in damp meadows and beside the streams together with delightful stands of *Aconitum columbianum* in both lilac and white forms. The scarlet of *Aquilegia formosa* was plentiful (and had been in just about every moist situation I'd found throughout the trip) though outdone by the intense red of scarlet gilia *Ipomopsis aggregata*, which grew mingled among a dainty blue *Penstemon*. Drifts of mint scented *Monardella odoratissima* were abundant throughout as were the silvery leaves of *Lupinus albifrons*. These were in more impressive effect on the way to the sulphurous, steaming geothermal area known rather dramatically as Bumpass Hell. Here, appearing suddenly among the dark forests was a stark ochre and alabaster landscape, containing a series of hot pools, one a pleasant sky blue, with adjacent hissing steam vents and bubbling mud pots. The late afternoon light was perfect for both this and the lupines and as I wandered back, I had the added final bonus of a deep red-pink form of *Penstemon newberryi* glowing with late sun - the cherry on the cake.



Penstemon newberryi