

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION



Lilium akkusianum



Stachys macrantha



Aquilegia olympica

The late June is the best time to see the fabulous lilies of north-east Turkey in flower and offers the greatest diversity of this charismatic flowers, with six species scattered across the various lush, forested valley systems. I hadn't expected to see any of these wonderful flowers this year, but I was suddenly invited by me sister-in-law, Isik Guner, to join her and a film crew in making a documentary of one of *Lilium ciliatum* one of the striking endemic species. Isik is a botanical artist, and the program was intended to show searching for and finding the plant in its native environment and then collecting (for which she had official permission - otherwise it is a definite no-no in Turkey) and finally drawing a painting the subject. My job was to 'find' the plant and talk about it. Talking about plants is not a problem.

Lilium ciliatum is confined to a few valleys between Giresun and Rize, but it can be locally very common. During past trips I had successfully shown all of region's lilies including ivory-flowered *L. akkusianum* an even more range restricted lovely found only around Erbaa and the Akkus Valley. However, the lush lily heartland is to the east where *L. ciliatum* thrives often alongside the sweet-scented *L. monodelphum* var. *armenum*, as it does at the Zigana Pass



Persicaria bistorta var. *carnea*



Lilium ciliatum



Lilium ciliatum



Gymnadenia conopsea



Dactylorhiza urvilleana

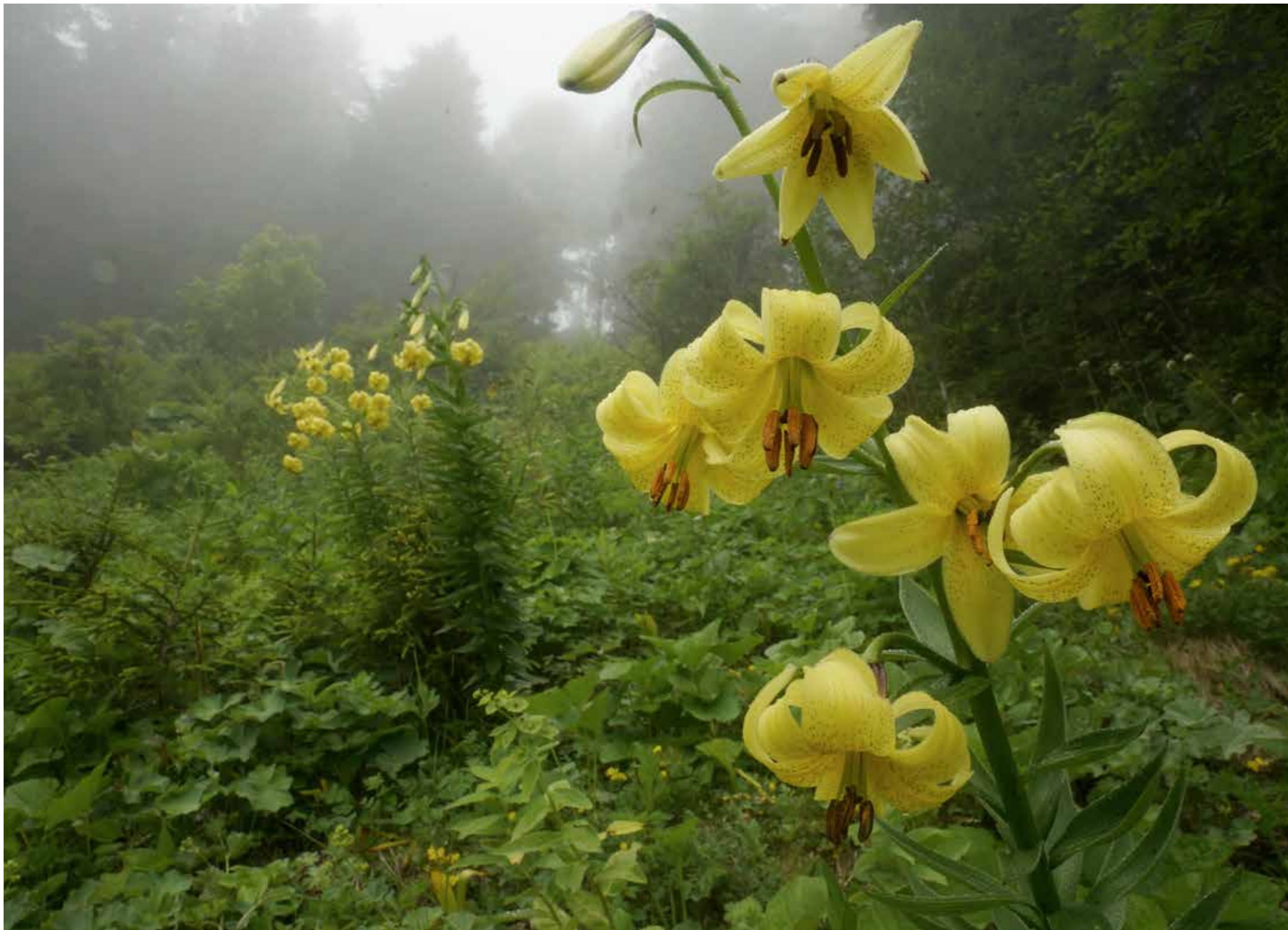
where we chose to base ourselves. The fragrances of the two species are quite different, a *L. ciliatum* has a mustier almost spicy perfume is also easily differentiated as the name alludes to, by the fine, ciliate hairs that edge the leaves and buds. Isik and I can be separated in that way also.

After meeting up in Trabzon we all drove up to the cool emerald heights and swiftly found the first lilies. Mere sighters. After lunch I showed the various other locations and scenes were worked out to construct the program. The last location was a even better than I remembered with some impressive stands of dozens of plants, each bearing their characteristic dark purple centred flowers and striking orange anthers - a bull's-eye for any passing pollinator. Looking up at a stand of these lilies is like having hundreds of alien eyes looking back down at you. Spooky.

There was a super-abundance of other flowers as well and I spent early mornings up in the hills among great drifts of *Persicaria bistorta* var. *carnea*, the immense architecture forms of *Heracelum platytaenium*, flamboyant blue and white of *Aquilegia olympica*, big clumps of *Stachys macrantha*, tumbles of *Lathyrus rotundifolius* and vast carpets of *Rhinanthus angustifolius* mingled with the dark pink orchid; *Dactylorhiza urvilleana*. Other orchids included



The Lily hunters



Lilium monodelphum var. *armenum*

slender *Gymnadenia conopsea* and the unusual white pom-poms of *Traunsteinera sphaerica*, the latter easy to miss among masses of white clover scattered across the turf. Various *Geranium* were in flower too including the vivid magenta *ptilostemon*, pink *sylvaticum* and purple-veined *iberica*, with much more to come in a month's time as huge clumps of *Centaurea helenoides*, *Aconitum orientale* and *Campanula lactiflora* were just getting going. Glancing up at the higher slopes and they were still encrusted with the gold of countless fragrant *Rhododendron luteum*.

Filming involved lots of repeating and walking back and forth, getting lost among

towering lilies, some 1.8 metres or more. Drone filming revealed the phenomena of the cloud sea rolling up the valley. We had had two days of glorious sunshine (something of a rarity in this part of the world) before the north-east mist eventually rolled in, creating a mysterious ambience and we finished up photographing among superb specimens of both *Lilium ciliatum* and *L. monodelphum* in the mist, with the sombre silhouettes of spruce and beads of moisture coating every leaf and flower. It is a always a pleasure to spend time in this stunning part of the country, though it has to be said, if I stayed too long in this humid land, moss may begin to develop in my own enhanced ciliate margin.



Geranium ptilostemon



Lathyrus rotundifolius