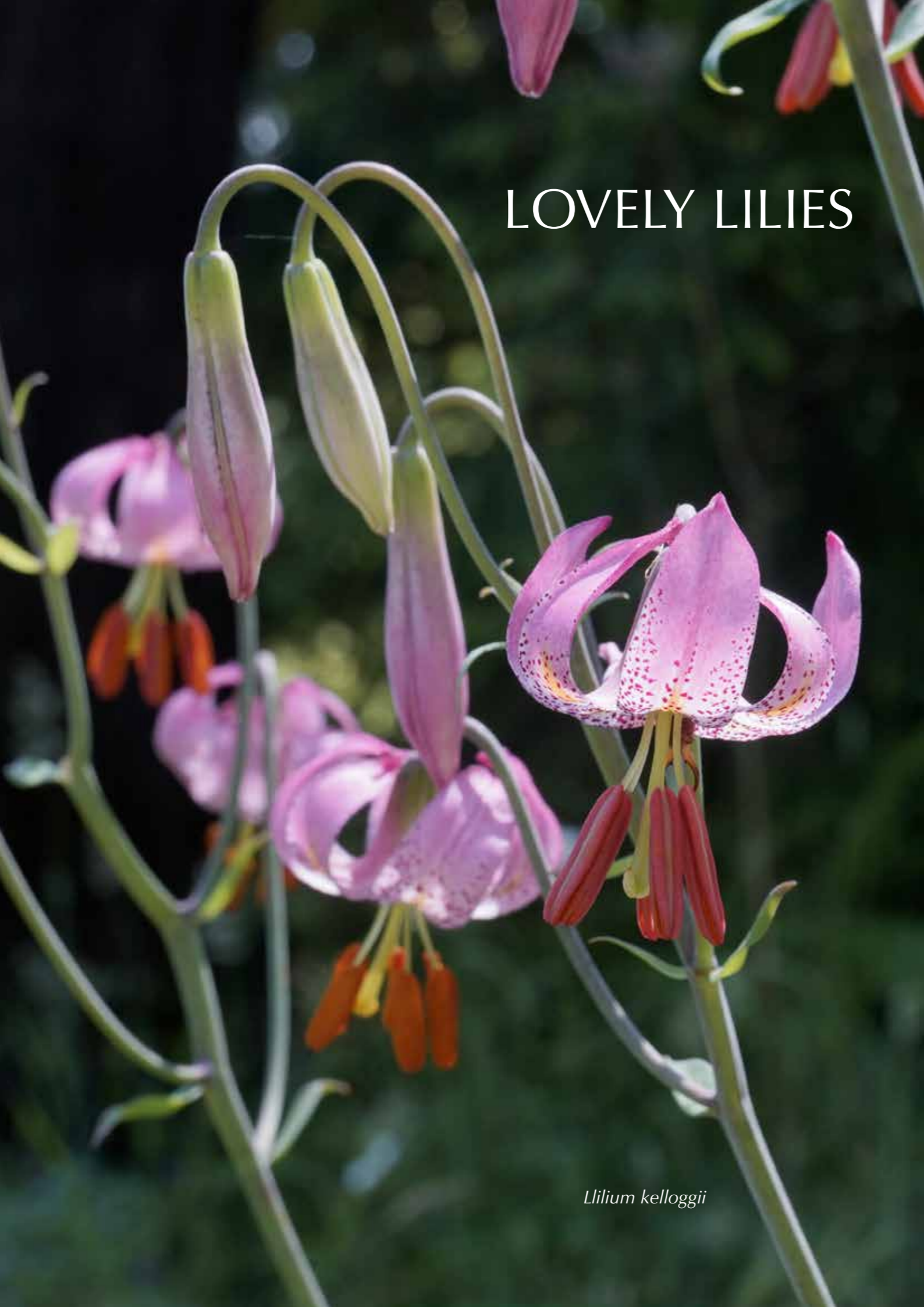


LOVELY LILIES



Lilium kelloggii



Lilium rubescens

Spring moves inexorably into summer and although the flush of fantastic spring bulbs fades, another is eager to replace it, and one that is arguably the showiest of them all. I have over the past few years been fortunate to organise a number of tours and make visits to hotspot locations for that ultimate showgirl; the lily. I have always been a bit of a fan, enjoying their ability to stand proud of meadows and woods in an unashamed show, presenting beautiful and at times outlandish flowers for all to see. Not hiding, in fact needing to be seen, hoping to draw in pollinating butterflies to feast on nectar and coat their wings in copious orangey pollen (something we must have all gotten on the end of our nose or clothes when going too close for a sniff of the often-intoxicating fragrance).

Rather like orchids, there is an air of the exotic and rarity about them. Many are indeed localised, some are rare, but invariably when I do find them, they are plentiful. None more so than *Lilium columbianum*, a species from northern California and on up into Oregon and Washington. South of Crescent City they can be seen growing in ridiculous numbers, with many thousands lining the highway, colouring it golden-orange, backed by immense redwoods with riven bark. California as a lily destination may surprise some, but it is



Lilium bolanderi



Lilium columbianum



Lilium pardalinum

Lilium af. albanicum

one of the premier places to see a wide variety of lilies (with around twenty taxa, depending on where one draws taxonomic lines). I'll be there this July and can't wait. *Lilium* in California occupy an array of niches, with beautiful species such as cherry-red *L. bolanderi* preferring inhospitable rocky serpentine scrub. This is a favourite of mine and in one location it shares its home other stunners such as *L. rubescens*, whose white flower age gently to dark pink, tall *L. washingtonianum* (which does much the same) and the lovely *L. kelloggii*. The latter is abundant along some roadsides, passed unseen by California's always on the move traffic. Serpentine seeps and bogs are home to various forms of *L. pardalinum*, which when at its best is a flamboyant cascade of fiery hues. It grows with interesting company too, sometimes in bogs with the fascinating *Darlingtonia californica* (California pitcher plant), the golden spikes of *Narthecium californicum* or *Cypripedium californicum*, a gorgeous white-pouched slipper orchid (which alas flowers a month earlier). Various dazzling forms and subspecies of this widespread species can be readily found, their colours often enhanced by huge

pollinating swallowtail butterflies. California is an outstanding place to see lilies.

Climate wise, Mediterranean Europe (and the adjacent mountain areas) is much the same, and five times larger, but here *Lilium* has not speciated to such an exceptional degree. Certainly, there is a good selection of lilies, including *Lilium martagon*, perhaps the most widespread of all species, I've seen it in the Kazakh Altai as well as northern Greece, where it can also be seen as the sumptuous wine-red colour form *cattaniae*. The highlands along the Northern Macedonian border have thriving populations of lemon-peel *L. af. albanicum* that emerge from flowery meadows in late June-July, scarce *L. rhodopeum* lurks in the beech woods of the wetter Rhodope Mountains and the more Mediterranean *L. chalcedonicum* fires up the woodland edge with sealing wax red on the limestone of Parnassos and other craggy massifs all the way south to the Peloponnese. At the same season in north-west Greece, it's normally possible to just catch the last crisp white flowers of *L. candidum*, the Madonna lily. This plant has been spread across the region and



Lilium chalcedonicum



Lilium martagon cattaniae



Lilium auratum



Lilium rubellum

appears in many a church yard and front garden from Greece to Spain, but is truly native to the limestone of Greece, the southern Balkans and south-west Turkey. Large quantities of seed used to be exported from the western Turkish city of Izmir (Smyrna) in the past. A smattering of other species can be found across Europe; *L. bulbiferum*, *L. pomponium* and *L. pyrenaicum*, but to match the richness of California one must head east and the lily heavyweights of China and Japan. The unique experience of Japan combines an emerald lushness I have seen in few other places, combined with a culinary awakening and the cultural richness of immaculate gardens and ornate temples of Kyoto. Teasing out the lilies takes a bit more effort at times when compared to the convenience of California. But it is in Japan we find botanical reserves dedicated to *Lilium rubellum*, where the meadows throng with thousands of soft pink scapes. A stiff hike onto Mount Asakusa will bring the 'real' wild plant, but bring plenty of food and water! The almost autumnal blends of *L. dauricum* are quite plentiful along roadsides in Hokkaido, similar *L. maculatum* a stunning orange gem on the islands near Tokyo where it shares its home with a giant. Nothing quite prepares one for the first meeting with *Lilium auratum*, a titan that can barely be believed to be truly wild and unadulterated by horticulture. And yet there they are hanging

from steep rocky banks, bursting from dense coastal vegetation alongside wild hydrangeas or most remarkably, towering amongst islands of green in stark ash flows on the flanks of still active volcanoes. The flowers are huge, blazoned with golden stripes, speckled with candy spots, powerfully perfumed. It's as though everything about lilies was poured into one outrageous bloom. There are many other species in Japan,



Lilium dauricum



Lilium regale

around thirty taxa, some rare and confined to individual islands. Across the water there are even more.

China boasts fifty-five species of lily, half of the world's total (embellished still further if one includes the gorgeous close-relatives; *Nomocharis* and giant *Cardiocrinum*). It's here there Ernest Wilson first encountered *Lilium regale* and subsequently introduced it into cultivation. Some years back I travelled to his discovery location in the Min Valley in Sichuan hoping to find some had survived the intervening one hundred years and to my delight there were still thousands hanging from cliffs and rocks. Although it was a bit tricky to find accessible plants to photograph, it was heartening to know the plant still thrived in modern-day China.

I find this to be the most elegant of the Chinese trumpet lilies and I've yet to find any of the others in the same quantity as *L. regale*. The diversity of Chinese lilies is remarkable, everything from the towering giants, suffused and speckled *L. bakerianum* and the diminutive sombre bells in of *Lilium souliei* a little gem that pops up among dwarf rhododendron in high altitude moorlands,

looking more fritillary than lily. Other tiny species can be found in high alpine turf such as *L. nanum* and *L. euxanthum*, as well as the slightly weird *L. lophophorum* an abundant species in grasslands alongside *Incarvillea*, *Anemone* and *Iris*. Despite the vast distances between the two species, the intense scarlet of *L. pumilum* rather mimics the fiery *L. chalconotum* of Greece, probably in response to similar pollinators (butterflies certainly attend the latter and some of these specialise in red flowers,



Lilium lophophorum



Lilium pumilum



Lilium duchartriei



Lilium souliei



Lilium bakerianum



Lilium szovitsianum



Lilium ciliatum

which few insects can see). These grew in Gansu near stands of beautiful *L. duchartrei*, which like so many of the Turk's-cap types dangles outside anthers to create botanical jellyfish dangling for prey.

Another of our personal favourites does the same, a species which is quite unlike any other and which thrives in Basak's spiritual home; the Kackar. *Lilium ciliatum* is a robust plant, sometimes to two metres, with up to thirty dark centred flowered with vivid dangling anthers. Glancing up at a stand on a bank is like gazing into so many alien eyes. The flowers are covered in silken hairs and emit a rather musty sweetness. I've yet to see what pollinates them, but suspect it is moths - I really must go out with a torch next time I'm there. *L. ciliatum* is endemic to north-east Turkey and quite often grows alongside or mingled among the more widespread *L. monodelphum*, a very showy species that occurs east to Armenia and the Caucasus. There is debate as to whether *L. szovitsianum* is just a form of *L. monodelphum*, regardless the former is magnificent growing near the Georgian border, huge towering scapes with big sweetly-scented buttery flowers among meadows with the huge scarlet bowls of *Papaver pseudo-orientale*. This corner of Turkey is another lily hotspot (lucky Basak will be there this year with our tour, I'm restricted to California only!!!) with six taxa in a

relatively compact area. The narrow endemic *L. akkusianum*, lovely *L. kesselringianum* and citrus assortment of *L. ponticum* make up the rest of the cast, together with so many orchids and meadow flowers. This is one of the other remarkable aspects about lilies, just how adaptable they can be, from humid meadows and bogs, to cool alpine turf and woodlands to limestone rocks or serpentine heaths baked by the California sun.

The lilyphile simply has to decide whether to pack sun cream or an umbrella.

<https://www.viranatura.com/tour/100060/lilies-of-california-jewels-of-the-wild-west>

<https://www.viranatura.com/tour/99995/lilies-of-the-black-sea-turkey>



Lilium ponticum