

viranatura
tours



NARGS
LYCIA AWAKENS
SW TURKEY
2024

Anemone coronaria

© Christopher Gardner (2024)

Day 1 Arrival in Antalya

We arrived on various flights at various times and on various days, some enjoying some extra time in Antalya old town, or a seaside stroll, before we all met up at our sea front hotel and walked to a typical restaurant. Here we enjoyed a selection of delicious starters (mezes) and grilled meats and kebabs, followed by sweet baclava and Turkish tea.

Day 2 Korkuteli & Termessos

Rain greeted our first day in the Taurus mountains, but fortunately once we had driven inland a short distance this eased. We had driven up onto the Anatolian Plateau from the coast, passing fine stands of architectural *Euphorbia characias* and then climbing through rugged limestone country, with slopes clothed in Turkish pine (*Pinus brutia*) and macchie to the gentler undulating farmland with rounded, rocky hills. The fields and edges were studded with wild pear infested with *Viscum album*, whilst the grey limestone slopes had open *Juniperus excelsa* woodland. A tantalising view of the highest peak in the Bey Daglari range opened up at one point and this boded well. Reaching a low pass (1300 metres) our first botanical foray was dry and bright (if not sunny) and immediately we found the first of many delightful *Crocus fleischeri*, the white stars beginning to open alongside plenty of pale pink *Colchicum burtii*. Here and there we also fond lovely forms of *Crocus lyciotauricus* though these seemed more reluctant to open. I quickly applied my crocus opening technology and we carried on exploring to give it time to work. Moving on up the slope there were more fine patches of *Crocus fleischeri* scattered among the low juniper trees as well as *Gagea granatellii* and a variety of non-flowering plants including the curly leaves of *Sternbergia colchiciflora*, low shrubs of *Salvia trifoliata* and a *Paronychia* sp. Returning to the greenhouses, the crocuses had all opened beautifully for photos.

Crested larks were flying about singing and displaying as we left.

The next location was only half an hour away, but the weather decided to play a trick and mists drifted in to the pasture and woodland where we found both *Crocus antalyensis* and *C. danfordiae* in both white and yellow colour forms.



Crocus fleischeri

The same warming technique was applied and we wandered off to look at the cascading *Loranthus europeaus* laden with bright yellow berries that was infested a large *Quercus infectoria*. The crocuses duly opened and we could easily see the difference between these and the previous species. A short walk up the road brought us to lunch among the trees, unfortunately set on top of a large colony of emerging *Ornithogalum lanceolatum*, but there was nowhere else! It was a touch cool and misty but atmospheric at the same time and this continued at our last destination. The magnificent historical site of Termessos is still in largely ruined state, with little tidying up or sanitising save for a car park. Here we could wander up past some immense two thousand year old walls, through mature Mediterranean woodland with oaks, *Ostrya carpinifolia*, *Jasminum fruticans* and even a solitary but lovely *Cyclamen alpinum*. The mists gave the whole ensemble a wonderful and mysterious ambience, nowhere more so than the theatre, where the clouds parted every so often to reveal the tiered seats and beyond. There were also the impressive and huge cisterns that formerly supplied this impregnable city state with water. Onur gave the historical background and we all enjoyed the site however we preferred.

The evening meal was at an excellent fish restaurant, topped off with Andra's birthday cake.

Day 3 Kemer Valley, Phaselis & Olimpos

Warm morning light and clear skies boded well for the day as we drove along the promenade and directly towards the jagged teeth of the Taurus ridges, following the cliff-hugging coast road, the slopes swathed in pine woods. A side turn took us into a narrow limestone valley, with a fast flowing river, edged with plane trees and higher up woodlands with lots of *Arbutus andrachne*. Stopping a couple of switchbacks higher we took a slow wander down the road, never getting more than two hundred yards there was so much to see. In flowers was



Anemone coronaria

a fine rosette of *Mandragora officinalis* and across the road a colony of *Ophrys climacis*, an endemic orchid. Some huge boulders held our attention for a while, their surface encrusted in moss and various ferns including *Asplenium ceterach*, *Cheilanthes marantiae* and pretty patches of *Polypodium cambricum*. The round leaves of *Umbilicis horizontalis* were mingled with spreading *Selaginella denticulata* and punctuated here and there by *Orchis anatolica* or tufts of narrow leaves *Gagea peduncularis*. Lovely forms of *Cyclamen graecum* grew on the rocks too and on the rocky ground. Also growing in the thick layer of pine needles was *Iris unguicularis* in various shades and we also found *Ophrys fuciflora* and flowering *Orchis anatolica*.

Moving on followed the convoluted coastline some more with a fine view opening out across Phaselis Bay where we stopped for a cave with an interested array of plants. Below was Papaver rhoeas and lots of graceful *Hyparrhenia hirta* (grass), whilst up on the rocks were fine clumps of *Hyoscyamus aureus*, *Anchusa undulata*, shrubs of *Amygdalus graeca*, patches of *Sedum sediforme* and the oak; *Quercus aucheri*. However, perhaps the most special gems were the clumps of soft-leaved *Verbascum spondiotrichum* that hung from the cave walls and roof, a narrow endemic only found in a few valleys in this area. The ancient site of Phaselis was close by and we spent an hour looking around here, Onur providing the background history to the former port and garrison town, set between two bays. Leafy clumps of *Verbascum levanticum* could be seen along with rosettes of *V. chrysochaete*, drifts of white *Bellis annua* and *Anthemis chia*.

The afternoon was spent down on the Adrasan Peninsula, where we first wandered in a stunning patch of (protected) pine woods, the understorey swathed in thousands of *Anemone coronaria* in a wide range of colours from white to pin, mauve, salmon pink or red. Among these were hundreds of *Ophrys fuciflora*, all very fresh and all very varied in pattern and the intensity of the pink in the sepals. Stands of robust *Himantoglossum robertianum* were also common, most sweetly-perfumed and varying from greenish-white to pink. Closer searching also found a few *Anacamptis morio* subsp. *syriaca* and *Ophrys lutea*. It was hard to leave



Ophrys fuciflora

this beautiful place, but more delights were just down the road where an area of rough macchie had big clumps of *Iris unguicularis*, *Lathryus stenophyllus*, *Trifolium chypeatum*, a specimen of *Ophrys argolica* subsp. *lucis* and a huge *Mandragora officinalis*.

There was time for one last stop for the lovely *Erophaca baetica* (syn. *Astragalus lusitanicus*), with fine spikes of ivory flowers. Around these grew *Calycotome villosa*, *Cistus creticus* (with its first bloom) and *Arbutus andrachne* in flower and with well-coloured bark. From here it was down another valley to the pleasant seaside village of Cirali and our comfortable rooms in well planted gardens.

Dinner was beside a roaring fire with some delicious starters and more.

Day 4 Beycik Yaylasi & Cirali

A contrasting day with a wide variety of flora that favoured different geology. Dawn was crisp but quickly warmed with clear skies and sunshine. We climbed up and up from the coast and along a small mountain road, up past the last village of Beycik and into the extensive pinewoods, continuing onto a ridge overlooking the dramatic coastline and entering the cedar belt. Here the woods were dominated by beautiful Cedar of Lebanon (*Cedrus libanii*), the branches clad in blue-green leaves and encrusted with grey lichens. Beneath them were thousands of cerise *Cyclamen alpinum* in pretty drifts and patches, many wedged in rocks and all in perfect flower. With them was the sapphire of *Scilla bifolia* and some flowering *Lamium garganicum* including one sprouting from a mossy boulder. It was a gorgeous scene, the cedars, the cyclamen and the fine mountain scenery. Tearing ourselves away we drove a little further and stopped in an area where the grassy flats were peppered with golden *Crocus sarichinensis*. The reverse of some specimens was a rich chestnut-brown, other a subtle fawn. Diminutive *Crocus danfordiae* in both white, lilac and yellow colour forms. *Ornithogalum oligophyllum* was also found and generously sprinkled among the rocks and on the



Galanthus elwesii

cliffs and slope across the stream were countless *Galanthus elwesii*, more crocus and *Corydalis wendelboi*.

The road then continued a little higher, the driver skilfully negotiating the tricky track and bringing us down to stream. The adjacent slopes was wet and had many *Romulea bulbocodium* var. *crocea* and *Ornithogalum lanceolatum*. On the opposite side we crossed a field then continued up a rocky slopes with lots of big mounds of *Astragalus angustifolius* and *Acantholimon acerosum*. Reaching an area of cliffs we could immediately see they were dressed in a frosting of many hundreds of *Galanthus elwesii*, with perfect clumps and pretty drifts decorating the rocks. *Colchicum szovitsii* and more *Crocus danfordiae* were on flatter ground, but the snowdrops were the stars, briefly usurped by a fine clump of *Eranthis hyemalis*. It was a perfect spot with countless flowers and a wonderful rugged backdrop of forested hills. A fine place for lunch, though we did opt to pack fast at the sight of fast approaching grey clouds.

No matter the plan had been to head back to the coast in the afternoon so that's what we did, driving straight back down all the way to Cirali and stopping at the base of a serpentine slope, the rocks a very different rusty-brown, the ones decidedly stunted and the macchie sparse and scattered. This rock type is harsh and many plants are tied to and specialised to live on it. We quickly found the fragrant spikes of white (to mauve) *Muscari racemosa*. Ironically, the lovely bulb grows on both serpentine and limestone equally happily! More specialised was *Anacamptis collina* and *Phlomis chimera*. The rocky slopes also had flowering honey-scented *Euphorbia hieroscolymitana*, spiny *Genista acanthoclada* and a large-flowered buttercup; *Ranunculus millefolia*. Then just as we about to leave Tony found the tiny but delightful adder's-tongue fern; *Ophioglossum lusitanicum* growing almost invisibly among the short sward.

Day 5 Arykanda, Avlan Lake & Myra

Some of the group took early morning strolls along the beach to see the sun rise and clear skies promised another enjoyable, sunny day in the Taurus mountains. Leaving the very pleasant surrounds of our hotel we drove west,



Euphorbia rigida

gaining some fine views of the main ridge of Bey Daglari including the peak Kizlarsivrisi, which at 3086 is the highest point in the western Taurus. We could also see the vast sea of plastic greenhouses that completely filled the bay! Our route climbed again into the foothills until we followed a narrow road to the wonderful historical site of Arykanda. A large site it spanned an area of slopes and pine woods and the ground was illuminated with bold clumps of *Euphorbia rigida* in perfect flower. Kruper's Nuthatch was found almost as soon as we got there too. A hour or so was spent exploring the various buildings, the Roman baths and then higher up, the fine theatre with a large pine tree growing from the upper tiers. Attractive, silken-grey tufts of *Ajuga bombycina* grew in crevices as well as the daisies *Calendula arvensis* and *Hedypnois cretica* and lots of *Gagea villosa*. A group photo was called for and then we descended as crag martins swirled around the cliffs above.

A very special plant awaited higher up, so we continued to the wide expanse of Avlan Golu (lake), the southern shore hemmed in by mountain slopes swathed in Cedar of Lebanon forests. Here among the rocks and scree that spread beneath the trees were the lovely ice-blue goblets of *Crocus baytopiorum*. They grew near a few elegantly striped *C. lyciotaureicus* and also running through the scree was *Cyclamen alpinum*. There was bird life on the lake too with; ruddy shelduck, grey heron, great egret and a passing marsh harrier.

Descending to the coast once again, we followed the winding road down through the forest clad hills and limestone gorges, then continued along an even more sinuous road along a lovely stretch of coast with lots of little bays that looked inviting for a swim. Nestled against the hills was the remarkable site of Myra; a Lycian site with some impressive burial tombs carved directly into the cliffs. First though, we looked at the theatre where pretty *Cymbalaria microcalyx* was filling the joints in the stone blocks together with some more cute tufts of *Ajuga bombycina*. Robust stems of *Ricinus communis* bore fresh, curious rather than beautiful, flowers and their characteristic large handsome foliage looked good against the warm stone of the theatre walls. A rock nuthatch was perched on a shrub near its mud nest that was wedged into a tomb roof and black redstart chased about the rocks.

The was one final treat in store to round off the day. Climbing above Myra



Crocus baytopiorum

we rounded a curve and there on the roadside terraces was a fabulous display of multi-coloured *Anemone coronaria*. Had there been a window Julia would have jumped out of the bus to get to them before we'd even stopped! The terraces also had a fine display of *Asphodelus aestivus* in full flower, big plants of *Euphorbia characias* and then beneath the leafless spreading boughs of old *Quercus ithaburensis* subsp. *macrolepis* trees we found a flowering *Aristolochia hirta*. The trees were interesting too, with many outsize cupules lying on the ground, each a confusion of thick corky flakes. There was nothing left but the final half hour drive in soft late-afternoon light to our hotel down near the sea, followed by a very good dinner.

Day 6 Ak Dagı & Asas Dagı

A clear but silvered sky was laced with light clouds, casting a somewhat ethereal light on the landscape. The plan had been to drive straight onto Ak Dagı but as is the way with these trips, fate intervened and a short stop for lovely flowering bushes of *Daphne sericea* and accompanying *Iris unguicularis* became something much more. Julia found the first orchid, the first of very many covering six taxa. This one was *Ophrys iricolor*, a distinctive species with a large red-brown lip. There quickly followed the smaller, but similar, *O. fusca*, *O. lutea* and then the stunning *O. speculum* with shining blue lip. All very good and we began to board the vehicles when the cry went up that bigger and better was just over the hill. And so it was with a superb multi-spiked *Ophrys speculum* in perfect flower, as well as patches of *O. fusca* and more and larger *O. iricolor*. The added bonus of two subspecies of *Ophrys omegifera*; *fleischmannii* and *israelitica* completed the set.

The road climbed up into fine tracts of cedar forests, winding through the hills with big views of the snowy ramparts of Ak Dagı mountain. A stop at a pass to photograph this between ancient junipers also produced *Anemone blanda* and *Aubrieta deltoidea*. The town of Gombe could also be seen, the streets and fields edged with hundreds of ghostly narrow poplar trees. Our route up passed through all of this, climbing past stands of *Salix caprea* bursting into flower and then bare banks sprinkled with golden *Tussilago farfara*, with *Cyclamen alpinum* ringing the bases of the trees above. A dirt track led across the slope beneath the high mountain ridge and we very soon



Ophrys speculum

found our first lovely Ak Dagı variant of *Crocus lyciotaureicus*, which came in such an array of forms from pure white to purple-striped lilac with everything in between (though mainly white). With these were a good number of *Colchicum triphyllum*. A wonderful display of clumps and drifts of gorgeous crocuses, glowing with backlight, lined the track and bare ground all the way to the green waters of Yesil Gol lake.

Our orchid stop earlier on had set us back a bit time wise so now we had to drive directly to our last location, traversing a road across another series of forested valleys and rugged hills that wound its way eventually to an area of fields within the cedar forest below Asas Dagı. There was a cold wind when we stepped out of the vehicles, which meant sadly, the *Crocus brickellii* we found were closed up, but that at least clearly showed the soft grey reverse to the tepals. Further along the track an area of damp pasture had a drift of *Colchicum szovitsii*, with several flowers wedged into each big leafy clump. The cool conditions had us moving back to the vehicle quickly enough. It didn't prevent a last minute stop for *Clematis cirrhosa* though, with flowery stems draped over roadside trees. The road reached the coast with a grand view of the sea and the large Greek island of Castellorizo and we descended past big bushes of *Euphorbia dendroides* to the hotel where hot tea was waiting for us when we arrived.

Day 7 Xanthos & Baba Dagı

The last botanical field day began with a stop just outside Kas where the big, spreading domes of *Euphorbia dendriodes* were in full flower with a wonderful coastal backdrop. Alongside these were *Teucrium fruticans*, *Ptilostemon chamaepeuce*, pretty pink forms of *Ricotia sinuata*, *Convolvulus siculus* and *Galium canum*. The scenic coastline continued for a while as we drove on, turing inland after a while and stopping at the historical site of Xanthos. Onur told us about the key points of the former capital of Lycia and female blue rock thrush perched on the ruins. Not far away we couldn't resist stopping for a a beguiling display of countless *Anemone coronaria* of all colours.

It seemed as though the sun would shine all day, but the forecast had



Crocus lyciotaureicus

been for something wetter. It still seemed unlikely, but by the time we had reached Sidyma for lunch the clouds were building. Whilst Basak prepared lunch we all had a look around the village where various features such as temples and sarcophaguses were scattered about the fields, quite literally history at the bottom of the garden. There were plants too with stands of leafy *Smyrniium olusatrum* and a number of *Leontice leontopetalum* in the fields with *Ornithogalum umbellatum* and both *Bellevalia trifoliata* and more slender *B. clusiana*. A local lady came to sell honey, jam and scarves she had made as well as preparing some tea. Nearing the end of lunch the rain began and we swiftly packed up. the sunny skies had turned to thunderstorms and this prevented us using a short cut onto Baba Dagı. We had little choice but to go the longer route, eventually wending our way up to the elevation of cedars once again and driving through a layer of hail ice that had just come down. No matter, this had stopped by the time we reached a thriving colony of lovely, crisp white *Sternbergia candida* (an endemic to this one mountain). A fine finale, embellished further by the moody atmosphere and sprinkled of rich blue *Scilla forbesii*. Then to top everything off, Basak saw the delicate yellow bells of *Fritillaria forbesii* as we descended to underline a very productive botanical week.

The final group meal was in a local fish restaurant, a delicious end.

Day 8 Flights to Istanbul

The floral (and avian) delights of Lycia were left behind. A short flight took us to the bustling entrepot of Istanbul and four days of cultural touring with Basak and Onur. Chris flew off to Malaga, Spain in search of narcissi and rioja.



Sternbergia candida



viranatura tours



For information on our tours
please contact

info@viranatura.com