

# LYCIA WALKING WITH FLOWERS TRIP REPORT 2024

viranatura   
tours





## Day 1                      28 March      Antalya to Üçağız

Kerem and I met up with the group at the Antalya hotel and after enjoying a cup of coffee together, we began our journey along the coast towards Üçağız. About half an hour's drive southwest of Antalya, we made a stop at an area where serpentine meets limestone, creating a semi-open cave with a view overlooking Phaselis Bay. There was a surprising variety of plants growing in this unique environment; some, endemic *Verbascum spodiotrichum*, preferred to hang down from the rocks with velvety leaves, while others, like *Hyascyamus aureus* and *Onosma strigossisima*, thrived on the serpentine rocks. The roadsides were also full of colour, with *Phlomis lycica*, *Papaver rhoeas*, and *Securigera parviflora*.

Our next stop was the Phaselis ancient site, but before reaching the ruins, we took some time to explore the surrounding area. The forest floor was covered with *Cyclamen graecum* leaves of various patterns, and we spotted hairy spikes of *Ajuga orientalis* with tiny blue flowers. As we approached the ancient city, a little stream welcomed us, home to a variety of birds, including a kingfisher, which was a highlight for us. Despite dubious efforts to keep the site clear of weeds, we still managed to find *Lupinus angustifolius* and even spotted a Lang's Short-tailed Blue butterfly resting on it. As Kerem led the group on a walk, explaining the history of the area, Başak prepared lunch for us, and soon enough, we were ready to continue our journey.

A side road towards the sea revealed more plant treasures with showy *Astragalus lusitanicus*, golden *Phlomis bourgaei*, and Başak's favourite, striking red-and-yellow *Lathyrus belinensis*. We were delighted to find a field full of orchids, including *Ophrys fuciflora*, *O. umbilicata*, *Anacamptis morio* subsp. *syriaca*, and *Himantoglossum robertianum*, with the highlight being a monkey orchid; *Orchis simia*, which Kerem spotted. We even had the pleasure of watching a Kruper's Nuthatch in the pines.

We reached our family-run pension in Üçağız, next to the sunken city of Kekova. A plant checklist followed by a good dinner provided the perfect end to our first day.



*Lathyrus belinensis*



## Day 2      29 March      Aperlai walk

As the morning sun ushered in a new day, we gathered for a filling breakfast at our hotel. With spirits high and packed lunches ready, we set out towards Aperlai beginning at a leisurely pace as we took the time to photograph the various of plants that lined our path with the rare *Senecio elata*, *Ornithogalum narbonense*, the fresh golden blooms of *Helichrysum stoechas*, and the pretty pink *Gladiolus anatolicus* catching our eye. The bubbling calls of Yellow-vented Bulbuls and melodious Orphean Warblers filled the air, enhancing the first half of our walk, whilst a Blue Rock Thrush posed elegantly for our cameras. The trail continued along the coastline before veering inland through old, uninhabited settlements and verdant olive groves. Underneath the olive trees, we found the unusual stinging nettle; *Urtica pilulifera* and the delicate white blooms of *Gagea graeca*. The area was botanically-rich especially in the pea family with various clovers; *Trifolium tomentosum*, *resupinatum*, *stellatum* and *campestre* and *Medicago orbicularis*, *disciformis* and *minima*.

Approaching lunchtime, our path flattened, and we then found a fine *Quercus aucheri* (an evergreen oak with white undersides to the leaves). A change in habitat brought new bird sightings too, including Woodchat Shrike and Black Redstart. The morning's trek concluded by the sea, where we sat and enjoyed our packed lunches at a quaint café frequented by fellow travellers of the Lycian Way. Post-lunch, while Chris opted for a refreshing swim, others ventured further to explore the ruins of Aperlai and our short walk was rewarded with sightings of Black-eared Wheatears and several Hoopoes. Near the ruins, we discovered *Orobancha crenulate* too and Kerem, explained the history of Aperlai, once a major supplier of the shells used in royal purple dye.

We then took a boat to the sunken city of Kekova, which began its slow submersion beneath the Mediterranean Sea following a significant earthquake in the 6th century. Sailing through crystal-clear waters, we viewed ancient ruins along the island's edges





and submerged walls that hinted at the former bustling (and drier) past life. The journey back to the mainland included a stop at Simena and the chance visit Simena castle. The area was dotted with impressive sarcophagi and ancient olive trees against a picturesque coastal backdrop. It was the perfect spot for a group photo.

**Day 3: 30 March Andriake and Return to Üçağız**

Our third day started with a scenic drive to Andriake, an ancient Lycian port near Myra. As is often the case with ancient sites, the ruins had a diverse flora including various ferns and small plants. The newly established museum at Andriake, set beside a thriving wetland (home to many birds), provided fascinating insights into Lycian civilization through well-preserved artefacts.

On through the beautiful landscapes we reached Kapaklı village where a tasty lunch of traditional gözleme awaited us in a pleasant garden setting. The coastal path took us back with multiple stops for photographing the plants such as *Gladiolus anatolicus*, *Arenaria deflexa* and the striking aroid; *Dracunculus vulgaris*.

There was freshly squeezed orange juice and another superb dinner back at our pension.

**Day 4: 31 March Gelidonya Lighthouse to Adrasan**

The transition from macchie (maquis) to Mediterranean pine forest added a new layer to our botanical exploration. The roadside was a brimming with colour with various species of flowers as we drove towards Gelidonya Lighthouse. Our path through the forest was punctuated by scarlet *Papaver dubium* (as well an albino form), *Pisum sativum*, *Malva cretica*, bushy *Psilostemon chamaepeuce* and fragrant orchid; *Anacamptis coriophora*.

Lunch at the lighthouse offered not just food but panoramic views of the Mediterranean. Afterwards, our trek continued to Karaöz Bay, seeing a fine group of *Fritillaria acmopetala* on the way. Before reaching our hotel, we stopped to admire a hillside dotted with *Tulipa orphanidea*,



*Dracunculus vulgaris*



their bright red blooms contrasting beautifully against the earthy browns of the terrain. This stunning display was enhanced by the soft glow of the setting sun, allowing us to capture some arty backlit photographs. A few specimens of *Neotinea maculata* was a further bonus and nice conclusion to our day's botanical explorations.

The serene beach setting providing a perfect backdrop for a relaxing dinner.

#### **Day 5: April 1 - From Adrasan to Olympos and Çıralı**

For the tour's longest walk, we started early at 8:00 am to avoid the midday heat. While some members opted for a more leisurely day and were transferred to our next stop in Çıralı to enjoy the beach and explore the town, the rest of us were eager to begin our hike.

Our route began gently enough through gardens of fruit trees, gradually ascending as we entered the forest. Here, we found numerous *Orchis anatolica* and the occasional sombre *Fritillaria asumaniae*, still in bloom. The forest was filled with ancient pines and understory shrubs such as *Styrax officinalis* and *Cistus salvifolius* and *Coronilla emerus*. A charming highlight was watching a Coal Tit busily constructing its nest.

By lunchtime, having completed most of the climb, we reached a small café nestled among beautiful meadows and offering a refreshing breeze. It served delicious gözleme and freshly squeezed orange and pomegranate juices, which were just what was needed. We spent time in the meadows photographing the elegant bells of *Fritillaria acmopetala*, various colours of *Anemone coronaria*, yellow *Ophrys lutea*, and the striking intense red of *Ranunculus asiaticus*.

The descent back down to the coast was challenging yet rewarding, with discoveries like the lovely *Ophrys reinholdii* (one of the finest of all bee orchids), lilac *Iris unguicularis*, and the impressive warm-toned bark of giant *Arbutus andrachne* trees.





The trail led us to the renovated ancient site of Olympos, where ongoing excavation funded by the tourism ministry has brought fresh insight into the lives of the people who once lived here. After refreshments, we briefly explored the ruins and decided to return the next day with the entire group for a more relaxed viewing.

The day concluded with dinner at a seaside restaurant, where we reviewed our sightings and discussed the plan for the days ahead.

#### **Day 6: April 2 - Olympos, Boncuklu Bay and Chiemera**

As our tour neared its conclusion, we started another day with a big breakfast at our hotel before heading back to Olympos with the entire group. The journey began with a leisurely beach walk, during which our guide, Kerem, regaled us with tales of the various civilizations that had thrived in Olympos. The slender *Coluber najadum* snake on the walls of the bishop's house which Katrin spotted added a little thrill to our morning. A group photo was taken in front of the grand temple gate, after which we crossed a small river to explore ancient structures like the theatre and the baths, encountering pretty pink *Papaver gracile*. After spending almost three hours among the ruins, we retreated to a nearby cafe for lunch and more refreshing orange juice.

The afternoon's walk took us through a markedly different habitat, with some impressive *Pinus pinaster* (planted near the beach) as well as some very old native *Pinus brutia* trees and a serpentine hillside blanketed with various species of yellow flowering plants, including different *Alyssum*, *Hypericum montbretii*, *Stachys libanotina*, *Helichrysum stoechas* and *Phlomis chimerae*. The rusty soil contrasted strikingly with the silver-leaved *Inula heterolepis* and *Verbascum* sp, with *Euphorbia helioscopia* and *Lavandula stoechas* drawing numerous bees. We postponed photographing the *Asphodeline brevicaulis* until our return, anticipating their late afternoon flower opening. Upon reaching the black-sand bay, the allure of the bright blue sea was irresistible after our sweaty hike, prompting most of us to dive in. While some opted for a civilized boat ride back to the hotel, others walked and captured images of *Asphodeline brevicaulis* in full bloom. Regardless of the route, we all arrived back at the hotel at the same time.



*Ranunculus asiaticus*



Refreshed, we gathered for dinner, after which the day concluded with a mysterious evening walk to the eternal flames of the Chimaera, which have burned ceaselessly for millennia.

### Day 7: April 3 - Beycik and Culinary Delights

Today, we ventured up to the enchanting cedar forests on the slopes of Tahtalı Mountain, a refreshing change from our sea-level explorations. After breakfast, we drove to the small village of Beycik, spread out at altitudes of 600 to 1000 meters. Our first discovery was several flowery specimens of *Iris unguicularis* just above the village, a sight we had missed near the sea due to the early season. As we ascended, the landscape transitioned from pines to majestic cedar trees (and junipers), under which we found a diverse understory. Notable finds included the pale pink flowers of *Cyanus bourgei* on roadside rocks and the widespread *Doronicum orientale*. We also encountered the last blooms of *Cyclamen alpinum*, alongside the endemic *Veronica lycica*, tiny *Viola heldreichiana*, *Cardamine graeca*, and *Lamium garganicum*. The forest was alive with the sounds of Krüper's Nuthatch, Goldcrests, Serins, and Greenfinches, adding a musical accompaniment to our peaceful walk.

Further up the road, we stopped to admire the bright yellow blooms of *Asphodeline lutea* and more subtle *Alkanna tubulosa*, thriving in the sunny yaylas. The higher pastures were a tapestry of flowering *Prunus* trees, creating a striking contrast to the junipers and cedars. Our final botanical highlights were the yellow bells of *Fritillaria carica*, nestled near mats mauve *Aubrieta deltoidea*, the white stars of *Ornithogalum lanceolatum* and yellow *Romulea bulbocodium* subsp. *croeca* in the flat areas.

As noon approached, we returned to the village for a communal cooking session. Hilal greeted us with tea and cookies, setting the stage for a group effort in meal preparation, accompanied by Kerem's guitar melodies. We enjoyed our lunch under olive trees, the steep slopes of Tahtali Dagı providing a perfect and dramatic mountain backdrop.

Back at the hotel, we concluded the day with a final checklist, enjoying some wine, beer and chips, reflecting on the beauty of the cedar forests.

### Day 8: 4 April - Departure

Our botanical journey concluded with heartfelt goodbyes and promises of future adventures. The group departed from Antalya, enriched by a week of beautiful landscapes and flowers intermingled with standout historical insights and an overall deeper appreciation of Turkey's natural and cultural heritage.

*Papaver gracile*







*Happy group*



