

MAGNIFICENT MEADOWS



Campanula latifolia



Psephellus appendicigerus



Papaver lateritium

As we reach the beginning of August, much of flora in Turkey has run its course. The place that bucks the trend is the north-eastern Karadeniz Daglari (Black Sea Mountains) or Kackar, which remains verdant and flowery well into August. In fact the wettest month is July and vast swathes of tall meadows are pushed on to greater heights. Many of the lower areas will have already been cut for hay, with the harvest moving slowly uphill. The majority of the hay is still cut with hand scythes - the slopes are too steep to use anything else. What's more, no fertilizers are used on the land so the grassland flora is diverse and vibrant. And, if butterflies are your thing this is also the richest part of Turkey for these too.

The flora is a complete contrast to the Mediterranean, with few elements in common. Here there is strong influence of Euxine or northern European flowers and the Karadeniz shares a great number of species with the neighbouring Caucasus and the Caspian slopes of the Iranian Alborz Mountains. Typical tall meadows plants at this time include many bellflowers with *Campanula latifolia* and obvious example, but there is a tremendous variety of *Campanula* here, from more alpine *C. tridentata*



Aquilegia olympica



Meadow



Anzer Valley



Campanula tridentata



Campanula alliarifolia

with its outside blue bells to the graceful spires of *C. alliarifolia*. Joining them are staples such as *Stachys macrantha*, a near ubiquitous, showy herb that mingles with *Polygonum bistorta*, the big daisy flowers of *Anthemis melanoloma*, the gorgeous nodding blue-and-white *Aquilegia olympica*, deep pink *Geranium psilostemon* and many species of *Centaurea* and closely related *Psephellus*.

Our personal favourite species of the latter genus is *Psephellus appendicigerus*, a wonderful shorter species with large creamy flowers that pokes out from crevices and rocky spots, especially around Ovit Dag. Winding up to the pass here you can't miss the big orange saucers of *Papaver lateritium*, sometimes alongside that most outrageous sea holly, *Eryngium giganteum* with its fantastic big silver ruffs and stout 'cones'. It is the forerunner to the garden favourite 'Mrs Wilmott's Ghost'.

The neighbouring valley is Anzer, location of world famous (and expensive) honey and it's no surprise why it's so good when you see how many flowers are growing up here. The meadows are some of the best packed with *Campanula lactiflora*, *Centaurea helenoides* and stands of the impressive *Delphinium formosum*. The rough road allows access to nearly three thousand metres where screes might still have some *Corydalis alpestris* in



Stachys macrantha



Polygonum bistorta



Delphinium formosum



Eryngium giganteum

flower. Anzer is wonderful at anytime from May to August, with many spring bulbs as the snow melts, followed a succession of fine plants. The landscape is not bad either, climbing up through meadows, spruce forests and rhododendron dells.

However, all of this lushness quickly recedes once we pass onto the drier inland slopes of the mountains where we see a return of steppic and Mediterranean-type plants. Earlier in June and July there are many verbascums, huge scarlet bowls of *Papaver pseudo-orientale*, hollyhocks and pinks. Now we find tumbling masses of *Origanum rotundifolium*, a rather fun aromatic herb with showy creamy bracts, from between which poke out pale lilac flowers. This genus excels at these peculiar designs with several similar species found in Turkey, especially in the Taurus Mountains and I'll finish with a final Mediterranean flourish, having managed to catch up with delicate *Origanum solymicum*, a narrow endemic, whose limited area of distribution includes the woods around my house. Poised on a steep slope before sunrise it took me nearly two hours to photograph it well, waiting for the soft first light on a breezy morning. Such dainty flowers quiver and wobble in the slightest air current and having skipped breakfast, I was hungry enough to have eaten them all at the end of it!



Origanum rotundifolium



Origanum solymicum