

viranatura
tours

NORTHERN
GREECE
2026

Anemone coronaria

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Day 1 25th April.

We arrived at Athens airport from our different destinations, picked up our vehicles and made our way towards Delphi and Mount Parnassos. The weather was fine and we could see that spring was already advanced in the lowlands. There were fields of red poppies, *Papaver rhoeas* among the general vegetation, patches of bright yellow *Isatis tinctoria*, *Asphodeline lutea* and other plants as we drove along the highway.

We arrived at our welcoming hotel at the foot of Mount Parnassos and soon after went out to explore the hillside opposite the hotel. Almost straight away we found some of our target plants. There were still good patches of *Iris attica* in both colour forms and we also found our first orchids in *Ophrys tenthredinifera* and *Ophrys lutea*. There was much *Aethionema saxatile*, *Thlaspi ochroleucum* and beautiful *Lathyrus digitatus*. We also found one plant of *Bellevalia ciliata*, some *Anemone blanda* and *Polygala nicaeensis*.

Day 2 26th April. Parnassos

It was only a short drive to the botanically rich Mount Parnassos near the melting snow. Our first stop was at a long meadow, which we started to explore. We found *Ranunculus millefoliatus*, *Helleborus odoratus* subsp. *cyclophyllus*, *Lamium garganicum*, *Anemone blanda*, *Corydalis solida* and *C. cava* growing close together. *Malcolmia orsiniana* subsp. *angulifolia* was growing on the vertical cliffs. Red admirals were about and we saw Orphean warbler and Coal tits.

We then drove through the *Abies cephalonica* forest towards the ski centre. At our two next stops we saw wonderful displays of *Anemone blanda* and *Scilla bifolia* of the deepest blue, *Crocus sieberi*, *Muscari botryoides* and *Ornithogalum oligophyllum*.

We then drove downhill to our picnic spot, a meadow full of wonderful plants. As we drove way we found large flowered *Viola graeca* growing by the side of the road and had to stop again for photographs. We continued downhill, soon leaving the alpine and entering the Mediterranean zone. Our next stop was at a meadow ablaze with bright red *Anemone pavonina*. One specimen



of *Orchis mascula* was also found, just starting to flower. We then continued and stopped at a junction and then walked along a dirt track full of Mediterranean plants now. There was Kermes Oak, *Quercus coccifera*, *Phlomis fruticosa*, *Vicia cracca* and much *Onosma frutescens* in flower. There was also *Anchusa cretica*, *Scabiosa integrifolia* and both *Campanula spatulata* subsp. *spruneriana* and *C. ramosissima*. We saw more butterflies at this level now. There was Brimstone, Wall and Clouded Yellow.

Day 3 27th April. Delphi

In ancient Greek times Delphi was the seat of Pythia, the major oracle who was consulted about important decisions throughout the ancient classical world. It was considered the centre of the world, marked by the stone monument known as the Omphalos of Delphi. Delphi is well worth exploring, not only for its rich history, but also for some interesting flora. From our hotel we drove directly there and entered the site. We could see straight away that the walls were festooned with blue *Campanula topaliana* subsp. *delphica*. We walked round the site, looking at the impressive remains and also the plants on the walls. There was also bright yellow *Alkanna graeca* growing with the campanula. Our meandering took up most of the morning. We then assembled and headed off outside Delphi where we found our picnic spot. Whilst Basak was preparing lunch the group looked for and eventually found *Daphne jasminoides* growing on the rocks. There was much in flower in this Mediterranean habitat from *Cistus creticus*, *Silene colorata*, *Fumana arabica*, *Verbascum undulatum*, *Papaver rhoeas*, *Phlomis fruticosa* and others. After a most delicious picnic we continued our exploration, finding our first orchid for the day, *Ophrys ferrum-equinum*. Scarce Swallowtail and Bath Whites were on the wing.

We then boarded our vehicles and headed back towards Delphi, stopping to search another site. More species of orchid were found in *Ophrys argolica*, *Ophrys spruneri* and one specimen



Campanula topaliana

of *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. We then continued through Delphi and climbed higher towards Parnassos, grateful for the cooler weather. We looked for and found *Prunus prostrata*. The fields were awash with Anthemis and other colourful annuals and perennials, including *Anchusa undulata* subsp. *hybrida* and *Jurinea mollis* in bud. We continued a short distance up the road and started to explore the steep hillside. There was *Leopoldia comosa* and *Papaver apulum* in flower. We then came across swathes of orchids. There were masses of *Ophrys aesculapii* with *O. ferrum-equinum*, *O. spruneri* and *Ophrys argolica*. Eventually we found a perfect specimen of *Ophrys delphinensis*, one of our target species for today. As we were leaving the hillside some were lucky to photograph a specimen of Southern Festoon.

Day 4 28th April To Meteora

We set off northwards today on our next destination. The roadsides were swathed in colourful flowers, especially *Phlomis fruticosa*, *Verbascum undulatum*, red and orange poppies. Our first stop was in a field to see *Serapias vomeracea*, but other plants were also seen. There was *Anacamptis laxiflora*, *Ophrys mammosa*, *Parentucellia viscosa* and *Ranunculus neapolitanus*. Glanville fritillaries were common in the field. We continued on our way, stopping at the roadside to see *Iris hellenica* but also seeing *Orobancha pubescens*, *Orchis italica*, *Silene gigantea*, *Coronilla emerus* and *Petrorrhagia dubia*.

We continued our way northwards on the highway, reaching Meteora after lunch. We made our picnic in a meadow and then explored the area. We found *Aristolochia rotunda*, *Ajuga chamaepitys*, *Serapias politisii*, *Ophrys apifera*, *O. scolopax*, *O. reinholdii*, *Anacamptis morio* and *A. papilionacea*. Small Copper, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Glanville Fritillary, Clouded Yellow and other butterflies were on the wing. We also saw an Owl-fly *Libelloides macaronius*. A nightingale was continuously singing whilst we were there.

After lunch we drove towards the spectacular rock formations of Meteora to take out photographs. New plants such as *Papaver apulum*, *Linaria pelisseriana* and *Acinos suaveolens* were also seen.



Ophrys ferrum-equinum

Day 5 29th April. Meteora and to Katara Pass

An early start for Basak and the guests to see the sunrise over the iconic rocks. A return for breakfast and then a drive to the small monastery of St Nicholas to see the famous wall paintings. After that we set off towards Metsovo, making a road side stop to see *Carduus nutans*, *Linaria sp.* *Reseda alba* and *Acinos alpinus*.

We followed a secondary road until we reached Anilio and made our second stop. The slope was covered with *Primula veris*, *Ranunculus millefoliatus*, *Dactylorhiza sambucina* and a few plants of *Saxifraga rotundifolia*.

We continued higher to the ski centre where we searched and found *Crocus veluchensis*. The landscape was painted a vivid green colour due to the emerging beech leaves.

We then drove through Metsovo and climbed higher up above the village. Our lunch spot was a meadow full of *Ranunculus sprunerianus*. A few *Anacamptis morio* and *Narcissus poeticus* were found. We then took the road towards the Katara pass, stopping to see and smell the wonderful *Daphne blagayana*.

Our next stop was the Katara pass where we looked for *Fritillaria epirotica*, eventually finding the tiny plants, as well as *Tulipa australis* in bud. We made another stop to photograph the wonderful roadside display of *Scilla bifolia* growing with *Crocus veluchensis* and *Corydalis solida*. Our last stop was near Metsovo where we saw a wonderful population of *Fritillaria graeca* subsp. *thessala* in perfect flower. We checked into our hotel in Metsovo and later walked down to the square for an excellent evening meal.

Day 6 30th April. Aaos Lake

After a most extraordinary breakfast of many greek pies and cakes we set off to explore the Aaos Lake area. Our first stop was above



Metsovo to see a slope full of *Primula vulgaris*, including a *P. veris* hybrid. We then continued down to the lake and drove round, stopping at places to see plants. We found *Ajuga reptans*, *Dactylorhiza sambucina* in its two colours, *Orchis mascula* in profusion in many places, *Alkanna pindicola*, *Aremonia agrimonoides*, *Cruciata laevipes*, *Polygala nicaeensis*, *Ophrys zeusi*, *Chamaecytisus supinus*, *Fritillaria graeca* subsp. *thessala*, *F. montana*, *Genista lydia* and *Ophrys sicula*.

The fine weather we had been having finally broke and we returned to our hotel in the late afternoon with light rain. We walked to our restaurant later in the evening to sample the local dishes.

Day 7 1st May. To Papigo

Transfer to Papigo today with stops to see plants. The habitat we traveled across was mostly Mediterranean. Plants we saw on the various stops include *Saponaria calabrica* which was painting the hillsides red, *Crupina crupinastrum*, *Anthyllis vulneraria*, *Ajuga chamaepitys*, *Lysimachia atropurpurea*, *Silene italica*, *Silene atropurpurea*, a number of oaks which included *Quercus coccifera*, *Q. pubescens*, *Q. frainetto*, *Q. trojana* and *Lithospermum purpurocaeruleum*. The profusion of orchids was quite amazing with drifts of *Anacamptis morio* almost everywhere by the roadsides and masses of other orchids in the fields. We also saw *Orchis purpurea*, *Orchis laxiflora*, *Orchis mascula*, *Orchis simia*, *O. spitzelii*, *Orchis tridentata*, the hybrid between *O. purpurea* and *O. simia*, the wonderful *Ophrys helenae* as well as the last flowers of *Ophrys grammica*.

As we approached the Zagori area we came across a couple of the amazing arched bridges for which the region is famous. Papigo is a wonderful village of traditional architecture and our hotel is most welcoming.

Day 8 2nd of May Excursion from Papigo-Bourazani

Today we explored the lower reaches of the Voidomatis, a tributary of the Aoös river. Our first stop was at the eponymous bridge spanning the



Narcissus poeticus

river. We crossed over the other side of the river, over the old bridge and started to explore the rocks near the vertical cliffs. We soon found our target plant, *Ramonda serbica* in good flower. It is a rare European member of the Gesneriaceae, a mostly tropical family. We also saw *Centaurea deustiformis*, *Silene italica*, *Silene alba*, *Silene ungeri*, *Scrophularia peregrina*, *Saxifraga rotundifolia* and in a nearby meadow, *Verbascum phoeniceum* subsp. *flavidum*, *Anemone pavonina*, *Orlaya grandiflora*, *Papaver apulum*, *Tordylium apulum* and *Lithospermum purpureocaeruleum*. We also photographed Grecian Copper, Green-underside Blue, Speckled Wood and Clouded Yellow. Barn, Red-rumped Swallows and House and Crag Martins were flying overhead.

We then boarded our vehicles and continued our journey. A meadow full of pink *Crepis rubra* bade us to stop and explore. We also saw *Anacamptis pyramidalis* and a new orchid *Neotinea ustulata* as well as *Hypericum olympicum*. Large Wall was on the wing and obliged us with photographs, as well as a new Owl fly. We continued on our journey, taking a dirt road where we soon saw the bright red flowers of *Paeonia peregrina*. They were in peak condition and we spend considerable time photographing them. After lunch we continued to the Albanian border, stopping to see *Campanula ligulata*, *Ajuga chamaepitys* and *Euphorbia seguieriana*.

Day 9 3rd May Vikos Gorge

Our destination today was the spectacular Vikos Gorge reputed to be the deepest in the world and at the centre of a magnificent scenic area. We drove to Monodendri, at the head of the gorge and walked down to the chapel of Agia Paraskevi. We walked along a track on the cliff edge with spectacular views of the gorge. Plants seen on the way included *Geranium macrorrhizum*, *Asphodeline lutea*, *Centaurea deustiformis*, *Iris germanica*, *Isatis tinctoria* and *Ajuga orientalis*.

We then drove to a spot with a wonderful view of Monodendri for our picnic. The woods there held *Cyclamen hederifolium*, *Galanthus reginae-olgae vernalis* and *Asphodeline liburnica*. We also found a couple of perfect specimens of *Orchis mascula*. We continued our journey higher up to the iconic stone towers where we stopped to explore. We found beautifully coloured



Ophrys belenae

Malcomia orsiniana perched on the rocks, *Ramonda serbica*, *Aristolochia pallida*, *Asplenium ceterrach*, *Asplenium trichomanes*, *Lamium garganicum* and a green lizard. The end of the road was not far and from there we had more amazing views of the Vikos gorge. Plants seen here included *Saxifraga rotundifolia*, *Arabis alpina* and *Aubrieta deltoidea*.

We set off on the return journey watching the verges for more plants. Finally *Tulipa australis* was spotted growing on the rocks and we stopped to explore. We also found *Saxifraga hederacea*. Southern Festoon butterflies were in the area and duly photographed. Red Admiral, Small Heath and Wall were also seen during the day.

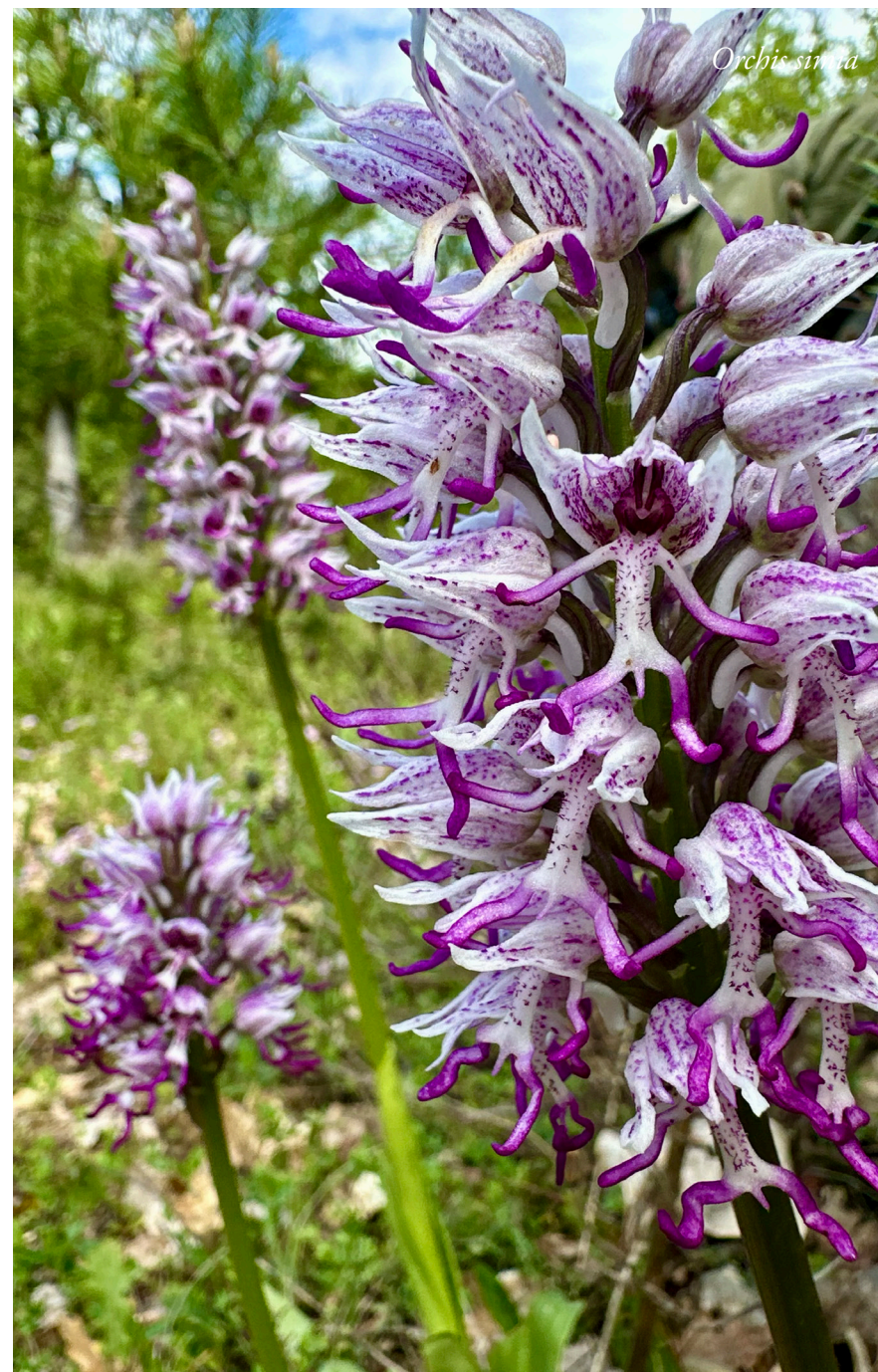
Day 10 4th May To Mount Voras

We left our welcoming hotel and the beautiful village of Papingo and headed south and then east, following the river Voidomatis. The views of the river and the surrounding area were fabulous and we stopped to take photographs and to explore. We found *Scutellaria orientalis*, *Acinos alpinus*, *Hypericum olympicum* and at wet seepage masses of *Pinguicula crystallina*. The serpentine rocks also hosted *Alyssum heldreichii*, *Anthericum liliago* and a pretty cushion-forming Euphorbia, most likely *E. deflexa*. Butterflies seen included Wood White, Green Hairstreak, Brown Argus and Grecian Copper. Lunch was at roadside stop.

Another meadow stop produced *Orchis simia*, *Orchis tridentata*, *Anacamptis morio*, *Anemone pavonina* and *Papaver dubium*. Further on we found both yellow and purple colours of *Iris reichenbachiana*, *Orchis mascula*, *Haplophyllum* sp. *Centaurea pindicola*, *Colutea arborescens* and more *Paeonia peregrina*.

Day 11 5th May Kajmakcalan

Our target area today was the Kajmakcalan (Voras) ski area, but before that we diverted to an area near the village to see *Aristolochia clematitis* and the fabulous *Campanula formanekiana*. We also found *Ramonda nathaliae*. We then continued climbing higher up the mountain, where we could see the snow still lying on the slopes. As we approached the ski area we could see thousands



of Crocus in flower. We disembarked and started to explore. There were amazing displays of *Crocus veluchensis* in perfect flower. Eventually we found equally beautiful displays of the darker *Crocus pelistericus* and the endemic *Ranunculus cacuminis*. *Scilla bifolia* was also coming into flower, colouring patches of ground a deep blue.

After spending a considerable amount of time looking at the displays and taking hundreds of photographs we started on the return journey, stopping to see the endemic violet *Viola voliotisii*, *Corydalis solida* and *Caltha palustris*. We also looked for *Soldanella pindicola* but we realised that it had already flowered.

We continued our journey to Thessaloniki, arriving there in the late afternoon. We had a wonderful dinner at our hotel, where we said our farewells as some had early flights the next day.

Day 12 6th May Flights

Departure flights from Thessaloniki Airport.

Trip report by Yiannis Christofides

Photos by Başak Gardner



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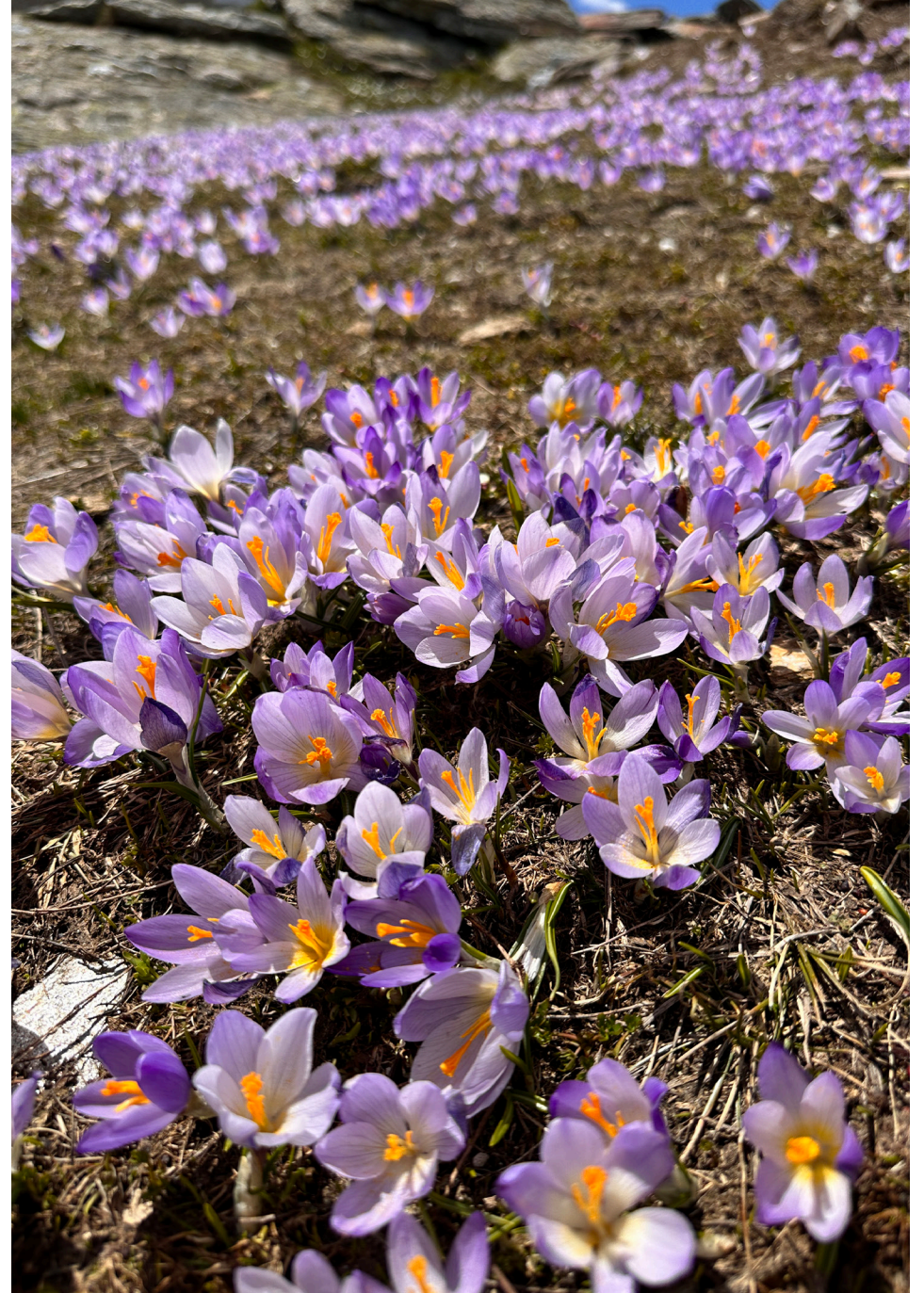
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Campanula formakeniana



Crocus pelisticus



Crocus veluchensis



Crocus veluchensis

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