

THE GOOD, THE BAD & THE UGLY



Euphorbia heiroscolymitanus



Euphorbia heiroscolymitana

Fritillaria asumaniae

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder we are told, and this week's selection has something of everything, but I'll leave you all to decide into what category each belongs. Lycia is renowned for its long-distance walk some of which runs along stunning stretches of pristine coastline to remote beaches. Rocky slopes plunge down into the azure waters and these are clad in a mature and diverse coastal macchie, which includes several endemic species, some confined to just one or two headlands. Many of these are also comprised of serpentine, effectively islands in a 'sea' of limestone. I set off mid-week to try and find one localised species that is only found in a few spots in our area. The walk was wonderful with abundant bushes of honey scented *Euphorbia heiroscolymitana*, and still a few equally fragrant spires of *Muscari racemosa*. It is fair to say that my quarry, *Fritillaria asumaniae* is not the most stunning member of the genus, but interesting nonetheless, the pendant dark flowers painted with ashen bloom and hanging from slender stems and leaves.

My next flower was even moodier, and smellier. Humid banks had the tell-tale leafy tumbles of *Aristolochia hirta*, and searching





Cymbalaria longipes

among them one finds the rather sinister and remarkably designed flowers, with the wide hair-lined 'mouths' leading into deep u-bend tubes. The carrion smell lures flies, the flies enter the flower, but cannot exit because of the stiff backward-pointing hairs. They are forced to spend time in the chamber at the end of the tube, collecting or depositing pollen until the hairs wither and they can crawl out. Their inability to learn from their experience means they do the very same thing in the next fresh flower. The shape of the flower bears some resemblance (at least to our ancestors) to the female womb, and of course a cup of aristolochia-infused tea was thought beneficial to pregnancy and childbirth. In reality it contains the carcinogenic aristolochic acid. So much for the wisdom of the ancients!

From these macabre plants I sped an hour to the historical site of Limyra, but not to see the ruins. Here thrives a strong population of another carrion-scented 'beauty' *Arum dioscorides*. Whether one appreciates the leopard-patterned spathes or not is a matter of personal choice, but regardless they are striking and hard to ignore. All together more delicate on the crumbling



Aristolochia hirta

Arum dioscorides (left)

Ophrys sphegodes subsp. *climacis*



Ophrys fuciflora subsp. *candica*



walls were pretty tufts of *Cymbalaria longipes* wedged into cracks and crevices, the scrambling thin stems with diminutive ivory snapdragons, each little face with golden eyes beneath purple lashes.

The following day Basak and I took a Turkish group out, as part of a plant study workshop and we introduced them to Mediterranean flora. Where better to start than some of the wonderful orchids that are appearing now, including the localised *Ophrys sphegodes* subsp. *climacis*. The best forms of this species have rather lovely gold-rimmed lips, but others completely lack this and there is an obvious variability within them, as is the case with most *Ophrys*. They grew with the widespread *Orchis anatolica*, itself varying from pale to deep pink, but always with cherry spots on the lip. Another location had a fine population of *Ophrys fuciflora* subsp. *candica* or as it is known locally *O. lycensis*. These also varied and I've included two of the best forms here.

It was rewarding to take out local people and show them the local plants, even though it was a bit of shock to actually be working after a year in COVID-19 mothballs.

Orchis anatolica (right)

