

# THE LATE SHOW



*Onopordum sibthorpiana*



*Hieracium pannosum*

With the heat building fast on the coast it was another excuse to head high to where it was fifteen degrees cooler. Setting off at dawn I enjoyed perfect morning light on impressive stands of *Onopordum sibthorpiatum* that lined the road. I found hundreds more all the way up the mountain and this superb thistle can still be enjoyed in August. Its softer cousin was just beginning to flower, the gorgeous soft-leaved *Hieracium pannosum*, sporting big woolly chalises of gold. It clung to limestone crevices above the dense spiny hummocks of *Acantholimon acerosum*. These seemingly uninteresting, unfriendly mounds spring to life in summer sending up dozens of spires of pink flowers that leave behind delicate papery cups once finished. Such late-flowering and showy plants are missed by most visitors along with so many other plants. Completing a spiny triumvirate was *Echinops spinosissimus*, with steely-blue globes. This is a very variable species and can be anything from thirty centimetres to three metres tall!

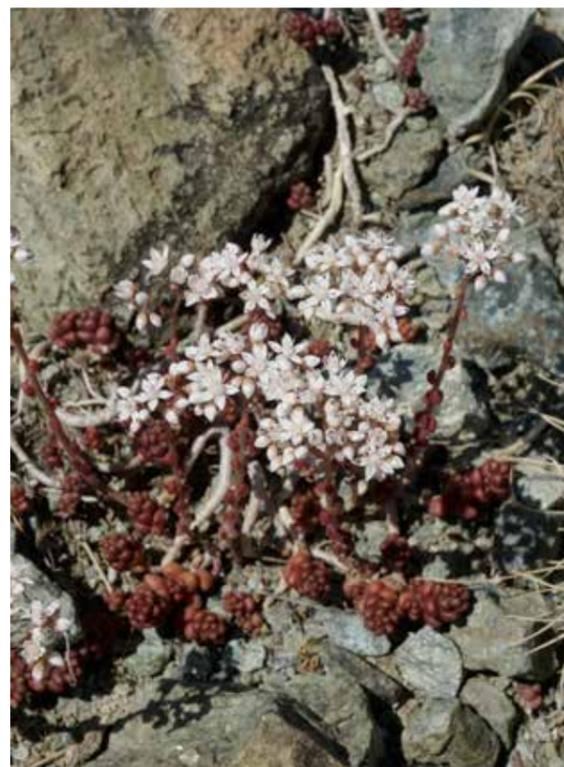
Gaining height and clearing the treeline, there was the odd flowering mound of *Acantholimon ulicinum*, a more compact relative of *A. acerosum*, but the bulk of these



*Acantholimon acerosum*



*Minuartia pestalozzae*



*Sedum album*

would be domes of pink in a couple of weeks. The road snaked its way to nearly 2500-metres. Striding out across the rocky slope, the spiny theme continued with big cushions of the endemic *Minuartia pestalozzae*, a much heftier offering from this genus of normally rather small plants. These also had a grand backdrop of the foothills. Growing around them were the slender stems of *Asyneuma limonifolium* and rock crevices were crammed with the narrow endemic - *Verbascum pestalozzae*.

The temperature was an ideal twenty degrees. I was reluctant to head back to the heat, so I delayed my drive down as often as possible, stopping for stony flats with abundant *Sedum album*, silver-leaved *Convolvulus lineatus* and *Allium scorodaprasum*. However, I couldn't avoid the sweat for my last plants. Growing on a rocky bank were the tall stems of *Cephalaria dipsacoides*, a towering perennial reaching three metres and topped by rather modest creamy flowers. Then, along the roadside grew the elegant, long-spurred flowers of *Delphinium peregrinum*, held in long racemes and attended by skipper butterflies that revelled in the warmth of the burnished summer Mediterranean, all be it a much quieter one this year.



*Echinops spinosissimus*

*Cephalaria dipsacoides*



*Delphinium peregrinum*

