

BOTANICAL WONDERS OF EASTERN TURKIYE TRIP REPORT 2025

viranatura
tours 

Amberboa moschata et al

Day I 8 May Arrival in Cappadocia

I met up with Gigia, Frank, Celia and Mike at the gate for our short flight from Istanbul that took us to the wide, twisted and riven landscape of Cappadocia, where even the drive in from the airport had us marvelling at the remarkable eroded post-volcanic world of ash formations, where deep wide valleys suddenly appeared, populated with sculpted turrets, some capped like mushrooms and many showing clear signs of tunnelling and excavating by the people that had inhabited the region for centuries. There was a dressing of flora too with much of the roadside green with annual plants. We drove to the hotel, organised ourselves and met our pair of Marcelas before going to enjoy a tasty lunch of various Turkish meses, traditional pasta, sarma and tasty meatballs (icli kofte).

The afternoon was a rich mix of flora and culture, driving first to the Goreme open air museum where even the wander down to the entrance introduced us to many plants including drifts of deep violet *Anchusa hybrida*, yellow *Senecio vernalis* and Isatis tinctoria, pretty pink *Silene conoidea*, shrubs of *Crataegus curvisepala* and the odd fiery orange *Glaucium corniculatum*. Our guide, Duygu, gave us detailed information on the various churches and aspects of the former Christian occupants of the area, all through a cold squall that had us putting our umbrellas up and donning raincoats. Time was spent exploring the various churches, their frescoes and pigeon houses, taking in the steady supply of new plants as we went including a dainty *Fumaria asepala*, *Scrophularia* sp. and the brimstone flowers of *Ajuga chamaepitys*. By the time we had finished our cultural part of the afternoon the rain had moved on the weather improved a lot.

Interesting-looking hills and valleys seemed to be everywhere, but we drove out to a particular area of pristine steppe, which at first glance looked nothing special but where there seemed to be a new lovely plant with every step. The indicator plant that this was a rich area was *Convolvulus assyricus* which grew in wonderful flowery mats and cushions. Among this grew the gold of *Genista albida*, plentiful deep blue *Moltkia coerulea*, various pretty pink *Astragalus* and a lovely creamy (pink tinged) form of *Hedysarum cappadocicum*. Dainty *Polygala pruinosa* almost went unnoticed as we moved from big clumps of ivory-flowered *Onosma aucherianum* to a spike of the remarkable *Salvia blepharochlaena*, a plant with beautiful outsized white flowers. What was so fascinating about this area of steppe is how the



Arnebia densiflora

composition of plants changed with the merest change of slope aspect or steepness. Another area had spikes of *Muscari longipes*, robust rosettes of *Gundelia tournefortii*, delicate *Galium incanum* and flowering *Asphodeline globifera* sprinkled with both *Adonis flammea* and *A. aestivalis*. And then there was a more barren expanse that was populated with hefty clumps of *Arnebia densiflorum*, one of the most impressive steppe plants with superb spikes of lemon-yellow flowers. Just beyond the slope gave way to low cliffs and perched on a promontory was another lovely specimen of *Salvia blepharochlaena*. Below we could see big umbels of *Zosima absinthifolia* and *Salvia cryptantha*. By now the sky had cleared and the sun was casting warming light onto the convoluted landscape and many towers of ash in the distance. We made a short stop in an area with many peculiar forms and then continued back to the hotel.

Dinner was a rich assortment of very tasty Turkish dishes.

Day II Aksaray, Selime Monastery & Love Valley

A fine clear day. We drove out across the flatter expanse of steppe and cultivated land dotted with small pear and hawthorn trees. A turn off took us to a caravanserai which was off the regular tourist beat and so pleasantly empty and rustic having not been overly restored. Doygu explained the basics about their function and purpose, and we spent time enjoying the peaceful interior courtyards and tall vaulted spaces that must have once thronged (and ponged) with merchants, their goods and livestock. Our next stop was an area of steppe, one part topped by a rocky area and the rest gently valleys. We were searching for a special plant and initially found just a couple among the rocks, but we eventually found a larger population of the lovely *Iris sprengeri* (one of the oncocyclis irises) in various pink to copper colour forms. There were more in a second area where we also found a good selection of other flora including some hefty clumps of green flowered *Gundelia tournefortii*, white *Haplophyllum vulcanicum*, *Nonea stenosen*, the peculiar poppy-relative *Hypecoum pseudograndiflorum* and delicate little spikes of *Linaria iconia*.

It was warm by the time we headed off again towards our lunch venue,



Iris sprengeri

stopping at a small, ruined church on the way, the surrounding rocks peppered with holes for pigeons. Lunch was in the shade beside the Ihlara River and afterwards we looked around the interesting Selime Monastery, set in the rocks above the river with good views across the now familiar confusion of eroded rocks that defines Cappadocia. There were various rooms from kitchens to meeting places, winery and church, all hewn from the rocks. Bizarre rock forms were the backdrop of our final location for the day: Love Valley. Right at the start of the walk we found cerise *Astragalus tigridius*, *Centaurea depressa* and *Salvia cryptantha* and a succession of interesting plants followed as we walk into the surprisingly green site. In fact, there were swathes of fresh flowery vegetation with stands of *Hyoscyamus niger*, abundant *Isatis floribunda*, *Anchusa hybrida* and *Alkanna orientalis* and clumps of *Glaucium corniculatum*, whilst further on was a creamy form of *Silene alba* and wonderful fresh drifts of its cousin *S. conoidea* mixed with big stands of peppery-leaved *Eruca sativa*. Underfoot was the unusual *Centaurea benecincta*. By now we had reached the site of the most impressive, eroded towers and at the base of one of them was a colony of *Muscari caucasica* to complete the walk.

Dinner was in a small local restaurant where we enjoyed various pide (Turkish pizza) and some very sweet desserts.

Day III Rose Valley

High cloud made for perfect photographic light for our walk in the fascinating landscapes of Rose Valley, a muddle of deeply eroded strata dissected by green valleys. Plants were immediate and plentiful with delightful little meadows spread across the rocky tops. *Tragopogon dubius* stood above most things, and this was joined by closely related, pink *T. coloratus* (even throwing up the odd hybrid). Fine-leaved *Prangos ferulaceum* and stands of *Isatis floribunda* were joined by pretty groups of *Muscari tenuiflorum*, *Ornithogalum orthophyllum*, colonies of *Salvia cryptantha* and tumbling tufts of *Lens orientalis*. Gnarled specimens of *Hippophae rhamnoides* clung to sides of eroding cliffs and *Juniperus oxycedrus* were laden with coppery fruits. Making our way to a flatter area, we found a fine spike of *Verbascum cappadocicum*, red forms of *Glaucium corniculatum*, slender green-flowered *Silene otites* and *Papaver lacerum* whilst *Pisum sativum* scrambled over the low vegetation. Our route then wound its way down to the valley floor where we were among semi-cultivated areas with fruit trees, vines and small plots. Hidden among the cliffs was the white church with its bright



Scorzonera violacea

interior and nesting pigeons, and there was plenty of evidence of these birds and their old ‘houses’, sometimes decoratively painted on the outside with flora motifs. Other hidden gems included a room with an oven and innovative beehive. By now it had warmed up quite a bit and we were glad when the bus showed up with cool water. It wasn’t that far to our restaurant for lunch.

There was a visit to carpet shop where among the time spent trying to sell carpets we did receive some education on their manufacture, design and history. Then it was back to plants with a visit to an area of steppe with the elegant arching stems of *Gladiolus atroviolaceus*, some fine spikes of *Asphodeline globifera*, abundant white *Alyssum thymops*, drifts of *Moltkia coerulea*, a spur-thighed tortoise, an attractive dwarf shrubby *Astragalus condensatus* with pink flowers, *Scorzonera violacea*, *Haplophyllum telephioides* and a *Paronychia* sp. A red-back shrike flashed across at one point too. We finished with a short stop at the popular three beauties fairy chimneys and were back in time for some to visit the nearby castle.

Day IV To Malatya

A long transfer day that linked the two parts of our tour together, moving from the rich steppe of Cappadocia, via Mediterranean-climate tracts of the Taurus Mountains onto the Anti-Taurus near Malatya. After stopping for picnic supplies in Kayseri, we continued in the shadow of Erciyes volcano until we happened upon an area with many mats of *Convolvulus assyricus* growing within the walls of a new cemetery. They grew in the surrounding steppe too. With them we found dainty cream *Silene* and tiny yellow *Ceratocephala testiculata*. We thought these were great, until we stopped a second quite stunning site where carpets of floriferous *Convolvulus assyricus* smothered the ground over hectares growing with a wonderful mixture of golden *Genista involucrata*, the blue cornflower *Centaurea triumfettii*, pom-poms of *Globularia trichosantha*, *Salvia frigida* and fast developing spikes of *Acanthus hirsutus*. It was a stunning feast, only cut short by a brief squall, but in truth we had to keep moving. We didn’t get far. Just a few kilometres further and there was a dense colony of flowering *Acanthus hirsutus*, this time mixed with pretty cushions of *Aethionema armenum*, *Gladiolus atroviolaceus* and *Onosma isaurica*(?). Even better was the magnificent clump of *Astragalus cristianus* in full flower, the graceful feathery foliage edge with silver hairs and quite magical combined with the golden flowers. In complete contrast were the many sombre *Aristolochia maurorum* that grew in the adjacent field.



Convolvulus assyricus

Continuing to the Gezbeli Pass past area of *Cedrus libani* and juniper woodland there was no late snow patches, but we stopped there anyhow for our picnic lunch finding *Solenanthus stamineus*, burnished bronze *Verbascum phoeniceum*, Hesperis anatolica and plenty of sky-blue *Myosotis*. Thunder rumbled in the distance and rain threatened but never arrived. Time to move on and cover some ground, except it often doesn't work that way! Barely five minutes down the road and we ground to a halt for a superb colony of *Onosma alborosea* that burst from crevices across a low limestone escarpment. Around these grew vines of *Bryonia dioica*, more *Aristolochia maurorum* and *Lamium garganicum*, whilst on the flat area above we found some superb pink forms of *Gundelia tournefortii* and the odd *Muscari neglectum*. Now we had to be strict and drove on into an extensive area of scrub oak (*Quercus pubescens*) and then past ridges of limestone mountains with tracts of cedar and juniper forest covering the flanks. In the end the weather closed in, and we stopped only for a (windy) roadside swathe of *Astragalus caraganae* before pushing on the Malatya.

Day 1 Kubbe Pass and to Tunceli

Once we had navigated the rush hour traffic of the city we turned and climbed into the relatively low mountains of the anti-Taurus and into an area of serpentine rocks, a geology that typically harbours some special plants, in this instance two special geophytes that are found nowhere else. We stopped at a (somewhat worn) sign that proudly showed the lovely *Iris peshmeniana* and requested visitors leave it unmolested. It was clear from the season's lack of snow that finding any today might be a challenge, but we set off undaunted finding many other good plants as we went from tufts of *Tripleurospermum oreades*, gorgeous clumps of the red-pink *Onosma serpentina* with deep rose-red tubular flowers and its' cousin *Nonea stenosolen* with a rainbow of different flowers colours as they aged. *Iris peshmeniana* was plentiful but all had finished flowering (maybe) ten days ago. However, this meant another rarity would be in flower and it didn't take long to find the first *Bellavalia chrisii* growing in the stony ground, the neat spike of purple to white flowers set among handsome broad foliage. Climbing higher we found some beautiful (pink-)red *Tulipa sintinesii* and the finally a decent flower of *Iris peshmeniana* nestled between clumps of grass. More *Bellavalia chrisii* were found and as we explored the ridge top *Arabis caucasica* burst from crevices and there were tight mounds of *Draba bruniifolia*. Descending we reached a wet flush are the base of the slope and where there was a small colony of *Dactylorhiza*



Aethionema grandiflora

iberica. There was also the bonus a two lovely cinnamon and cream flowers of *Iris sari* just down the road.

Lunch was enjoyed here with a view down to the city and nearby reservoir. Afterwards we descended a bit and then explored an area of stony flats where there were many more (robust) specimens of *Bellevalia chrisii*, some with multiple spikes. A large spur-thighed tortoise was found by Frank, one that had probably spent decades roaming these hills already. Our hotel for the next two nights lay three hours away in Tunceli so we made a start driving on to Elazig and through extensive areas of apricot orchards punctuated by stork nest on pylons, always with the huge reservoir to our left formed by dams on the Euphrates River, which we subsequently crossed eventually turning north. Rounding a bend the big bright pink hummocks of *Aethionema grandiflora* could be seen from afar and we spent some time among an amazing garish display, mixed with *Hypericum scrabrum*, *Muscari caucasicum* and by the road was an assortment of colour forms of *Vicia noeana* and clumps of *Salvia ceratophylla*. Thunder was rumbling and rain threatened but we lucked out with our first population of the remarkable Tchihatchewia isatidea on a steep (muddy) bank. On the nearby verges we also found *Ophrys sphegodes* subsp. *transhyrcana* as brooding grey clouds yielded to sunbursts across the barley fields. Heavy rain duly swept in and stayed with us for the remainder of our journey.

Day 2 Munzur mountains

The mountains surrounding Tunceli are renowned for their rich flora and we spent the day in a variety of different habitats, seeing a remarkable range of plants, all despite some often-poor weather. We began with some lovely rich pink *Paeonia mascula* in oak woods, a forest type that was vast in its extent in this area. As we photographed the peonies we were serenaded by the liquid melody of nightingales. Rain had been promised, and it duly arrived, rather annoyingly as we made our ascent into the hills to search for a bulb classic. Nonetheless, we still saw *Aristolochia bottae*, *Iris sari*, pale yellow *I. caucasica*, *Orobanche*, the magenta spike of *Orchis mascula* subsp. *pinetorum* and *Dactylorhiza romana* as we climbed. A scan with binoculars revealed a large stand of *Fritillaria imperialis* nestled among limestone cliffs and we made our way carefully around then across to them finding the first stunning sentry plant and then the stunning group of at least fifty plants in full flower, with tufts of *Arabis caucasica*, *Onosma alborosea* and the elegant green-flowered *Hesperis campicarpa* hanging from the rocks around. It was a botanical wonder. As we took our time enjoying them the mists drifted away somewhat and revealed the snow-streaked slopes of the mountains beyond. On the stony ground of the ridge were *Aethionema captitatum*, *Tragopogon buphthalmoides*, *Thesium aureum* and a reddish *Sedum sempervivoides*. The rain had



Fritillaria imperialis

stopped for a while but now returned as we descended, but fortunately we found a covered area to have our lunch.

The afternoon involved several ‘short’ botanical stops, first for population of *Euphorbia macrocarpa* growing with remarkable *Astragalus christianus*, and then a couple for the singular *Tchihatchewia isatidea*, with some superb specimens and congregations, sometimes mixed with sulphurous *Isatis candolleana*. A wonderful orchid site then followed where we found seven species including robust green *Orchis punctulata*, pink *O. spitzelii*, *Cephalanthera longifolia* and then a solitary *Ophrys reinholdii*. The latter seemed quite a find until Mark called us over to an incredible population of at least a hundred crowding a slope among the oaks each with a different lip design. The variety was amazing, and it was tempting to try and photograph them all! Just beyond was a *Neotinea tridentata* and two more *Orchis mascula* too. Continuing we stopped for a few nice *Paeonia mascula* and found also *Cephalanthera kotschyana*, *Allium kharputense*, *Salvia* sp. and a superb *Orchis simia*. Quite a collection, but there was still one or two more goodies to try and fit in, so we pushed on passing a stony plain sprinkled with *Eremurus spectabilis* and abundant *Gundelia tournefortii* to a site where there was a fine population of the rather elegant *Asphodeline tenuior*, each white flower flushed with peach. Among them grew other interesting plants including *Gladiolus humilis*, *Iris sari*, *Scutellaria orientalis* and *Onosma* sp. It had clouded over again and all looked grey, but the mountain landscape around us was still magnificent. By now it was late, very late and we had no choice but to pin our ears back and make for home.

Day 3 To Erzurum

There were clear views across the interesting green hills that surrounded Tunceli from the breakfast room at the hotel. We set off into the very same hills, following the fast-flowing river lined with trees with extensive oak woods cloaking the slopes. A couple of hefty *Astragalus macrocephalus* were in flowers and a small track had *Teucrium multicaule* on the rocks, *Verbascum orientale*, *Trifolium grandiflorum*, *Anchusa azurea* and *Lathyrus sphaericus* in the meadows and a pristine spike of *Ophrys cilicica* was found tucked in the shade. Many more orchids were to follow starting with a population of *Cephalanthera kotschyana* on the edge of some oaks together with *Orchis punctulata*, *Neotinea tridentata* and *Arum rupicola*, whilst on the other side of the road was *Ophrys reinholdii* and a robust developing spike



Ophrys reinholdii

of *Salvia sclarea*. Val had also found a colony of *Cephalanthera kurdica*. Moving on there was an unusual mix of plant on a high bank with spikes of (nearly flowering) *Limadonum abortivum* and *Aristolochia bottae* growing in the oaks growing alongside *Tchihatchewia isatidea*, *Gladiolus atrovioleaceus*, *Scutellaria orientalis* and a single spike of *Muscari massayanum* on an adjacent scree slope. Further on and a little higher up a spike of *Orchis simia* caught our eye in another area of oaks. It seemed an ideal place for lunch and as it turned out it was also a fascinating location for orchids with a collection of varied hybrids between *Orchis simia*, *O. punctulata* and *O. purpurea* as well as the parent plants. Near the water we also found *Platanthera chlorantha*, *Anacamptis palustris* and *Polygala anatolica*.

The scenery was dramatic with some extraordinary, buckled strata and endless hills clothed in forests and grasslands. Reaching the main road we continued towards Erzurum (seeing whiskered and white-winged black terns, ruddy shelduck and black-headed yellow wagtail) and then stopping for a fine population of the very handsome deep violet *Verbascum weidermannianum*, which also had *Adonis aestivalis*, *Gladiolus atrovioleaceus* and a small *Prunus microcarpus*. There was one final plant stop, in what appeared a barren and unappealing gully. However, almost as soon as we started up it there was a bush of *Daphne oleoides* in flowers and then continuing higher we found many superb, fresh spikes of *Muscari massayanum*. Big-leaved *Allium akaka* was also here, though not quite in flower and there was *Polygala pruinosa*, *Iris sari* and grey-leaved *Turanecio eriospermus* too. The last hour was through fine wide landscapes flanked by snowy mountains, poplars crowded with rookeries and warm afternoon light.



Muscari massayanum

Day 4 Palandoken

The weather looked decidedly unkind this morning and not far out of town and with heavy rain falling we changed our plan and went first to an area of water meadow where there grew abundant sky blue *Bellevallia forniculata*, whose haze of blue was interspersed with the deeper blue of *Muscari armeniaca* (growing in slightly drier places) and tufts of *Barbarea plantaginea*. By the time we returned to our original road the rain had almost ceased. We first stopped in a small valley where there were patches of lovely *Primula auriculata* mixed with *Caltha polypetala*, *Geum rivale* and *Cardamine uliginosa*. Just a short distance further and we found wonderful drifts of *Tulipa julia* growing on scree and in stony turf, with superb clumps of deep red flowers and although they were all closed on this cold, overcast day they still looked amazing flowering in mass. The plan had been to look for flowers at the pass ut as we climbed the (late) snow became deeper and deeper and there must have been a foot (30 cm) or more blanketing the ground. Instead, we continued to a lower area with only a scattering of fresh snow and where we enjoyed a feast of spring flowers. Here there was plenty of nodding *Fritillaria caucasica*, the pretty pink bells of *F. alburyana*, gullies filled with *Colchicum szovitsii*, deep violet *Iris reticulata* and a few *Scilla sibirica* subsp. armena. As we searched for more, we found *Fritillaria alburyana* poking through the snow, cushions of *Draba bruniifolia*, the odd *Gentiana verna* and plenty of gorgeous silken-haired *Pulsatilla albana*.

Lunch was in the shelter of a broken building with many more frits and pulsatilla on the grassland below. Then we retraced our steps to arrive at a dark cliff peppered with flowery clumps of yellow *Draba rosularis*. Time was then spent in the city looking at the interesting old (thirteenth century) medrasa and adjacent mosque, with Cahit providing plenty of interesting information on history and function of these places.

Dinner was back in the same intriguing museum-cum-restaurant as yesterday.

Day 5 Tortum and to Kars

A fine clear, sunny day that took us through a wide variety of steppe habitats, beginning with the rocky slopes at the head of the Coruh Valley. This is the



Tulipa julkia

home of *Iris toachia*, a species that comes in both yellow and violet forms, with a few intermediates thrown in. They were in excellent flower and among the stout clumps of irises we also found *Chesneya elegans*, stands of *Verbascum cappadocicum*, the unusual *Campanula macrochlamys* with rings of lilac flowers, dainty *Linaria coriifolia* and spiny mounds of flowering *Onobrychis cornuta*.

Our route took us back to Erzurum and then out across a vast green expanse, stopping for picnic supplies and then finding a good place to eat lunch with the big view out across the rolling steppe with just a very few scattered pear trees. In the steppe was plenty of long-pedicelled *Bellevallia sarmatica*, the fine-lined flowers of *Hyoscyamus reticulatus*, and the erupting shuttles of *Astragalus angustiflorus*. Areas if weathered lava had drifts of *Tripleurospermum oreades*, a sprinkling of *Tulipa julia*, woolly *Rindera lanata*, the narrow endemic *Nonea karsensis* and then a bit further over were dense congregations of *Sempervivum armenum*. From our viewpoint we could almost see our next location below a castle where there grew an amazing population of *Allium akaka*, mingling with *Prangos* sp., *Asperula orientalis*, and *Lamium galactophyllum* on the steep scree below eroded rock pillars. Everything became greener after we moved on stopping to look at the drifts of *Primula veris* and *Bellevallia paradoxa* in the damper turf.

The final stop of the day was for the gorgeous golden-rimmed chocolate bells of *Fritillaria michailowskii* growing on a wet rock shelf. The perfect finale and soon we were rolling up to our character-filled old Russian hotel in Kars.

Day 6 Ani and to Dogubeyazit

After a good breakfast in our distinctive Russian period hotel and essential cheese and honey buying, we set off across the wide green steppe, heading towards the border with neighbouring Armenia, with the immense width of its twin-peaked strato volcano; Mount Aragats in view. The two countries are divided here by a simple river border that cuts through the basalt flows. On the Turkish side is the historical site of Ani and Cahit gave us a tour of the large site, taking in the various churches, mosque and other key parts, all hewn from the surrounding rough tuff volcanic rock. A few *Papaver arenarium*, plentiful *Nepeta fissa* and patches of yellow *Onosma araratrica* were seen among the ruins. However, the real plant experience began afterwards. Moving on the landscape was green but decidedly non-flowery,



Allium akaka

but this changed quite abruptly when we hit the *Iris iberica* zone, and we made three stops for this wonderful plant. The first was for a large colony with hundreds of crisp white standards wavering in the gently breeze above variably coloured chocolate to chestnut brown falls. Each cuboid flower was a botanical masterpiece and around them grew and abundance of other flora including *Muscari caucasicum*, wispy white *Eremogone* sp, *Scorzonera violacea* and *Veronica multifida*. Larks sang loudly the whole time, and it was quite magical.

Lunch was very close by and here were hundreds of *Gladiolus atrovioleaceus*, *Bellevallia sarmatica*, swathes of *Muscari caucasicum*, airy *Linum nervosum* and creamy yellow *Astragalus cinereus*. Another colony of *Iris iberica* could be seen nearby so we walked to these also finding purplish leaved *Nepeta* sp. and plenty more vocal larks. As if all these stunning irises could not be enough, our third stop took it up a notch (or three) when we stopped at a wide plateau that filed with thousands of these gorgeous flowers, indeed they stretched to the distance edge where the land gave way to the border. There were incredible clumps of dozens of flowers scattered everywhere and among them we also found a stunning yellow form. There was again plenty more among them including golden *Tanacetum chiliophyllum*.

We would have all been satisfied with this, but it was a day of floral excess. Our next stop by a roadside slope was swathed in the beautiful *Amberboa moschatum* each flower with elegantly twisted ray florets and their display was blended with vivid red *Papaver arenarium* and yellow *Senecio vernalis*. Searching among the dazzling mass we also found *Phlomoïdes laciniata*, *Silene subconica* and *Nonea pulla*. On the other side of the road were more poppies together with a colourful mix of purple pink *Astragalus onobrychis*, *Moltkia coerulea* and spires of a yellow *Verbascum* sp. The displays of poppies continued as we descending, coating every lava shelf with a veneer of scarlet and once we had reached the bottom and the multi-coloured hills of ash a plain if simmering red could be seen. It was impossible to resist, and we spent some time enjoying this mass display. By now the looming bulk of Agri Dagi (Mount Ararat) was firmly in view and stayed with us as we drove up and over its vast shoulder, stopping on the other side for a big mountain view with extensive marshlands below.

Our hotel also had a commanding view from the upper terrace, where we could also look up to Ishak Pasa, tomorrow's first destination.



Rheum alexandrae

Anemone demissa var. *villosissima*

Day 7 Ishak Pasa and to Van

First thing we went up to the Ishak Pasa palace, nestled between razor ridged limestone hills with a commanding view of the route in and out of neighbouring Iran. Soft morning light cast on the warm toned stones, the banded minaret and the red dome and time was spent learning about and exploring the palace. From here we drove onto the huge Tendurek volcano, driving up and over the impressive and harsh lave landscape (but sadly not permitted to stop) until we reached an area with many mounds of spiny *Onobrychis cornuta*, each smothered beneath a mass of flowers in varying shades of pink. Non-flowering mounds of various *Acantholimon* were also here along with lots of *Stachys lavandulifolia* and Josh found a solitary *Fritillaria kurdica*. Another short stop was for *Dactylorhiza umbrosa* and *Trichlochin maritima*.

We found a shady spot for lunch among a poplar grove with the yodelling of golden orioles in the background. Our location was near a river that had cut down through the basalt flows creating islands that held some good clumps of *Iris iberica* and there were one of two of these where we next stopped, but this time for the dazzling and intense red of *Phelypaea tournefortii*, an outrageously coloured parasitic plant that parasitised *Tanacetum*. With them on the grassy flat were *Ixiolirion tataricum*, the bursting shuttlecocks of *Astragalus angustiflorus* and spikes of *Lallemantia peltatum*.

The lava flows ended once we reached the placid water of Lake Van, Turkey's largest lake. Fallow fields of blue stood out from the landscape, created by big sweeps of stunning blue *Anchusa azurea*. Our final location for the day was a very special one, beginning with marshy areas bursting with *Dactylorhiza umbrosa* (and one *Anacamptis palustris*) together with *Pedicularis comosa* and a mauve form of *Polygala anatolica*. On the nearby hill was the most stunning display of *Iris barnumiae* with hundreds of pristine silken deep maroon-purple flowers scattered across the grass slope. Elsewhere grew drifts of *Astragalus caraganae*, patches of *Salvia multicaulis*, *Euphorbia virgata* and *Scutellaria orientalis*. Mark found a few beautiful paler pink forms and plenty of time was spent enjoying these gorgeous flowers in the pleasant afternoon light.

From here it was onto Van, taking the coastal route past marshes filled with thousands of *Dactylorhiza umbrosa* and many migratory birds.



Day 8 Karabel Pass

Blue, blue sky promised a good flower day and so it turned out, all be it a bit on the breezy side at times. Not far beyond Van and the flowery steppe began and we stopped in a rich area with the singular *Iris paradoxa*, tufts of *Linum mucronatum* submerged under yellow flowers, *Salvia multicaulis*, *Convolvulus holoserica*, *Linaria grandiflora*, pale blue *Lappula barbata*, the red poppy *Roemeria refracta* and silken-haired *Stachys lavandulifolia*. Reaching and area of limestone cliffs there was a second stop for the lovely *Psephellus karduchorum*, clumps of *Silene pungens* and *Astragalus zohrabi*. From here we pushed on upwards, passing through small villages nestled in the valley and big herds of sheep, climbing to where there were snow patches on either side. The rocky slopes had plentiful *Fritillaria kurdica* in various colour forms and a little higher up were many of its plain yellow cousin, *F. minima*. The wind was gusting strongly at times as we enjoyed *Rosularia* sp. wedged in the crevices and pretty tufts of lilac *Thlaspi sintinesii*. Trying not to get blown away we descended finding *Pedicularis caucasicus* and then some lovely *Tulipa humilis*.



Following the road up we crested the pass and stopped briefly the other side for a view before dropping down to. A good picnic site with a superb view down to the village below. On the slopes was lots of *Euphorbia macrocarpa* and interesting rock formations lower down held more frits and tulips. Afterwards we drove back up to the pass, the wind having calmed a lot, a spent an hour exploring the snowmelt areas that had masses of *Puschkinia scillioides*, denser-flowered *P. biligineri*, drifts of *Gagea fistulosus* and with some searching several large pink *Colchicum kurdicum* were found. Snow finches, Radde's accentor and rock thrush were seen too. Basak had seen some inaccessible *Saxifraga kotschyi* on the cliffs and descending just a little we found many more on the rocks, this time within range. Climbing up to them there were lots of *Fritillaria minuta* and *Corydalis oppositifolia*. The saxifrages were superb with large cushions fixed to the blocky cliffs with dense heads of yellow flowers.

There was a final stop in some grassy steppe to look for irises and although we didn't find any there was *Centaurea vanensis*, *Solenanthus stamineus* and in the dampy flats below were fine stands of *Pedicularis comosus* and *Nonea pulla* among a sea of buttercups.

Fritillaria kurdica

Day 9 Akdamar Island and Zerneke

Our last field day began with a short drive along the coast, with thankfully calm blue water stretching to the snow-capped bulk of Suphan Dagi far across on the opposite side of the lake. The calm water meant a gentle boat ride across to the craggy rock of Akdamar Island where we spent an hour looking at the fine Armenian church with crisp reliefs and interior frescoes as well as the booming and raucous Armenian gull colony and a few resident spur-thighed tortoises. Crossing back to the other side we drove towards the mountains and a different body of water, stopping beside the long Zerneke reservoir where we found *Iris paradoxa*, *Astragalus latifolia*, wonderful clumps of wispy *Stachys lavandulifolia*, patches of stemless golden flowered *Centaurea rhizocalathium*, *Hedysarum varium* and robust *Salvia ceratophylla*. A nearby flower-filled valley was explored after lunch with architectural *Prangos* sp, the unusual borage, *Cassinia macranthera*, lovely clumps of *Onobrychis radiata*, the leaves of *Rheum ribes*, tufts of *Allium scabriscapum* nearly in flowers and masses of cerise *Astragalus onobrychis*. A diminutive and pretty (but unidentifiable) white-flowered cousin on steeper slopes too and Marcela found fine spikes of *Orobancha* sp. before we left. The next stop was a touch unusual, a local graveyard, but one where over the years relatives had planted some exotic flora on the graves including golden spikes of *Eremurus spectabilis* and lots more *Iris paradoxa* (which had thoroughly naturalised).

We took the back road towards Van and made two interested stops in the steppe, the first brings clumps of *Salvia kronenburgii*, mats of *Scutellaria orientalis* and abundant *Moltkia coereulea*, whilst in an area of bare ground was delightful cushion plant *Alyssum* af. *sulphureum* with pale yellow flowers growing amongst plentiful reddish pink *Hedysarum cappadocicum*. A colourful ensemble. As we climbed the slope, we looked back at a huge flock of sheep passing on the other side of the road. Our second stop produced good clumps of *Astragalus cinereus*, a good form of *Silene spergularifolia* with reddish calyces and the pretty tubular pink flowers of *Onosma rascheyana*. An hour was spent buying souvenirs and baclava in Van before returning to the hotel.

There was a vivid sunset as we drove for final group meal of tasty kebabs, pide and lamacun.

Day 10 21 May Return flights

A last breakfast by the lake and then it was off to the airport for flights to Istanbul, Antalya or Athens.



Onobrychis radiata



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Papaver arenarium