



VIBRANT VERGES

Bellevalia tauri



Silene cryptoneura

Magical May arrives so quickly each year. Just as it seems spring is happily moving along at a pace my camera can keep up with, it gets a sudden shot in the arm and races off - from coast to mountain. Roadside verges are a great place to start. In my early guiding years I had a strong tendency to race up the hill - some would say that hasn't changed - but I have slowed down (really) in so far as I pay more attention to my immediate surroundings and have come to realise that there is a tremendous amount to be seen without breaking sweat. Everything I feature here has been taken without walking further than fifty metres, much of it less than that.

There is so much in flower in May that I had to make an early start and set off at 6am to reach the upper meadows above our village. They are just getting into the swing now with lots of colour. There were lovely drifts of *Silene cryptoneura* in the gentle morning sun, peas, buttercups and thousands of *Asphodeline lutea* marching across the meadows towards the distant cedars. There were also the handsome spikes of *Bellevalia tauri* popping up in the damper meadows and two frantic hours ensued to make the most of the light (or lack of it). Naturally the photographer's mind is concentrated on flowers at these times and it sometimes forgets to pay attention to its surroundings. A quick argument with a tree left me with a sore head and handsome scar!

Asphodeline lutea





Papaver rhoeas



Onopordum boissieri



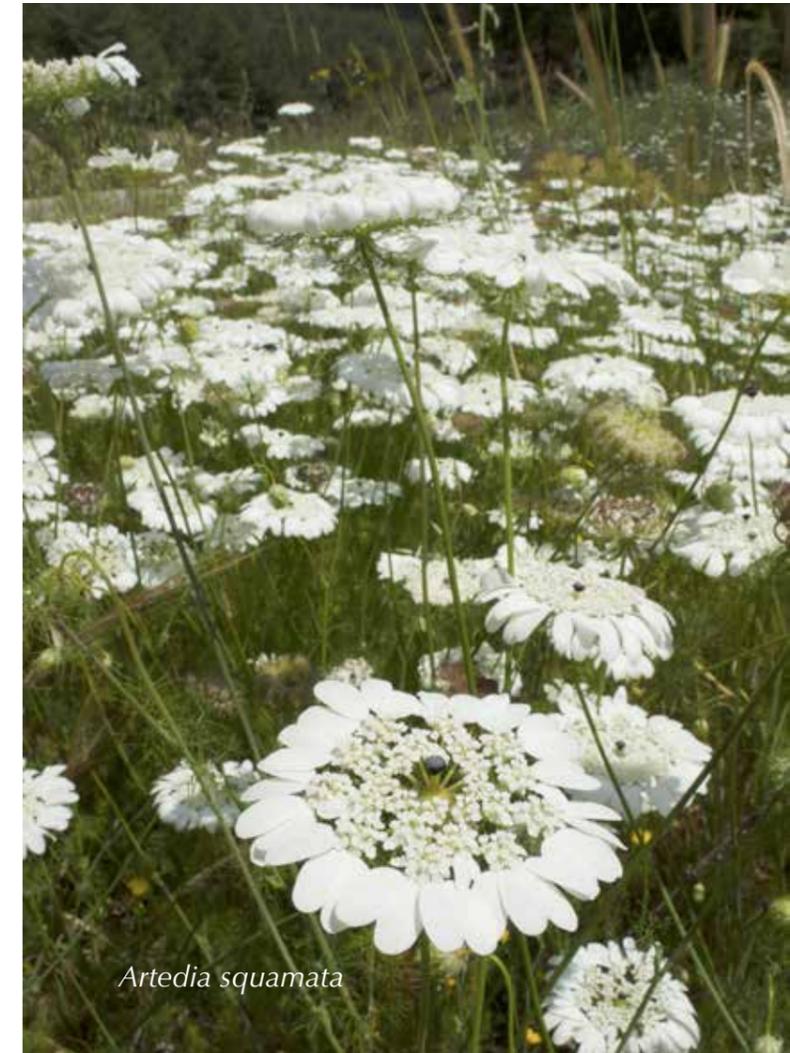
Verbascum chrysochaete



Alcea pallida

Undeterred I set off again after breakfast for a few hours to in the lowlands. This all began with delightful drifts of *Artemisia squamata* an abundant annual carrot with feathery leaves, which looks great with spires of pale pink hollyhocks - *Alcea pallida* or one of the many big mulleins, such as *Verbascum chrysochaete*, that are starting to flower. The latter can be tricky plants to identify and you really need to look closely at the individual flowers. They also need to be bagged in the morning since they tend to wither if the weather is hot. Just up the road from these were wonderful candelabras of *Echium italicum*, a bristly roadside specialist whose flowers age gently from pink (or white) to pale blue. And on the banks were spikes of a bee orchid *Ophrys fuciflora* alongside an endemic golden clover - *Trifolium mesogitanum*.

Almost ever present mixed with any of these flowers are poppies, one of those spring delights. They are unquestionably joyful flowers including the familiar and indispensable *Papaver rhoeas*, which appears just about everywhere, in its



Artemisia squamata



Onopordum bracteatum



Ophrys fuciflora & *Trifolium mesogitanum*



Echium italicum

various forms, including with black blotches or pure scarlet. One of the most dramatic combinations I've seen was with the gigantic silvery, spiny rosette of *Onopordum bracteatum*. The huge flowers will appear in summer, but its' smaller cousin *Onopordum boissieri* flowers around now, with purple-pink turbans bursting from its' spiny buds.

We are also fortunate to have another rather special poppy where we live and rather than a blaze, this one is a subtle, milkshake pink. *Papaver gracile* is normally in little groups scattered about, but every so often, if you spend enough time going up and down the vibrant verges, it's possible to be rewarded with a fine stand of these lovelies. But, whatever you do always look out for low hanging branches.



Papaver gracile