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## A flower and butterfly trip to Eastern Turkey

Ruth Baumberg

Fig. 1 My garden, where I have grown many of the plants (or their close relatives) which we saw in Turkey.

In 2014 I was really excited to find that the small flower and wildlife travel company I enjoy travelling with was making a visit to Eastern Turkey, in particular to the Pontic Alps and further into Eastern Anatolia. Now the Austrian and Swiss mountains were a major part of my childhood holidays

in the 1940s and 1950s as my parents were refugees in the thirties from Central Europe, and for my father no holiday was complete without pine woods, flower-filled meadows and distant snowy peaks. My husband too was a keen walker and traveller, if not a botanist (though as a bacterial

geneticist he did have a professional interest in certain plants), and he preferred the hills rather than the coast for our family holidays.

For the last thirty years or so I have been a member of the HPS and I've become increasingly enthused about plants and gardens.



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Fig. 2 The route up to the Zigit pass and flower-filled high meadows.



Fig. 3 *Digitalis ferruginea* subsp. *schischkinii*.

Since my husband's death nine years ago, I've been exploring as much of mountainous areas as I can manage, enjoying seeing plants in the wild, even if my poor gardening skills and a quarter of an acre of heavy clay in suburban Leeds mean that I do not attempt to reproduce exactly, or even approximately, what I see (fig. 1). Besides, a garden is an artificial thing and, whatever art I attempt in making a garden and trying



Fig. 4 *Geranium ibericum*.

to invoke the spirit of place, it is very different from a natural scene. But plants are the raw bricks of garden-making and, over the years, I have had love affairs with many different genera starting with hellebores, snowdrops, euphorbias, hardy geraniums, digitalis, campanulas, eryngiums (not good doers in my clay), polemoniums, geums, peonies (not very successful apart from



Fig. 5 *Dactylorhiza urvilleana* and *Alchemilla mollis*.

*P. ludlowii* and *P. mascula* from seed), and so on.

Our Turkish trip started with flights via Istanbul to Trabzon (Trabzon) on the Black Sea. The day after arrival we were whisked aloft in three 4WD vehicles up the mountains to the Zigit pass (fig. 2) and the Sumelo monastery, around which the lush meadows between the rocks had many of the characteristic plants we saw throughout the holiday –



Fig. 6 *Campanula lactiflora*.



Fig. 7 Lunch by an alpine lake.



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Fig. 8 *Gentiana pyrenaica*, above 2,600m.

*Digitalis ferruginea* subsp. *schischkinii* (fig. 3) (*D. ferruginea* is a plant I have grown in a large patch in my garden for over 10 years and is a good doer on any soil, even having an AGM, but the variety I grow has smaller, browner flowers than the beautiful Turkish subspecies); geraniums including *G. ibericum* (fig. 4), the marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza urvilleana* around mountain streams (fig. 5), our old friend *Alchemilla mollis* (as abundant around the mountain



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Fig. 9 *Geranium cinereum* subsp. *caulescens*.

streams as in our gardens in the UK, *Campanula lactiflora* (fig. 6) (yes, it grows in Leeds), *Salvia forsskaolii* (another happy resident of my garden, even seeding into my lawn), and everywhere pinks and silenes and hardy salvias (*S. nemorosa* in quantity along roadsides, *S. verticillata* on shale rocks), and many other familiar garden plants.

The following day we went up into the high alpine region where we left



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Fig. 10 *Pinguicula balcanica* subsp. *pontica*.

the vehicles at the 2640m Ovit pass and walked further upwards to lunch by an alpine lake (fig. 7). I momentarily put down my sandwich to photograph some of the wonderful plants nearby and lost part of it to a passing cow who seemed to be used to tourists and their curious offerings. Up above the pass were numerous beautiful alpinas as you would expect at such altitude, but which I would be



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Fig. 11 *Centaurea appendicigera*.



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Fig. 12 *Centaurea macrocephala*.



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Fig. 13 *Centaurea nigrofimbriata*

Fig. 14 *Paris incompleta*.

chary of trying to grow in my garden: they included various gentians including *Gentiana pyrenaica* (fig. 8), *G. verna* and *G. septemfida*; campanulas; the odd primula; *Geranium cinereum* (fig. 9) (which I can grow only in a sink in my garden); veronicas; and in the damp patches *Pinguicula* (fig. 10) (*P. grandiflora* seeds gently into my garden pots).

On our way back down to the vehicles, we even found *Centaurea appendicigera* (fig. 11) – there were many good centaureas in Turkey and I definitely revised my



Fig. 15 The apparently barren dammed valley.

opinion of the family, having previously considered it rather boring and suitable only as second-rate fillers for borders. I used to grow gold *Centaurea macrocephala* (fig. 12), quite a showy perennial but, as with so many plants, it is no longer with me. I shall long cherish the memory of a steep, high hillside with a dirt road edged for hundreds of yards with brilliant blue *Centaurea nigrofimbriata* (fig. 13).

We were taken on a long circular drive, up and over passes, stopping at various crags where there were lilies, and

at a peat bog where, as well as sundews, grew *Paris incompleta* (fig. 14) – quite similar to *Paris quadrifolia*, which in my garden takes up a square metre by a beech hedge. The following day we moved into a different region and stayed in a charming, small, family-run hotel with the best food on the holiday, despite having travelled through a flooded valley which was part of a big infrastructure development and seemed almost lifeless (fig. 15).

Here we had more walks along mountain valleys, again filled with flowers.



Fig. 16 Spotted fritillary.



Fig. 17 Yet more blue butterflies.



Fig. 18 The Ghost Orchid.

It was also here that sadly one of our number was knocked down by a runaway mule, luggage portering for a hiking group, and with a broken shoulder she had to be evacuated with her husband from a local hospital to the UK. This area, like almost all the parts of Turkey we travelled in, abounded in butterflies (figs 16 & 17) as well as crickets and a multitude of spectacular insects. One of the group was a butterfly expert so we were able to identify a good number of butterflies which added yet more interest.

After three days we moved inland to an area which looked like the European Alps with quite different flowers and the high chalky hillsides (Back Cover) absolutely covered with *Stachys macrantha*, a constant companion throughout the trip; salvias; and stunning *Scabiosa caucasica*, looking just like our garden variety 'Clive Greaves' AGM. I'm sure others grow it, but I wouldn't risk it on my heavy clay and anyway it is as much a plant of meadows, rather than borders, as our native field scabious. The rooms of our hotel were like small individual alpine chalets with beautiful, distant views, though a problem with the restaurant staffing meant we had four evenings of identical food. But



Fig. 19 Barhal women running shops and knitting.



Fig. 20 Near Cildir, Anatolia.

it was a wonderful region, and we even managed to find the extremely rare Ghost Orchid (fig. 18) which has finally been rediscovered in Wales, having been thought extinct in the UK.

Our last days were spent on the Anatolian plain in a Kurdish area adjacent to the border with Armenia, our final afternoon in a medieval Armenian city, now empty and full of ruins, flowers and butterflies (fig. 20).

I would recommend this itinerary to anyone who has the opportunity to visit this region of Turkey, though not at times of political instability. The flowers are truly amazing – I have only just touched the surface with the ones I've mentioned – there were lilies, aconitums, delphiniums, aquilegias, astrantias, echinops, poppies both oriental and lateritum, salvias, cirsium (thistles) and many, many more... 🌸

**Ruth Baumberg** spent her working life in IT but she has always been interested in photography. A member of the West Yorkshire Group, she is an enthusiastic (but not particularly green-fingered) gardener. In her retirement she's enjoying visiting places where she can see garden plants growing in the wild.