

LILIES

of the Black Sea

20 – 30 June 2015

In search of Euxine jewels

11 days tour Christopher Gardner & Nursel İkinci

(Price details are below)

The lush green foothills of the Karadeniz or Black Sea Mountains rise quickly from the coast and represent a surprisingly different landscape to the one many of us imagine for Turkey. But, the north-east is distinct in many ways from the traditional wooden architecture and the proud people to the vast hazelnut groves, tea plantations and of course the native flora. The latter is nurtured by rainfall year round so the slopes are clad in extensive forests of beech and spruce with tall diverse alpine meadows packed with flowers in summer. It is here among many other beautiful herbs such as big-belled campanulas, orchids, flamboyant bright red poppies and rusty-coloured foxgloves that the majority of the country's lily species occur. At this season they stand above their peers providing at once graceful and striking accents in the meadows. This tour traverses the north-east Karadeniz Dağları exploring a series of long, green valleys and mountain passes and features all of regions' lilies, while at the same time encountering many other noteworthy and beautiful flowers too.

See photos on <http://www.viranatura.co/gallery-2/lilies-of-the-black-sea>

ITINERARY

Saturday, 20 June **UK to Amasya**

We arrive very early on Sunday and overnight in Amasya an attractive city with many old wooden houses.

Sunday, 21 June **Amasya**

Amasya is famed for its traditional architecture and the wonderful houses that line the Yesilirmak River flowing through the city. We will be free to explore the town and enjoy a relaxing day after our late arrival yesterday. Overnight in Amasya.

Monday, 22 June **Akkuş Valley**

The impressive white-flowered *Lilium akkusianum* is restricted to the Akkus Valley and the areas around Erbaa. It occurs among woodland and adjoining meadows along with stands of *Phlomis russeliana*. As it is the earliest of the lilies in the north-east and is confined to a narrow altitudinal bank, a very early spring might mean that we just miss it, but a splendid compensation will be this particular area's remarkable Mediterranean enclave flora, which includes the strawberry tree *Arbutus andrachne* and stands of Cedar of Lebanon *Cedrus libani*, a conifer that usually thrives among the Taurus Mountains in the south of the country. Overnight in Ordu.

Tuesday, 23 June Aksu Valley

South of Giresun the road climbs along the Aksu Valley to the Egribel Pass. Among masses of blue *Salvia forskoehli* is the gorgeous fragrant yellow *Lilium monadelphum* var. *armenum*. Higher up are large populations of somber *Lilium ciliatum* emerging from lush herb-rich meadows, and there are other choice flowers such as the lovely *Lathyrus aureus*. The views from along the road are some of the finest we see. Overnight in Ordu.

Wednesday, 24 June Sumela Monastery

From Ordu we drive to Trabzon the largest city in the north-east where we'll take lunch before visiting the fabulous Sumela Monastery perched precariously on high cliffs south of the city. Overnight in Trabzon.

Thursday, 25 June Zigana Pass

The day will be spent on the florally diverse Zigana Pass, with time spent exploring both sides. On both slopes are excellent mixed populations of *Lilium ciliatum* and *L. monadelphum* var. *armenum* with superb specimens of both species. They thrive among slopes thronging with *Aconitum orientale*, *Geranium psilostemon*, *Lathyrus rotundifolius* and *Centaurea dealbata*, while on the somewhat drier southern slopes are stands of elegant *Digitalis lamarckii*. Overnight in Trabzon.

Friday, 26 June Uzungöl

Ringing the popular lakeside town of Uzungol are diverse slopes peppered with *Lilium ponticum* in a variety of forms along with abundant meadow flowers such as *Campanula lactiflora*, *Alchemilla* spp., *Geranium psilostemon*, *G. dactylorhiza*, *G. urvilleana* and *Pedicularis condensata*. In the afternoon we'll continue on to our hotel in the next valley near Ikizdere.

Saturday, 27 June Ovit Pass

Lilium ponticum is again the focus today with hopefully some deep purple forms. Smaller tracks lead to herb-rich slopes with lily populations as well as many other campanulas, geraniums, frog orchids and *Dactylorhiza urvilleana* as we proceed up towards the Ovit Pass. Depending on the remaining snow patches there will be the chance to explore the higher alpine turf where we may find *Corydalis oppositifolia* together with *Primula auriculata* and possibly *P. longipes*. Overnight Ikizdere.

Sunday, 28 June Çoruh Valley

The various lily species of the region are rather spread out along the Black Sea Mountains (or Karadeniz Dağları) and today we drive across to Şavşat via the scenic and much drier Çoruh Valley with *Campanula betuliflora* flowering on the rocks, and steppe flora such as *Dianthus orientalis*, *Xeranthemum annuum* and *Glaucium corniculatum*. Our reward for the long morning journey will be the superb population of *Lilium kesselringianum* bursting from lush green meadows. Overnight in the bungalows at Laset with fine scenery all around.

Monday, 29 June Çam Pass and beyond

Turkey's only population of the magnificent *Lilium monadelphum* var. *szovitsianum* grows among stunning flower packed meadows with abundant *Geranium pratense*, *Linum hypericifolium*, localised *Echium russicum* and carpets of *Polygala anatolica*. If time remains we will also visit late snow patch areas on the way back for *Scilla rosenii*, *Primula auriculata* and possibly *Fritillaria latifolia*. Overnight Laset.

Tuesday, 30 June Back to UK

Drive to Kars for return flights via Istanbul.

TOUR COST

Per person: 2,400 Euros (Single supplement: 280 Euros)

This includes 10 nights of accommodation, all food, all transport and entry fees, but does not include flights, travel/medical insurance, alcoholic and soft drinks and personal expenses.

N.B. The group will have a maximum of 20 people.

ACCOMMODATION & TRANSPORT

In general the lily species are quite spread out, and occur mainly at over 1,000m in a series of long valleys. So it should be understood that there will be a fair amount of travelling on most days, and long journeys on some others, to reach the target areas. This is also necessary to negotiate the immense dam construction projects that affect parts of the eastern Pontic Alps and add to journeys especially around the Coruh Valley and Artvin. Also, suitable accommodation is rarely close to the localities that we really want to get to. However hotels are generally comfortable 3-star, but at Ikizdere and Laset rooms are more basic.

The mountain roads are tricky in places, so to deal best with this the vehicles will be older-style short-wheelbase minibuses based on Ford Transit chassis, but we will have no more than eight people in each, so as to give reasonable comfort.

As for terrain, some of the best populations are on steep herb-clad slopes which may also be wet from rain or dew. Even in such places, there should be accessible plants of most species for those that cannot climb such slopes, and there are many other roadside flowers too.

FLIGHTS

The following internal flights are needed;

TK 2854 Istanbul Ataturk Airport - Amasya Merzifon Airport
20 June 23:20 – 00:50

TK 7091/2155 Kars - Ankara - Istanbul
30 June 11:00 -15:05

It is advantageous to purchase a Turkish Airlines international flight with these internals and have luggage checked all the way through. Currently a London-Amasya Kars-London ticket is around 400 Euros.

If you wish the travel agency to carry out your flight booking with Turkish Airlines for you, there will be a small admin charge of 35 Euros. For this a separate credit card permission will be needed.

All bookings will be made through the tour leader Chris Gardner and his company ViRA NATURA Tours (www.viranatura.com) but could you please register your intention of joining or interest to Duncan Coombs using the attached form.