



THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY CENTRAL SUSSEX GROUP



NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2009

Mr. R. CHARMAN LAKE VAN, HAKKARI, YUKSEKOVA and BEYOND

This part of southeastern Turkey is beautiful, but because of long standing differences (and terrorism at times) between the Turks and the majority Kurdish subjugated population here, it can be difficult to travel around with many military check points and machine gun posts. But life goes on and the Kurds have a happy smile on their faces for visitors – their English is better than Bob's



Near Hakkari - Bob Charman

Turkish. An English speaking guide is advised, especially if travel is contemplated towards the borders with Iran and Iraq. 196Km south of Lake Van lies Hakkari, ringed by the jagged Cilo Daglari mountains with their glaciers and off limits for 15 years until recently. Beyond that Yuksekova. Driving as far as snow allowed in one valley, a hillside covered by *Aethionema cordifolium* (268/140) with pink flowers and needlelike leaves and then *Merenderas kurdica*, its tepal bases split into three and not fused as in *Colchicum*, *Fritillaria minuta* in standard red-brown or sometimes yellow narrowly campanulate, *Colchicum szovitsii* (294/409) which enjoys very wet, sodden mud, *Puschkinia scilloides* (298/394) in both pale blue, darker

striped tepals and a white form which is not in circulation. *Primula auriculata* (290/407) with water percolating down around them, pretty *Lamium garganicum* which might become too blowsy in our climate, the *Oncocyclus Iris sari* (254/418, 294/387) with an intense crimson or brown stain signal patch. The flowers of beautiful *I. paradoxa* (277/263) have very small, nearly horizontal falls (blackish-violet here) and large rounded standards, white with delicate dark veining, but those shown were variable and blue veined and are a possible *I. sari* x *paradoxa* hybrid. The dramatic flowers of the parasitic *Phelypaea tournefortii* are usually-scarlet flowered, but there is a yellow form not yet seen by Bob. Around late snow patches the extremely variable *Fritillaria crassifolia kurdica* (198/341). 15cm tall with 8-10cm flowers, *Iris iberica* ssp. *lycotis* (277/255, 300/198), is another splendid Onco, this variant having the falls and standards more or less equally heavily veined. *Eremostachys moluccelloides* is a labiate with lemon-yellow flowers and the red form of



Iris paradoxa - Bob Charman

Fritillaria imperialis was seen if not in Iranian quantity. Like many *Dactylorhiza* species, cream and green flowered *D. flavescens* requires some shade and lots of moisture. A straight side road widened to twice normal width appears an anomaly, but it was once used by Americans for their Hercules aircraft! In a water meadow, a *Ranunculus*. The Clouded Yellow butterfly captured by Bob in spite of its fast movement. Well-spotted *F. hikkariensis* (263/38) is close to *F. crassifolia* ssp. *kurdicas*, but has shining green leaves and smaller flowers. At one point the driver asked if he could visit his brother nearby where a layby was jammed with lorries and cars and at the back of the village more vehicles. It appeared that as diesel was cheaper in Iran, the locals would fill up and distribute it at the roadside – hence no petrol stations as far as Van. Bee pollinated *Ixiolirion tartaricum* has nice blue flowers and in a rock crevice a lovely orange flowered poppy. A search for a Frit. towards Semdinli not seen for many years ended in near failure in that a cry on spotting it alerted the military and an interrogation 'too many terrorists you will have to turn back', but the major was interested in the photos that had been taken. A passport was stolen from the car by shepherd boys, but a Belgium who happened to be on the scene, chased them like a gazelle. made a retrieval and the car window quickly replaced. *Fritillaria assyriaca* and *F. armena* tend to hybridise and are therefore difficult to identify. A Common Blue stayed still long enough for a delightful photo. There were different forms of *Crocus biflorus*, fine forms of *Fritillaria michailowskyi* (273/262) including all yellow ones. White *Arabis* at the base of a rock. Then a white and maroon *Corydalis* and *Pulsatilla albana* ssp. *armena* with violet-blue flowers.



Iris iberica ssp. *elegantissima* –
Bob Charman



Fritillaria michailowskyi –
Bob Charman

Back to Lake Van at 1750m, like that of the Caspian, has no outlet, its water level maintained by evaporation; it is therefore saline without a large amount of life apart from use as a bird migration route. The lake was formed when the Nemrut Dagi (now above the west shore) volcano erupted and blocked the natural outlet of a river. One of a number of volcanoes, this 2935m. mountain has two crater lakes within its 7 km diameter, one cold, one warm where there is still some thermal activity. Suffering some bug, Bob did not stay long on the summit (superb view over the lake) and on his way back to the car over volcanic ash, met a Kurdish lady with family and pushchair with whom he had a lovely talk. From the eastern end of the lake, a road leads in 55km to Hosap Castle built on the top of a rocky eminence. It is a half ruined but much remains of this fanciful fortress built for Sari Suleyman Mahmudi in 1643; so pleased with the result, he chopped off the hands of its architect so that no copy could be made.

From the lake, this time northwards towards Dogubayazit (affectionally called “Dog Biscuit”) whose only interest is the nearby Ishak Pasa Palace and views of Mt. Ararat. On the way *Orchis tridentata* in open oak forest. Across a large pass where between blocks of lava not easily grazed by sheep and goats, plants such as *Adonis*, a nice *Ajuga*, *Bellevallia rixii* bright blue which darken with age, *Tulipa humilis* (272/210), *Iris caucasica* a dwarf Juno with pale yellow 5cm flowers, along with an Onco with 8cm deep purple flowers evidently being eaten by caterpillars, a yellow *Scutellaria*, *Dactylorhiza osmanica*, a sturdy plant with a large conical purple spike, small *Allium akaka* – a good show plant.. Across the Karabit Pass looking for

yellow flowered *Fritillaria minima* which flowered for Peter Erskine a year or so ago and needs to be kept in a fridge, otherwise it becomes very leggy.. *Saxifraga kotschy* (295/62) formed a nice yellow flowered bun in limestone conglomerate. In lush areas, *Caltha*. Also *Iris reticulata* 277/299, great swathes of *Primula elatior* (251/96 254/395, 295/88), orange-red *Tulips julia* on warmer slopes lower down, yellow and white *Onosma*, large white flowered *Cephalanthera caucasica*, *Globularia cordifolia* (260/1341, 284/193) in rubble, white and pink forms of *Jurinella* in very dry conditions. Back to Van and *Orchis pinetorum* a larger form of *O. mascula*, fields of *Muscari* - how they spread in gardens! A two oxen scene with wooden harrows. Finally, a woolly *Rindera*, *Platanthera chlorantha*, *Paeonia mascula*, *Iris pseudocaucasica* (218/384, 273/286) yellowish-green flowers, a *Silene*, a thermal spring, *Tulipa humilis*, two colourful Kurdish ladies, a stone and plaster house complete with solar panel – more sophisticated than you may think, a machine gun post to remind us of military presence and finally sunset over Lake Van.

And a lovely ending to another of Bob's super presentations with his top class photographs.

RM

MEETING 12 DECEMBER

SOCIAL EVENING

While having nibbles (please bring something along – savoury or sweet) there will time to chat to one another, be entertained and perhaps puzzled by a few quizzes, so come along and enjoy the evening.