



# THE ALPINE GARDEN SOCIETY CENTRAL SUSSEX GROUP



NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2009

## Mr. BOB CHARMAN SPRINGTIME IN IRAN

Bob explained that he had been to Iran in 2006 (the Zagros and its foothills west of a line from Tehren to Istafan) and in 2008 (a very dry area towards Afghanistan) where it is quite possible still to find something new. We began with *Orchis anatolica*, a widespread species of semi-shade westwards to the eastern Mediterranean, the leguminous *Onobrichis cornuta* (288/203), a densely twiggy, cushion-like spiny shrub of rocky slopes from Turkey to Afghanistan and Turkestan and the delightful *Anemone biflora* (142/297, 186/272) its overlapping petals of orange to yellow, or red and some bicolour, *Iris aucheri* (258/415, 16, 280/192) a Juno with deep blue to white flowers and a yellow ridge on



*Fritillaria chlorantha* (Bob Charman)

the falls seen in the company of red tulips. There are many butterflies of which Bob had an early interest - the first shown, a black-veined white species. And many fritillaries such as *Fritillaria chlorantha* (144/149) endemic to the Zagros, no more than 4" high with very broad green leaves and lemon-yellow to green flowers. *Corydalis verticillaris* (287/43) has fern-like leaves and pink to purple flowers. There are many



*Iris aucheri*

sub-species of *Crocus biflorus* flowering in snow-melt. An aroid, *Eminium albertii* has evil-smelling black spathes. A False Apollo with its chrysalis. Then *F chlororabdota* or something like it, *Gentiana olivieri* (287/39) a tall grassland species with pointed flower buds, although habitat makes so much difference. With tumbleweed, *Tulipa humilis*, (272/210) its pink to magenta flowers with a yellow to

blue-black central blotch.

In the north east and into Turkmenia, is the tall *Fritillaria raddeana* (150/326, 198/348, 263/31, 273/273, 293/290) carrying many pendant yellow flowers in an umbel at the tip of the stem surrounded by a whorl of very pointed leaves. The Golestan National Park, the former Shah's hunting reserve holds about 1300 plant species. The Kopet Dag Mountains, parallel to the border of Turkmenistan, is covered by vegetation more similar to those of Central Asia.

There are two colour forms of nearly stemless *Iris hymenospatha* ssp *leptoneura*, a relative of *I. persica*. *Colchicum crocifolium* has white or pink flowers and of similar stature is *Merendera wendelboi*. There are cultivated flat fields covered with tulips, their bulbs surviving because they are below ploughshare depth.



*Merendera wendelboi*

In screes of the northern part of the Zagros at the onset of snowmelt, green flowered *Fritillaria olivieri* (234/348) although there is great variation even in the same population. Takht-e-Suleyman, a 1st century AD Fire Temple, some arches and vaulting still standing around a lake in an extinct volcanic vent. On Fridays it is a popular picnic site and on Bob's visit it was possible to chat to a nice family whose daughter had studied in London. There is *Colchicum szovitsii* (294/409), flowers light purple-pink or white suffused purple-pink, *Puschkinia scilloides* (298/394) with icy-blue bell-shaped

flowers striped dark blue, the borage *Arnebia echioides* (*Macrotomia pulcra*) (109/223) its sulphur-yellow flowers with five blackish spots at the petal lobe junctions (which gives it the popular name of Prophet Flower) and was the first plant to be photographed by Bob. In semi-desert, less than 4" tall, *Allium derderianum* which has a relatively large umbel of whitish tepals with purple-violet nerves, its two basal leaves twisting and curling to lie flat on the ground. *F. gibbosa* (218/360, 267/39, 273/257, 58, 277/262, 294/Cover, 415 295/71) is another dryland species whose pale pink flowers with darker spots are carried horizontally, but there are white and orange forms. *Tulipa sylvestris* (266/379) 18" tall or more with cream to pale yellow flowers is widely naturalised from Europe to Siberia and south to North Africa., while *T. montana* is more a plant of Central Asia carrying red flowers (sometimes yellow) with a greenish-black central blotch and some high up, only 1 1/2" tall. The monospecific orchid *Steveniella satyrioides* has a cylindrical spike of flowers and is distinguished by its single basal leaf, two long sheaths around the stem, three toothed purplish hood and green 3-part labellum; it grows in lower mountain slopes above the Caspian. *Tulipa biflora* (188/116) with two grey-leaves leaves, flowers white with a yellow centre, tepal backs suffused greenish-grey. Two Iris from the Elburz are the Pogon *I. imbricata* with pale yellow flowers and a darker-yellow beard yellowish-green growing in damp rocky meadows and the Juno *I. pseudocaucaasica* (52/384, 66/286) with yellowish-green or icy blue flowers forming large clumps on rocky slopes, photographed not realising that a wild boar was just 15ft. away! *I. songsarica* is a beardless species, the tallest of its group with stiff tough leaves and spotted and veined greyish flowers; it grows in very arid places, but is all but impossible to cultivate beyond the seedling stage.



*Iris imbricata* (Owell Baumunk)

In the Zagros the beautiful *Iris meda* (294/cover, 415), an endemic Oncocyclus, variable (there are purple forms), its background whitish flowers largely masked by golden brown veining and suffusion hence its description by Paul Furse as 'Honey Gold'. Also *Ixiolirion tartaricum*, pale blue to violet blue with three darker lines down each lobe, *Jurinella moschus* with white woolly leaves and sessile very fragrant lilac-pink flowers. *Scilla khorassanica* is a 3-leaved bicolor. On the Iraq border there are two forms of *Fritillaria crassifolia* ssp. *kurdica* (47/341, 350), the grey-green leaves often twisted lengthways, strongly tessellated on paler green or yellowish ground colour. This is a variable plant with up to ten fat bells on its flower head. At one point in the second year's visit, men in white shirts suddenly appeared and the party apprehended, but on finding no evil intent, were released with much shaking of hands. *Moltkia coerulea* is a small greyish sub-shrub with deep blue flowers. The foliage of *Galanthus trsanscausicus* (295/66) is splayed out when in bloom and the inner tepals have green basal markings. *Ophrys schulzei* is a pretty species with pink petals, the lip deeply lobed, the chestnut-brown middle one ending in a tooth. *Cephalanthera kurdica* (251/80, 266/479) with pink flowers, is a species of scrub and open forest.



*Orchis simia* was seen with mauve legs rather than the usual pink. In Iran the commonly almost black flowers of *Fritillaria persica* tend to be white, pink or yellow. The red flowered *F. imperialis* seen in such profusion in the Chelgerd Valley, does pop up all over the place. In shady areas, water loving, yellow-flowered *Rhynchocorys elephas*, has as the species name suggests, a trunk. Often on dry saline soil, the low suckering shrub *Rosa persica* carries rich yellow flowers, each of the five petals with a crimson spot at its base and *Silene ampullata* white to pale yellow. In very warm spots on dryish slopes in the Kopet Dag, the green flowered Juno Iris *kopetdagensis*, the standards very much reduced and the leaves concealing the stem until fruiting. Wisdom on snakes - if it moves, OK, if it doesn't you don't!

There is well known *Paeonia mlokosewitschii*. with cool lemon-yellow flowers and golden anthers and the less grown, with much paler blooms, *P. wittmanniana* with reddish filaments and crimson stigmas. Following cries of 'stop, stop', the sleepy driver veered off the road, but this did lead to the discovery of a black *Verbascum*. There are many tulips, among them *Tulipa stapfii* red flowers with purple blotch edged yellow, *T. micheliana* red or crimson with purple-black blotch and orange-red *T. oculus-solis* (*argensis*). A SwallowTail on blackthorn. In the Berberidaceae, *Leontice armenaica* with ground hugging grey leaves, yellow flowers and probably huge tap roots. Minute *Fritillaria zagrica* (286/555), curled foliage and dark purplish-brown flowers with yellowish blotches at the tips of the tepals.



*Leontice armenaica* (Botany.cz.cs)

A very attractive white flowered Goatsbeard, *Tragopogon* sp., *Fritillaria reuteri* like a more open flowered *F. michailovskyi* in the usual purple and yellow in the lower one third and pure yellow forms, pale blue *Iris reticulata* and icy-blue *Iris zagrica*. An uninterested Tortoise crossed the path. In *Orchis punctulata* the perianth segments form a hood, while the yellowish lip has groups of red hairs and the lateral lobes touching the lip giving the appearance of two holes. In the big open semi-desert plains with low mountains, thorny shrubs and in wet spots, *Scilla persica* (142/357) with blue, pointed flowers on horizontal pedicels. In tall bushes pretty Rosy Starlings. On one occasion, a scorpion awaited its victim until in bed, but the hotel staff's way of dealing with was a can of DDT. There are black beetles, large raptors and wild animals including antelope and boars roaming the Golestan National Park - although in spite of a guard with sub-machine gun warning that there were dangerous wild animals and that the party should stay together, the Caspian Tiger may no longer exist! *Crocus almeheensis* is endemic to N E Iran and was first seen in



*Pulsatilla albana armena* (Stephano

Doglio)

flower only in 1970; it has a striking rich orange-yellow colour with stripes or suffusions of bronze and mahogany on the exterior. On a track side, clumps of the Juno Iris *forsteriana*, bulbs long, stem short, silvery-white edged leaves and yellow falls with deep purple standards. *Eremurus persicus* (282/515) is an attractive dwarf species. *Phelypaea tournefortii* is a brilliant red-flowered parasitic plant, *Gladiolus atroviolacea*, *Tulipa biflorus* mauve exterior, pale green, brown tessellated *Fritillaria straussii* and hairy pale yellow flowered *Pulsatilla albana armena* (277/280),

*Fritillaria poluninii* "is the smallest and rarest of four closely related species or subspecies from Turkey, Iraq and western Iran. It has been found in north-eastern Iraq where it was discovered by Oleg Polunin near Sulaimaniya in 1958 ....it can be recognised by its combination of short stems, shining dark green leaves and greyish, cup-shaped flowers veined with green; these veins are distinctly wavy, and in places seem to be on the point of forming tessellations" (Rix). *Solenanthes circinnatus* (277/213) is a tall member of the Borage family whose flowers are held at the end of long stalks. Seen in the Elburz the *Oncocyclis Iris acutiloba* (the

specific name refers to the long pointed falls and standards) is a small species with narrow foliage and veined and streaked whitish flowers with two dark spots on each fall, whereas the subspecies *I. acutiloba* ssp, *lineolata* (222/359, 234/352, 267/49, 277/252) has a single spot. In a valley carrying a melt water stream, large cushions of deep yellow flowered *Dionysia haussknechtii* (286/556-58, 299/71) in crevices of the rocky cliffs. The last plants shown were some well flowered *Aethionema grandiflorum* (293/247, 301/323 - neither of these photos do justice to that shown or indeed the deep pink forms often seen in cultivation or on the show benches) and the last photo, another view of the Temple of Fire enhanced for evening light.

Bob ended with a few comments on staying in Iran. Food: not for gourmets or any other food lover for that matter; barley soup-barley soup-barley soup, otherwise chicken, tough "lamb" (goat?) salad and rice made more palatable with yoghurt. Local travel arrangements with guide, minibus and driver, but the presence of John Ingham who speaks the language was a great help. Dress: elderly ladies in full black garments although those under 18 like to be smart with western touches and a black scarf around the hair may still be acceptable, although the authorities are clamping down on this. The mosques are opulent in contrast to shops which look like bomb sites. Generally most Iranians are hospitable and the visitor will not not be harassed unless going to sensitive areas. So another wonderful view of a photogenic country with lots of spectacular plants, top quality pictures (+ an excellent display of photographs) and a clear presentation. Thank you Bob especially as the our scheduled speaker was elsewhere.

For more, see the April 2007 newsletter. For those online, there is a piece by John and Hillary Birks + power point presentation at A Botanical Paradise in the Zagros Mountains of Iran (just google the title) and a preview summary of a paper called Biodiversity and phytogeography of the alpine flora of Iran. Wikipedia has references to a number of species. SummitPost - Flower and flora in Iran's Mountains is a photo album but plant species not named. Bulletins:- Paul Furse – Some Iranian and Turkish mountain plants 134/295 and 142/295; Chris Grey-Wilson – The southern Zagros mountains 153/221; Dieter Zschummel – In the land of the Crown Imperials and Donysias 286/551 and 287/32.

**RM**

## **MEETING 18th APRIL**

### **GWEN AND PHIL PHILLIPS FLOWERS OF THE SOUTHERN AND MIDDLE ROCKIES**

Gwen and Phil have been to us many times before, so most of you will know of their vast knowledge and excellent photography - they have recently gone digital, so a change from the previous two slide projector technology. The Rockies are among their favourite locations, but we haven't been with them so far south before.

This is the last meeting of the season, so make the most of it and bring along friends and anyone you can find, especially as our speakers will be coming all the way from Cleethorpes. We don't want to disappoint them with a poor turnout, so please be with us in your droves. You will not be disappointed!

2009-10 programme in progress - you will be kept informed.

