

Chelmos

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1 & 2

To Karya & Pheneos Lake

We'll arrive into Athens' gleaming new airport late in the afternoon and travel westwards soon passing Corinth and thence to Karya, our base for the first few days of the holiday. One of our first visits will be to a "secret place" which hosts a colony of thousands of the Greek endemic *Fritillaria mutabilis*, as well as orange *Tulipa orphanidea*, pretty stemless white *Astragalus lacteus* and yellow *Astragalus hellenicus*.

Lake Pheneos is known to locals as "the Switzerland of Corinthia". This beautiful locale is surrounded by dark fir forests and high rocky peaks. The ascent to a pass above the lake will produce more than ten species of Orchid, with Provence, Sparse-flowered and Milky all prominent. There are many bee orchids too, the best being the black and white *Ophrys leucophthalma* (probably only a form of the variable *Ophrys mammosa*) and the small greenish *Ophrys hebes*. On friable limestone we will find beautiful *Hammatolobium lotoides*, a local prostrate legume with red buds and yellow flowers, and the small rock-rose *Helianthemum hymettium*. Pink Butterfly Orchids and strikingly coloured *Anemone pavonina* are still in fine form. This is a great area for reptiles with Hermann's Tortoises a frequent sight, their shuffling in the herbage drawing attention to themselves. The tiny Snake-eyed Skink may be difficult to spot but not the common Peloponnesian Wall Lizards, Balkan Wall Lizards, nor indeed the striking bright lime-coloured Balkan Green Lizard. Back down near the lake we can visit the church of St George's Monastery covered with beautiful wall-paintings.

Days 3 & 4

Mount Saitas & Mount Killini

One of the highlights of the tour has certainly to be looked for on Mount Saitas. The large yellow-flowered endemic *Adonis cyllenea* grows in grassy dolines together with *Biebersteinia orphanidis* in its only European location. The walk to the top of Mount Saitas will reveal a rich flora with endemic yellow *Viola mercurii*, creeping pink-flowered *Prunus prostrata*, and lots of *Anemone blanda*. Colourful Southern Festoons fly above a rich floral tapestry of *Corydalis cava*, *Saxifraga carpetana* and endemic *Minuartia attica*. Yellow Orchis *pallens* grows along the woodland edges together with *Fritillaria mutabilis* and the lovely *Ophrys reinholdii*. Nearby we'll find some fine *Ophrys aesculapii* blooming among all sorts of other bee orchids.

Days 5 – 7

Diakopto, Mount Klokos, the Kerinitis Valley & Plataniotissa

Just above Diakopto is a very good Orchid site with endemic *Ophrys delphinensis*, widespread *Ophrys sicula*, various *Orchis* species, and plenty of others including *Neotinea maculata* and *Cephalanthera longifolia*. This just happens to be one of the best butterfly sites in the whole Peloponnese too! Thanks to a fountain, there are always mud-puddling Blues (often at least ten different species) and Skippers.

The Kerinitis valley will be the lowest area explored for its rich rock-plant community. We'll encounter *Campanula topaliana*, *Silene congesta*, *Onosma frutescens* and *Scrophularia heterophylla* and endemics such as *Silene corinthiaca* and *Stachys parolinii*. *Silene gigantea*, *Cicer graecum*, *Onobrychis ebenoides* and the lovely *Ebenus sibthorpii* will be in flower. By field edges there are some fine knapweeds, widespread *Centaurea depressa* and *Centaurea cyaneus*, as well as *Centaurea pichleri* and the endemic form of *Centaurea raphanina*. We will drive up to the top of the valley and have a short walk to look for orchids like *Ophrys spruneri*, *Ophrys cornuta* and *Ophrys fusca* (subspecies *calocaerina*) which are always late there thanks to the altitude. There are also many butterflies to enjoy, especially Fritillaries and Blues, and it won't be difficult to see Subalpine Warblers and Red-backed Shrike. Southern Swallowtails are a feature of this area. We could not leave the village of Plataniotissa without visiting its very curious sanctuary, a famous pilgrimage place, and at the same time a botanical curiosity...

Another trip from Diakopto is the ascent to Mount Klokos where we will find a large range of interesting plants including *Fritillaria graeca*, *Ophrys argolica*, *Orchis quadripunctata*, *Aristolochia microstoma*, *Alkanna methanea* and endemic *Aurinea moreana*. The view from the top of Mount Klokos is one of the best in Greece. Looking north, the white city of Egio stands out between greyish-green olive groves and the deep blue Gulf of Corinth is backed on the far shore by an impressive range of high peaks - Vardousia, Giona and Parnassos. On the near side we find all the highest mountains of the northern Peloponnese, from west to east are rounded Panachaikon, sharp Erimanthos, Chelmos and Killini. Star of Bethlehem's are diverse on this mountain with five species including *Ornithogalum exscapum*, endemic *Ornithogalum atticum*, and the elegant *Ornithogalum nutans*. Chapman's Blue and Southern Knapweed Fritillary are among the butterflies we'll encounter.

Days 8 - 11

Kalavrita & Mount Chelmos

On the hillsides of Xerokambos we'll see masses of yellow *Tulipa australis*, *Geranium macrostylum*, large cushions of *Aubrieta deltoidea*, strange *Rindera graeca* and *Solenanthes stamineus*, endemic *Cyclamen peloponnesiacum*, violet *Viola graeca* and yellow *Viola aetolica* and various Orchids especially *Orchis pallens*, *Orchis pinetorum* and *Orchis spitzelii* with both colour forms (yellow and pink) of *Dactylorhiza sambucina*. Queen of Spain Fritillary and the first Clouded

Apollo fly above the flowery grasslands, the former often busy laying eggs on the leaves of the various pansies, including *Viola macedonica* and *Viola chelmea*. *Pterocephalus perennis*, endemic *Globularia stygia*, *Saxifraga adscendens* and several *Astragalus* including *angustifolius* and *depressus* occupy dry gravelly areas. Several species of Buntings (including Cirl, Rock and Ortolan), Rock Thrush and Hoopoe nest in the rock crevices and in the fir trees. Another excursion takes us along the summital rocky ridge, on a large track, to find the stunning *Crocus sieberi* subspecies *sublimis*, *Scilla bifolia*, *Muscari botryoides*, *Corydalis blanda* subspecies *oxelmannii*, *Draba lasiocarpa*, cushion-forming *Arabis bryoides* and *Aubrieta deltoidea* amongst all sorts of botanical gems. There are few animals at this altitude but we have good chance to encounter the Shorelark in a form with an unusually black and white head. We'll flush pairs of Rock Partridges and amongst the butterflies fluttering over the slopes will be Eastern Dappled White, Gruner's Orange-Tip and Greek Mazarine Blue. Lower down we'll encounter more butterflies such as Osiris Blue, Chapman's Blue and Southern Festoon, and near the monastery at Aghia Lavra, the *zeusii* subspecies of *Ophrys mammosa*. There are more endemics such as *Linum aroanicum* and several fine buttercups in the form of *Ranunculuses brevifolius*, *millefoliatus* and *subhomophyllus*.

Day 12
Departure

Our flight back to the UK leaves at about two in the afternoon on Day 12 from Athens so we'll be able to make the journey through Corinth in relaxed and unhurried fashion back to the capital.

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