

Delphi

& the Southern Pindhos

A Greentours Tour Report

15th – 22nd October 2018

Leader: Kurt Vickery

The flights arrived late in the evening so it was straight to the very comfortable Nafsika hotel in Athens for a good night's sleep.

To Karpenisi

After breakfast it was time to head for Karpenisi. It was a lot easier to get out of Athens than getting in and we were soon on the first leg of our journey. The stretch of motorway to Lamia didn't seem to take too long to pass and soon we were driving through 'proper' countryside. We stopped at Makrakomi for lunch in a friendly taverna. On the way back to the minibus we found a Geranium bronze nectaring on various cut flowers on display outside a florists shop. After leaving the town we turned up a promising looking valley and made our first 'nature' stop of the day. We were drawn to a bank covered with scores of *Prospero autumnale* and the much more conspicuous *Calamintha nepeta* – flowering their hats off and attracting a great many butterflies. Showiest of all was a pristine Swallowtail, It was most confiding and allowed some lovely pictures to be taken. Other species seen included abundant Clouded yellows, Eastern bath white, Large and Small white, with a few each of Common blue, Brown argus and Large wall brown. We then drove a bit further looking for suitable *Spiranthes spiralis* habitat. A very likely looking meadow was chosen and we were soon spread out suitably arched over to try and find our cryptic quarry. At first it looked like we might be disappointed but careful searching revealed one and then another before we really began to get our 'eye in' and several were found and all in really nice condition. There were a number of dicots hanging on to the last few flowers of the season including *Polygonum equisteforme*, *Dianthus tenuiflorus* and a tiny *Verbascum blattiarum*. We then pressed on to the hotel stopping about a mile short for a bank covered with *Sternbergia lutea sicula* and a smattering of *Cyclamen hederifolium* giving us a taste of what was hopefully going to come later in the trip. We finished our botanising by adding a few more flowering plants to the list including *Centaurea solstitialis*, *Consolida regalis* and *Dorycnium hirsutum*.

Timfristos

We set off in perfect weather towards the ski centre and the pass of Timfristos. Just above Karpenisi the road got ever steeper and quickly into botanising territory. Our first stop of the day was for what turned out to be a rather spent *Colchicum bivonae* – evidence of the early season we were experiencing. Around and about more late-flowering plants were found including the knapweed – *Lomelosia crenata*, *Petrorhagia prolifera*, *Verbascum speciosum*, paradoxically revitalised by nearly being grazed to the ground and Ploughman's spikenard (*Inula conyza*), the latter not very showy but a flowering plant nonetheless. A Peregrine falcon

circled overhead as we returned to the minibus. We had nearly reached the pass when we simply had to stop for some *Morina persica* that were in surprisingly good shape for the time of year. Arriving at the Ski centre on the pass we spread out to explore the slopes. Not a lot other than *Armeria canescens* was seen in the flower line but there were a great many Chaffinch and Linnet on the move and a Black redstart was seen flitting from one building to another. After half an hour or so we set off down the other side of the mountain. As always first port of call here was the beautiful *Epilobium dodonaei*.

While these were being photographed we also managed to find *Centaurea grisebachii* and *Lotus pedunculatus*. There were flypasts of several butterflies that all with the exception of a single Queen of Spain fritillary were Brimstones. A little further along Cecilia spotted a single spike of *Campanula versicolor*. We had barely moved a hundred yards when Kurt feared he had run over a snake. He ran back to investigate and was delighted that not only was it in perfect health, it was a Horned viper (*Vipera ammodytes*). Despite being well and truly warmed by the sun it was torpid enough for us all to have a good look before it slithered off into the undergrowth. As we had plenty of time on our hands we decided to take a different and longer route back than we have in the past. This proved a fortuitous move as we found a wonderful bank of *Colchicum boissieri*. Just before leaving Tony had 'popped into the woods' Which resulted in an impromptu fungus foray as he had found amongst many others some fantastic *Sparassis crispa*, or Cauliflower Fungus. We had a rather late lunch in yet another lovely simple family taverna. It was late because we simply couldn't stop looking at things as we went along. One last stop was made a few miles below the valley where we found sparsely scattered Cyclamen. Fleabane and Vervain were common by the roadsides and *Ruscus aculeatus* was our last discovery of the day before returning to the hotel for what seemed like a well earned rest.

To Arrahova

Today was transfer day to Arrahova that would be our base for the next five days. After a short motorway stint we turned south towards Amfissa. Although this is still quite a major road it is pleasant enough to travel along thanks to the dramatic scenery with lots of *Sternbergia* colonies in the cliffy road cuttings. About half way we made one of our regular stops to see if *Campanula rupicola* might still be in flower – it wasn't but a most photogenic *Campanula versicolor* was ample compensation. Legs were stretched in the nearby track leading through *Abies cephalonica* forest. The abundant Cyclamen were admired and we saw lots of Coal tits in the tree canopy. We then pressed on towards Amfissa passing yet more slopes festooned in *Sternbergia*, all the best ones seemed to be on the most dangerous corners which made stopping for them very unwise. Passing through Amfissa we had broken the back of the journey and carried on just a little further to have lunch in the pretty coastal village of Galaxidi. On the way to the restaurant we spent a bit of time admiring the abundant fish in the crystal clear water. We had a delicious meal in the relaxing surroundings before making the last short hop to Arrahova and a very warm welcome from Panos at the Nefeles hotel.

Delphi

The weather was perfect when we arrived at Delphi . The ruins are of course incredible but simple things like crumbling walls covered in flowering ivy alive with buzzing hoverflies, wasps and Red admirals were enjoyed with equal measure. Kurt drew the groups attention to the Crag martins and Sparrowhawks circling overhead – there were clearly a number of 'neck

issues' amongst the group some of them with unpronounceable medical names but that wasn't going to stop us enjoying the birds! We were hoping for Western rock nuthatch which duly indulged us on the pillars of the great temple of Apollo. They were extremely vocal unleashing their full repertoire of song and calls – some familiar and some not. After a while it became clear that the frantic comings and goings of the birds were being caused by three fledged juveniles making unreasonable demands on their devoted parents. Up around the stadium site good numbers of *Colchicum cupanii* were seen and Cecilia found a fine specimen of *Campanula rupicola*. Unfortunately Mary was the only one to see a Blue rock thrush but Kurt felt confident that we would see one or two at our next scheduled stop. Picnic lunch was taken at what has become 'our' grotto just outside the archeological site. In the afternoon we visited an area below Delphi village. The site seems to be an abandoned attempt to build a bypass but has clearly had some mining activity in the not so distant pass as well. Happily no lasting damage to the local flora and fauna has been inflicted, in fact it has become a superb spot for butterflies. By the time we arrived it had clouded over but enough warmth had been trapped to keep us more than comfortable. The areas of disturbed ground had lots of the butterfly magnet otherwise known as *Dittrichia viscosa*. Butterfly numbers as well as diversity were very high especially for the time of year and we added several new species for the trip including Nettle tree butterfly, Pygmy skipper, Lang's short-tailed blue and Europe's tiniest species, the exquisite Grass jewel. Soon the Blue rock thrush prophecy was fulfilled and we all got very good views of at least three of them. Whether by luck or design the great rocky pillars for which the area is famed have been spared here. These incredible geological features are favoured by the stunning *Daphne jasminea* and we were lucky enough to find a very floriferous specimen that had no doubt benefitted from the recent rains. Walking on a little further we encountered more flowering plants including a large patch of flowering *Bituminaria bituminosa* (all previous plants were completely finished) as well as *Coridothymus capitata* and in rockier situations *Centranthus longiflorus*. Returning to the minibus we added a few more species including *Plumbago europea* with attendant Hummingbird hawkmoth and the pretty soft yellow *Centaurea pelia*. On the way back to the hotel we had one last treat in the shape of a vast mixed colony of *Crocus hadriaticus* and *Colchicum cupanii* just outside of Delphi. There were scattered *Biarum tenuifolium* with spathes on the verge of opening too

Parnassus to Sikia

It was a beautiful sunny morning and a relaxed breakfast was enjoyed overlooking the great gorge leading down to Delphi that is just discernable from the dining room. After setting off we were very soon on the lower slopes of Parnassus. Our first stop was in the foothills near the village of Kellaria. We walked around some rocky meadows surrounded by *Abies cephalonica*. The trees were playing host to Mistletoe - *Viscum album*, in this case ssp *abietis* which is exclusively found on these firs. We were here to search for *Crocus cancellatus mazziaricus* which we found pretty quickly. They weren't as plentiful as usual but there were enough for us to find them in their full range of colours ranging in all shades of blue from very dark to almost white. The night had been rather cold which meant that the flowers were all covered in tiny dew drops that caught the light in a most attractive way, keeping the photographers busy for quite some time. We usually find *Sternbergia colchiciflora* here too but after careful searching we had to concede that they had probably been and gone already this year. We then moved on to an area of pristine *Abies* forest and walked along a track. There wasn't a lot in the way of flowers but were very pleased to find plentiful pristine *Colchicum boissieri* lining the trackside. One individual specimen was so tiny it was almost

dwarfed by a visiting Pygmy skipper. Next stop was at the pass just below the ski-centre. Again we encountered good numbers of *Colchicum boissieri* growing in beautiful crumbling limestone pavement habitat. A lot of the other flowering plants had recently been browsed by animals so not a lot of blooms to be seen with the exception of *Dianthus deltoides*. It was in lovely condition and worth getting spiteful *Astragalus* spines in the knees to get a closer look. We had lunch on the other side of the mountain in the grounds of the delightful little church of Ag Maria. While Kurt prepared the food the group spent time botanising in the gently kempt Walnut grove opposite.

The ground around the trees had been scraped by humans and excavated by Wild boar which resulted in a lot of *Cyclamen hederifolium* tubers sitting on top the soil. They seemed none the worse for this disturbance and were flowering their hats off. In less shady situations *Crocus cancellatus mazziaricus* of a uniformly dark blue were found as well as the leaves of countless *Biarum*. Last scheduled stop for the day was to search for *Colchicum bivonae*, just north of the Mournos reservoir at around 1200 meters. We searched a site well known to Kurt but could only find one withered flower—sadly the rains that had helped us in so many ways had defeated us this time. The way back to the hotel was through dramatic scenery and a number of photo opportunities were taken along the way. The last half hour was spent driving past mirror calm azure sea setting the scene for a relaxing evening at the hotel.

Koutsorou monastery and Mournos reservoir

Today we headed west along the coast road. Our first botanical foray of the day was in the foothills between Itea and Galaxidi. We climbed up through wonderful phrygana until we stopped at what seemed like an unremarkable gully on a hairpin. We had been here on previous trips and knew that we had a good chance of finding *Biarum tenuifolium*. The season was clearly late for them as we only found one specimen. On a more positive note we found the first *Arisarum vulgare* 'flower' of the trip so far along with *Calandula arvensis* in profusion. There were a lot of passerines on the move of which a very high percentage (and all that we checked) were Robins. We then moved on higher up the mountain through beautiful boulder-strewn *Euphorbia dendroides* and *Phlomis fruticosa* habitat. Before settling on a plateau. As soon as we stepped out of the minibus we were having to watch our feet to avoid treading on the abundant *Colchicum cupanii* which included some fine multi-flowering clumps. There were quite a few *Prospero autumnalis* and a single *Crocus hadriaticus*. A pair of Western rock nuthatches were very active and seemed 'out of place' flitting between the low rocks. After an enjoyable hour we travelled further up the coast road. Some of the group had expressed a desire if possible to see *Urginea maritima* in flower as thus far the thousands we had seen had been in well advanced fruit. Fortuitously, Cecilia saw some out of the corner of her eye as we sped along the highway. We made a U-turn as soon as possible to investigate. The few that Cecilia had seen were in fact part of a very large colony numbering a few hundred bulbs nearly all of which were in flower. Thanks mainly to overgrazing they had managed to dominate in much the same way that *Eremurus* do in other parts of the world and from a distance they bared an uncanny resemblance to them albeit having no leaves. There was very little else that had managed to survive the ravages of grazing except for the lovely little Bugle – *Ajuga iva*. The *Urginea*'s were most photogenic and so we lingered for quite a while before moving on towards to The Koutsourou monastery. The way up involved seemingly innumerable hairpin bends through a landscape of *Quercus* scrub. Eventually we got quite high and on the plateaux leading towards the main stop of the day we were delighted to see thousands of *Crocus hadriaticus*. Our lunch was taken under the arms of a fantastic old Plane tree just below the monastery itself. Again there were countless *Crocus hadriaticus* along with

scattered *Colchicum cupanii* to enjoy in the surrounding meadows. When we had eaten a quick walk up to the rocks below the site we found some very large plants of *Campanula versicolor*, most of which had gone to seed but a few were still in good condition and deserving of a few photographs. The last leg of the day involved driving through the spectacular scenery of around Mournos reservoir before heading south towards Nafpaktos. We drove through several miles of beautiful Plane trees just beginning to take on their autumnal hues punctuated by the fiery colours of *Cotinus* that were seemingly advanced and ready for the coming cold of winter. The reason for this lengthy if beautiful detour was to search for the local endemic – *Crocus robertianus*. Kurt stopped at a site that he knew well for the species. At first he feared that we might be out of luck as the first search only revealed a couple of shriveled specimens. With a bit more perseverance more in hope than expectation we counted ourselves very lucky as a few of these beauties were found hidden in the base of some dense shrubs that had perhaps kept conditions cooler just that little bit longer. This seemed the perfect swan song for the trip and we cruised home much satisfied with our day.

To Athens and home

How lucky were we!? It had rained heavily in the night, something we had managed to avoid all week. Sad farewells to the lovely family at the Nefeles were made before an easy drive to the airport and home

The Peloponnese

Autumn Bulbs of Sparta

A Greentours Tour Report

22nd – 29th October 2018

Leader: Kurt Vickery & Oron Peri

Mycaenae and road to Gythio

After a relaxing breakfast in the dining room of the lovely Arxontiko Hotel we had barely left when Oron spotted a fine specimen of *Clematis flammula* in very good flower especially for the time of year. Photographs were taken and we continued to our first scheduled stop about 15 miles of tight hairpins from Kefalari . We knew from experience that there should be *Colchicum cupanii* here. They were indeed but in fewer numbers than in previous years. They were joined by a scattering of *Crocus cancellatus mazziaricus*. The weather was rather cool and cloudy meaning that most of the flowers were fairly tightly shut. Oron was asked to explain the structural differences between the two genres and obliged by crouching over and gently blowing into the blooms to reveal the relevant parts. Walter whose main botanical passion is *Cyclamen* wandered off while all this was happening and found some fine examples of *Cyclamen crassifolium* mainly finding refuge in the base of spiny shrubs. . A few miles down the road we couldn't resist a floriferous colony of *Erica manipulifolia*. There was a fantastic specimen of *Cyclamen graecum* with unusually large and plump flowers growing in the exposed roots of an Olive. A quick wander around revealed lots of *Prospero autumnalis* and the wonderful aroma of disturbed volatile oils betrayed the presence of *Micromeria juliana* and *Coridothymus capitata*. There were also thousand of leaves of *Anemone pavonina* which we speculated must be an amazing sight in the spring. Not much further along the road we found a rocky bank festooned with *Sternbergia lutea sicula* and *Cyclamen graeca*. There were lots of emerging leaves too of *Urginea maritima* (Apparently this species has been placed in *Drimia* and split into a number different taxa .Those from this part of the world are now referred to by some as *Drimia numidica* – groan!). It was then on to the magnificent archaeological site of Mycaenae. Unfortunately it was raining quite heavily when we arrived so the visit was rather short . We did however find our first *Arisarum vulgare* in flower along with the now familiar *Cyclamen* and *Sternbergia*. Needless to say the characteristic birds were nowhere to be seen. To compensate we spent a most enjoyable and protracted meal in one of the very friendly tavernas in the village below. The last leg of the journey was through beautiful if wet countryside. We were going to drive non stop but a rather urgent call of nature just north of Gythio revealed a fine colony of *Crocus boryi*. As we travelled the last few miles the weather gradually improved and lifted completely just as the pretty bay of the town came into view. We just knew we were going to enjoy our stay here!

Monemvasia

We awoke to a fine morning and enjoyed breakfast overlooking the bay. The view enhanced by the occasional blue flash of a Kingfisher flying from one side to the other .Our first stop of

the day was just outside Gythio at a spot overlooking Valtaki beach, where the wreck of the Dimitrios lies just offshore in shallow water. We had stopped to look at *Narcissus tazetta* which were in nice condition which isn't always the case at this time of year. Around and about were *Allium callimischon* and *Cyclamen graecum* with a few flowering *Heliotropium hirsutissimum* too. Some of the nearby trees were draped in *Clematis cirrhosa* and on more clifly habitat *Ephedra foemina* was abundant. The scratchy calls of Sardinian warblers gave them away just as we were leaving. Next stop was just outside the town of Sykia where we walked along a boulder strewn slope. Here were a lovely combination of *Crocus goulimyi*, *Crocus boryi*, *Colchicum cupanii* and *Allium callimischon*. The slightly damp terra rossa between the boulders made a very attractive contrasting background for flower portraits of which umpteen were taken. Eventually we reached a pretty white chapel that overlooked the surrounding hills. There were some spectacular clumps of multi-flowering *Crocus boryi* here and some very nice examples *Coridothymus capitata* and the unusual Bugle - *Ajuga iva*. Butterflies were numerous especially Clouded yellow and Wall brown and there was considerable excitement when a Plain tiger sailed past. As ever Walter was simultaneously searching for the best forms of *Cyclamen* and Reptiles and reported Snake-eyed skink. Somewhere in the distance we could hear a Western rock nuthatch. We spent a bit of time scanning likely looking rocks and eventually found one showing very well. The group were delighted to see them as missing them at Mycanae was a great disappointment. Driving on, we rounded the coast and caught a glimpse of the spectacular fortified peninsula of Monemvasia. We would be visiting the town later on so continued down the coast to Agias Foukas where a tiny chapel stood in a cemetery atop a small rock in the sea, accessed only by a narrow causeway. The charming little harbour just happens to be a perfect picnic spot. Kurt and Oron prepared lunch while the group explored the nearby littoral. People gradually drifted back with reports of plentiful *Narcissus serotinus* growing amongst the spiny shrubs that dominated the area and lots of splendid male Stonechats were seen. After we had eaten it was time to concentrate on the actual reason for coming here – that being it is the Locus-classicus for *Colchicum sfikasianum*. Before any time at all we saw a few growing on crumbly roadside banks. While these were being photographed by the many, Celia looked on a hidden bank opposite and found a magnificent multi-flowered clump and in the base of a fruiting *Rhamnus alaternus* a huge deep coloured *Cyclamen graecum* that had Walter almost in a sweat!. In the meantime Oron had been determined to find more *Colchicum* and had been searching in an abandoned Olive grove about quarter of a mile back from whence we came. It was well worth the effort as he found several perfect plants in a small area. The markings on this species are usually only just discernable but one specimen had the most spectacular dark tessalation usually only found in species like *Colchicum variegatum*. It was then on to see *Crocus goulimyi leucanthus*. The medicane of a few weeks previous may have caused devastation in so many ways but on the positive side it had created perfect conditions for flowering bulbs (OK corms in this case!). It is nearly always a sight to behold the *Crocus* here but it is no exaggeration to say that the myriad blooms of 2018 were quite overwhelming in beauty and scale. It took a bit of persuasion to drag people away but we needed to press on. First port of call was the huge bank festooned with *Cyclamen crassifolium* in the village itself. The tubers are so numerous here that they end up pushing each other out of the crumbling soil. Oron speculated that some of the largest specimens were probably fifty or sixty maybe even more years old. We had spent so much time looking at flowers that our scheduled stop at Monemvasia was only long enough to get a very welcome coffee before heading back to the hotel

Harouda

Today we were heading down the 'middle finger' of the Peloponnese towards Harouda. It took about twenty minutes of winding roads to get there and within seconds of arriving we found what we were looking for. In a very pretty and well-tended Olive grove were the magnificent chequered purple goblets of *Colchicum bivonae* in the peak of condition interspersed with *Crocus boryi*. Some of the old Olives had holes in them and several opportunist *Cyclamen crassifolium* were growing out of them. The margins of the plot were full of *Calamintha nepeta* that were being attended by all sorts of butterflies but mainly 'Whites'. After half an hour or so we went to the coastal village of Vathi. This is home to another *Colchicum* species, this time *Colchicum parlatoris*. It may not be such a spectacular species as *bivonae* but it is a multi-flowering species in some cases with as many as a dozen blooms from a single bulb-like corm. The temperature had risen considerably and the diversity and numbers of butterflies increased accordingly. Several species were nectaring of the *Colchicums* including Pygmy skipper, Common blue, Meadow brown and Large wall brown. Just as we were walking away from the *Colchicums* a Plain tiger sailed past serenely. A bit further along we stopped for a colony of *Narcissus serotinus*. It looked like there weren't many flowers this year but closer inspection revealed that there were hundreds of cryptic green seed capsules and in fact we were just a little late for them at this site. In some shadier habitat we found *Asplenium ceterach* and one of the 'Birthworts' – *Aristolochia sempervirens* whilst all the time the air was pervaded by the sweet scent of *Smilax aspera*. Pushing on we stopped at the 'Fireman's memorial'. This is the locus classicus for yet another *Colchicum* – *Colchicum psaridis* (the name has recently been messed with but I reserve the right to retain it) This species is superficially similar to *Colchicum cupanii*, but the main and most obvious difference is what goes on underground ... Instead of typical *Colchicum* corms it has what are technically known as 'sobols'. These are very strange looking things that look a bit like amorphous bronze shiny chicken breast bones. We were treated to many fine flowering plants that were joined by countless *Crocus goulimy* and *boryi* as well as *Allium callimischon*. Walter had other ideas and searched fruitlessly for Swallowtail caterpillars but did turn up a Spurge hawk caterpillar searching for a suitable pupation site. It was then on to Harouda but with just one more scheduled stop for *Crocus niveus* at its type location. As usual the site delivered a great many perfect and huge specimens some rivaling a small Tulip for size. There were good numbers of *Spiranthes spiralis* which although not a huge surprise we hadn't noted them at this site before on several previous visits. After half an hour or so we at last arrived at Harouda. It takes a bit of navigating through the labyrinthine village but the effort is so worth it. We parked up by its exquisite ancient church and while the group explored lunch was prepared. There are acres and acres of long abandoned groves here which have created the perfect habitat for *Sternbergia lutea*. The plants here closely match the concept of *Sternbergia lutea lutea* with very large flowers and apple green almost stripeless leaves. Oron hypothesises that this is in fact a selection from ancient times and has been originally planted by locals around churches and houses. True or not it seems a sound enough theory and here quite literally countless bulbs have found the conditions ideal to proliferate. It was hard to pull people away as ever on these trips but as time was marching on we headed for home but with just one more stop namely Kelefi castle. The castle affords a spectacular view over the surrounding area and just happens to be a great spot for *Narcissus serotinus*. Fortuitously the bulbs were not quite so advanced as at Vathi and lots of pictures were taken and as an added bonus yet more *Spiranthes* in very nice condition were found before we returned to Gythio

Lambokampos

It was an absolutely beautiful sunny morning in Gythio, enough to tempt almost everybody out of bed early for a promenade. Walter even found time to photograph Pipefish and Blenny's from the sea wall. After yet another relaxing breakfast we headed West this time. Before too long we gained altitude pretty quickly through beautiful jagged and crumbly limestone habitat. Abundant window views of *Crocus niveus* and *Euphorbia rigida* whet our appetite before our first stop of the day. The habitat was boulder strewn with *Cistus* and several spiny shrub species. Unusually both *Arbutus andrachne* and *unedo* were growing together too. Within minutes some 'new' *Crocus* were found namely the distinctive and easy to identify *Crocus biflorus melantherus* and more ambiguous *Crocus laevigatus*, most of which were completely white with only a few showing faint feathering on the outers. There were plenty of other dicots to keep us busy including *Thymelaea tartonraira* and pretty crimson-flowered but foul smelling *Putoria calabrica*. Cirl buntings filled the air with their songs and Linnets flitted about seemingly everywhere. We then moved on and into a valley where we traditionally look for *Crocus cancellatus mazziaricus*. As soon as we got out of the mini-buses we easily found them, the good light had encouraged them to open their star-like flowers wide. Some were even forcing their way through the degraded tarmac on the side of the road! We then pressed on towards the main stop of the day, climbing steadily again for a while before the long winding road down to a village. The road was lined in places with fantastic fiery-red *Cotinus* in their glorious autumnal guise along with lots of showy *Erica manipuliflora* full of flowers. In the village itself we wandered around the labyrinth of lanes and smallholdings and before too long there were 'oohs' of pleasure at the myriad *Crocus goulimyi* growing in any ground that hadn't been recently cultivated. We went into an ancient meadow walled with stunning weathered stone. Amongst some fantastic old and gnarled Acers were *Cyclamen crassifolium*, *Sternbergia lutea* and of course lots of *Crocus goulimyi*. But in an old threshing circle were plentiful of *Crocus laevigatus*, this time showing more of the characteristic feathering that helps to identify them. We retraced our steps for the 12km or so to the plateau that overlooks the village. Amongst the boulder strewn habitat of stunted *Abies*, *Quercus* and Juniper scrub were *Crocus boryi*, *niveus* and *biflorus melantherus* and also *hadriaticus* that seemed to prefer the margins of lightly cultivated land that the locals had somehow managed to till in this rough terrain. After lunch in a handy roadside shelter we headed back towards Gythio. A few miles on someone spotted a big colony of *Crocus boryi* which had everybody piling out to get a better view. They were joined by scattered *Colchicum cupani*. The locals in a nearby house were clearly wondering what of earth was going on especially with lots of people on their hands and knees taking photographs! We got back into Gythio with a bit of time to spare so it was a popular choice to head for the lighthouse on the peninsula that overlooks the bay. To our great surprise there were numerous *Spiranthes spiralis* (hadn't noted them hear before) but it was the infinite variation amongst the *Cyclamen graecum* we had come to see. There seemed to be an endless array of leaf colour, pattern and size that kept people amused for quite some time before it was time to head back for dinner.

Vathia and Cape Matapan

Yet another fine morning – we could get used to this! We entered a steep cliffy valley and stopped to admire a pretty good specimen of *Campanula versicolor* albeit rather high up and difficult to get to. While we were busy doing this Walter had gone on characteristic walkabout and with the eyes of a hawk had picked out an Oleander hawkmoth dangling from a shrub

about thirty feet above us. How he saw it remains a great wonder to us all as it was as cryptic as could be and took a lot of describing to everybody just where it was. Eventually it was gently 'coaxed' down for a closer look where its beauty could be admired in close-up. Pressing on we passed through lots of abandoned Olive groves and in one them we saw a Golden jackal scurrying away as we approached. We drove through the town onto a plateau again a landscape of abandoned terraces. Black kites circled above and lots of Linnet flocks were moving around. There were great thickets of spiteful *Calicotome villosa* much favoured by perching Stonechat. On the botanical front there were hundreds of *Narcissus serotinus* to enjoy interspersed with *Cyclamen graecum*, *Prospero autumnalis* and a few *Colchicum parlatoris*, the latter were pretty much past their best. We next popped into the town for a walk and a coffee. On a steep rocky slope right next to the sea, we found a broad-leaved form of *Colchicum cupanii*, much like *f. glossophyllum*. Lunch was taken a few miles further on at the iconic Mani village of Vathia. While the food was being prepared people wandered around. Walter excitedly returned with reports of several Spurge hawkmoth caterpillars. When we investigated further it seemed like just about all the spurges in the area - *Euphorbia rigida* and *characias* had larvae of one instar or another on them. Next stop was at Cape Matapan, the most southerly point of the Peloponnese and site of the ominously named 'Death oracle' – now a pile of rocks to the heathens amongst us. It just happens to be the type locality of the newly described subspecies of *Prospero autumnalis*, *ssp. latifolia*. It may be very rare internationally but there were plenty to be seen here as well as *Cyclamen graecum* and a few abraded *Colchicum parlatoris*. We had come down the west side of the peninsula and decided to return home along the eastern side. The road zig-zags pretty steeply on this side and it took a bit of time to drive up but the effort is so worth it. The scenery overlooking the sea is spectacular to say the least. After a while the road became flatter and easier to negotiate. Soon we were reunited with *Crocus niveus* in great numbers. Some jumbo sized clumps proved irresistible and we were 'forced' to stop. We had barely moved when Oron was flashing his headlights in the second minibus meaning something had happened. With his sharp eyes he had somehow managed to spot a Little owl peeping out of a crevice in the roadside cliff. It had been a wonderful day so we headed back with just one more stop for an exquisite tiny chapel that wouldn't look out of place in a Tolkien movie.

Mystras and Langada pass

Today it was time to start the last leg of the trip. We headed north towards Mystras. It was a pleasant drive in the sunshine and it didn't seem at all long before we began to approach the ancient site. About a mile or so before arriving we stopped to allow people to take the essential photographs of the fortified village and its spectacular, imposing citadel. As usual the group were ferried to the top and mini-buses taken back down to rendez-vous and save tired legs from having to make the very steep return. After a couple of hours 'doing culture' we met up. Walter had decided to wait at the bottom as the car park is a reptile 'hotspot' in both senses of the word and was patiently waiting with a tiny Whip snake wrapped around his fingers. We then travelled the quarter of an hour or so it takes to reach the Langada pass. The road snakes up through stunningly beautiful forest enhanced even more at this time of year by the Plane trees whose leaves a beginning to take on the golds and reds of autumn. Lunch was taken in the wonderful purpose-built shelter next to a tiny whitewashed church overlooking the stream that runs through the valley. The church just happens to be the perfect spot to find our main target of the day – *Galanthus reginae-olgae*. After lunch everybody spread out and enjoyed the Snowdrops scattered amongst the huge gnarled Plane trees. We were lucky with the weather as it often rains up here even when it is sunny

elsewhere. Lucky for us all except Walter who was hoping it would be wet as it tempts out the Fire salamanders from their lairs. There were a number of locals collecting Fungi and they were very keen to show us the fruits of their labours. Amongst a host of unfamiliar toadstools they had found some delicious looking Ceps and the Coral fungi – *Ramaria flava*. Just as we were leaving a group of Long-tailed tits were a pleasant surprise and would prove to be the last birds to make it on the trip list. Before setting off for the hotel we raced a few miles higher to see a disjunct colony of *Colchicum boissieri*. We were either too late or too early but there was only a solitary flower but a flower nonetheless! Time was getting on and so we headed straight back to the hotel for our last evening meal together and flight in the morning.