

Galanthus of the Black Sea

A Tour for the Alpine Garden Society

Day 1 to Trabzon

Our flight will land in the Trabzon late in the evening and we'll head into the city to our hotel. Trabzon was first settled by Milesians and Arcadians in around 700BC and became the Kingdom of Pontus, ruled by kings most of whom were called Mithridates! Since, Trabzon has led a mostly secluded history, only occasionally involving itself in outside events. During the 1800s much of its trade was conducted with Britain and it became thought of as a romantic trading outpost in the English-speaking world.

Day 2 Sumela Monastery & Kara Deresi

Close to Trabzon is a side valley cloaked with hornbeam and Oriental Beech in which we'll find the famous Sumela Monastery, built directly into a cliff and surely in one of the most spectacular settings in Turkey. Rushing streams are home to Dipper and Grey Wagtail and along their banks we'll find *Galanthus rizehensis*. Under the richly diverse forest is abundant *Pachyphragma macrophyllum*, occasional *Scilla winogradowii*, lots of *Corydalis caucasica*, and plenty of the white form of *Primula vulgaris* subspecies *sibthorpii*. Close to the monastery we'll find *Lamium gundelsheimeri*, *Lathraea squamaria*, *Tilia rubra* and *Scrophularia kotschyana*.

In the afternoon we'll explore Kara Deresi, a stunning gorge with large igneous bluffs rising vertically out of the thick forest. This is the main known site for *Galanthus koenenianus*. These snowdrops grow with a striking large white-flowered *Erodium*. If we are lucky we might get a sight of Wallcreeper here.

Later we'll turn inland on a road that rises up towards the 2600m Ovit Pass. This road takes one through the most gorgeous forests before reaching the small town of Ikizdere a little below 1000m above sea level. Our hotel is seven kilometres up a side road from here.

Day 3 Anzar Yayla

Close by our hotel we'll have our first chance to see *Galanthus alpinus*. Today, our route winds gently up through the valleys to the high summer pastures of Anzar Yayla, at this season the land above this summer village will be largely snowbound, but just below the snows we'll find a magnificent sight as hundreds of thousands of *Crocus aerius* bloom on the gentle slopes by the roadside. They are a mix of whites and blues, some with tepals more or less half and half, others pale with blue lines – a wonderful sight! Shorelarks and Rock Bunting inhabit these same slopes

alongside *Gagea villosa* and *Gagea glacialis* and just a little *Primula veris macrocalyx*. Lower down we'll find plentiful *Cyclamen parviflorum* and *Scilla sibirica* subspecies *armena* – and descending further we'll find *Mezereon* and *Senecio hypochionaceus* on the rocks along the roadside.

Day 4

Ikizdere & Mençuna Waterfall

Banks of low fine turf are draped with the local reddish-purple version of *Primula vulgaris* subspecies *sibthorpii*. Pretty little meadows between forest and stream have *Galanthus alpinus* though the present thinking puts all Turkish 'alpinus' in *koenenianus*. Under the trees *Paris incompleta* will just be coming into flower. We'll also find the unusual *Primula megaseifolia* whose flowers superficially resemble the *sibthorpii* form of *Primula vulgaris* but the flowers are held several in an umbel and the leaves are very different, being rounded and coriaceous.

Moving along the coast we'll visit Mençuna Şelalesi, a waterfall immersed in luxuriant euxine forest, the banks dripping with water and the understory fern-laden. By the waterfall itself is a curious population of snowdrops that seem intermediate between *Galanthus rizehensis* and *Galanthus woronowii*. A nice form of *Viola canina* flowers on the rocks and in the valley below we'll find the impressive birthwort *Aristolochia pontica* and *Ornithogalum oligophyllum* both in flower.

We'll drop back down a short distance to the Black Sea coast and spend the night at Arhavi.

Day 5

To Georgia. Adjara – Chalaati

It is a short journey to the Georgian border from Arhavi. As we cross the border offshore we'll see the rare Black Sea race of Porpoise and many Black-throated Divers and Great Crested Grebes. Soon we'll be heading uphill into valleys if anything more luxuriant than the similar euxine forests in Turkey. Here we'll find 'nests' of *Iris lazica* laced with blue yellow-centred flowers on shady banks where both *Rhododendron ponticum* and *Rhododendron luteum* will be in flower. And *Staphylea pinnata* too. *Violas* include *alba*, *odorata* and *riviniana*, Both *Galanthus woronowii* and *Galanthus rizehensis* are found here but at these levels they are likely to be already in fruit. Elegant *Doronicum orientale* is overshadowed by beautiful blue *Omphalodes cappadocicum* clinging to the low cliff faces. Other plants include *Lathyrus laxiflorus*, *Chamaecytisus hirsutus*, and fine displays of *Saxifraga cymbalaria*

We'll head for the little hamlet of Chalaati full of big farmhouses hardly occupied at this season. These lie in a mosaic of beech forest and meadows and here we'll see a hillside carpeted in a hundred thousand flowering *Galanthus krasnovii*. This species has particularly large blooms and the variety at this site is impressive. We'll see abundant *Corydalis caucasica* carpeting the woodland floor and also just a

little of the almost white, entire-bracted, *Corydalis cava*. *Lathraea squamaria* is commonplace under the trees and we'll see some fine Witch's Butter and Scarlet Elfcaps too. Just a short distance from the magnificent show of *krasnovii* is a twenty-metre square patch of *Galanthus woronowii*. A little further along the road is a wonderful display of *Scilla winogradowii* colouring the forest floor blue.

Day 6

Ambrolauri District

Driving north from Batumi we'll stop by the Rioni River. Here a large area of longoz forest looks stunning with great drifts of *Leucojum aestivum* in flower. We'll visit a valley at Ambrolauri where we'll see a population of *Paeonia caucasica* though whether any will yet be in flower we'll see - we may be too early for them! Here the *Helleborus orientalis* is particularly abundant and the woodland understorey holds a rich fern flora including *Polystichum aculeatum*, *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, and *Asplenium trichomanes*. We'll visit the locus classicus for *Galanthus shaoricus*. Under mixed hazels and oriental beech this lovely little snowdrop holds sway. The very glaucous and rather wide leaves are held at 45° to the stems, which are short, and the whole gives a very pleasing structure. Flowering with them are lots and lots of *Cyclamen* and *Erythronium caucasicum*.

Day 7

Shaori Lake & Racha

Carpets of *Primula vulgaris* and *Cyclamen coum* dominate the woodland floor. *Scilla sibirica* of the nominate form offers its bright blue bells in ones, twos or sometimes threes. Little blue *Anemone caucasica*, pretty pink *Dentaria pentaphylla* and large-flowered forms of *Pulmonaria dacica* mix with some fabulous plants of the reddish flowered *Helleborus abchasica* under the beeches. Here we can find more *Galanthus shaoricus*. Higher up we'll reach the lovely Shaori Lake. Fabulous displays of *Cyclamens*, *Primulas* and *Erythronium caucasicum* bloom under a mix of Chestnuts, Oriental Beech and Hazel. In the evening we'll descend to Batumi and our hotel on the coast. Offshore will be large rafts of Black-necked Grebes and flocks of Mediterranean Shearwaters will be passing by....

Day 8

Kutaisi & Gelati

Moving inland we'll find alder woods replete with fine displays of Summer Snowflake and once above Kutaisi, some wonderful populations of *Erythronium caucasicum*, these gorgeous flowers numbering in their millions here. With them are rich-blue *Pulmonaria dacica* and rich reddish-purple *Lathyrus vernus*. On a prominent bluff in the hills above Kutaisi is Gelati Monastery, a classic Georgian church that has been listed as a World Heritage Site since 1994. The small monastery garden has the old daffodil cultivars 'Telemonius Plenus' and 'Romanus'.

Day 9

Batumi Botanical Garden and Departure

We'll spend the morning at Batumi's Botanical Garden. The garden is a little over a hundred years old and this has allowed the many trees planted at the garden's inauguration to mature into magnificent specimens. This is allied to a wonderful setting of steep-sided hills by the sea with a subtropical climate. The gardens are laid out geographically, so we can walk through the Chinese and Japanese sections before passing through North America and briefly Mexico then descending past the Australasian section! Under the trees and bamboos is a fair smattering of often native flora. amongst these is the *Epimedium colchicum* with bright yellow flowers, various *Violas*, *Duchesnea indica*, and stands of the white crucifer *Pachyphragma macrophyllum*.

We'll have a chance to see a little of Batumi's faded glory and then head to the airport where we can sit back and reflect on our snowdrop odyssey.

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