

Lake Van

Eastern Turkey

A Greentours Tour Report



Iris iberica elegantissima

21st May – 3rd June 2023

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Photos by Ian Green unless otherwise stated

Day 1 May 21st

to Istanbul



Lady Orchid

We all convened at the Durusu Hotel in pleasant countryside fifteen minutes from Istanbul's shiny new(ish) airport. David and Kay had already been there a couple of days and had generated a list of birds in that time that included Imperial Eagle, Little Bittern and Eastern Orphean Warbler. Before dinner we had just time to take a look at the slopes below and above the hotel where amongst other things we encountered Lady Orchid, some very robust and richly-coloured Bee Orchids, Toothed Orchids and *Ophrys cornuta*. We could not relocate David's *Platantheras* but pictures showed them to be Lesser Butterfly Orchids, an uncommon plant in Turkey. Sand Lizard and Eastern Hedgehog were seen too.

Day 2 May 22nd

Van to Doğubeyazıt

We were up early this morning, and by six-thirty were going through airport security, thankfully at this time of morning quiet so our progress through check-in and into the gate area was swift.

Our flight was on time and we were soon heading east, crossing more or less the length of Turkey, something that takes two hours in a plane. The weather was mostly cloudy, so we only got intermittent views of Lake Van's turquoise-blue waters, the snow-rimmed crater of Nemrut Dağı marking the start of our descent and to the south we could glimpse line after line of very snowy mountains, many of them topping 3500m. There were neat villages perched among grassy basins and occasionally along the shore of the lake itself. We passed over Akdamar Island before banking round in a semi-circle and following the shoreline into the airport. Our baggage soon arrived and then it was out to meet our drivers Sinan and Gökhan.

After picking up my bag full of Turkish Flora books from a hotel in town we were off, heading into the steppelands north of Van. It took us a while to shake ourselves free of the expanding city, but soon there was nothing but wide-open expanses and the occasional village and a seemingly out of place dual carriageway given the volume of traffic on it – not much! We drew to a halt to explore an area of dry steppe. *Iris barnumae* had finished flowering and *Bellevalia longipes* had finished flowering (just) but there were *Muscari caucasicum* and *Gladiolus atroviolaceus* in bloom. *Silene arguta* and *Campanula involucreta* were enjoyed and there were patches of blue flowered, red-purple-bracted *Salvia multicaulis* mixed with masses of yellow *Astragalus caraganae*. All the time Black-headed Buntings and Corn Buntings moved past and there were Bee-eaters, Cuckoos, Common Whitethroat and Cetti's Warbler in the small copse of trees. A Long-legged Buzzard flew overhead. Rosy Starlings flew past and the lovely *maura* race of Stonechat was noted. Butterflies were excellent with one impressive group of mud-puddlers noted. These included several Glanville Fritillaries, an abundance of Green-underside Blues as well as a few Common Blues and Mazarine Blues, and scarce species such as the little Persian Skipper *Spialia phlomidis* and best of all the lovely Fatima's Blue. We photographed both Turkish Fiery Copper *Lycaena asabinus* and the lovely golden Anatolian Copper *Lycaena ochimus*. Moving back to the road we could hear Quail and Redshank flew about. *Primula auriculata* bloomed in a damp gully with lots of *Dactylorhiza osmanica*. Here there were a few *Orchis pseudolaxiflora* blooming amongst Sea Arrow Grass and the lousewort *Pedicularis comosa* which was common.

We reached the northeast corner of the lake and left its shores at Bendimahi, not having time to stop and birdwatch (we'd save that for a later day) and instead following the Bendimahi River valley up into the hills. We stopped for lunch at Muradiye Waterfall. The waterfall was in good spate – an impressive amount of water cascading down. Lunch was provided by a small cafe in a green grassy spot amongst poplars, and was either fried trout or a meat dish 'saç kavurma', both of which were rated delicious, and some of us were so hungry after the early start and airline breakfast that we had to have more! Egyptian Vulture was seen in the distance.



After lunch we drove upstream a few kilometres and walked through a little almond and peach orchard to the river bank where we were by an incredible sight. The huge blooms of our first oncocyclis iris, *Iris iberica elegantissima*. A hundred or so black-purple blooms were topped with almost luminous white standards, these lightly edged in red. There was some variation, two particularly pale plants were noted, and also some with hints of yellow and others really quite dark, but all were exceptionally large. Below us Marsh Warbler, Golden Orioles and Cetti's Warblers were in the riverside vegetation. There was a rich variety of plant life here with several *Astragalus* species, Bastard Toadflax, various *Euphorbias*, and the lovely prostrate *Astragalus halicacabus*, the pale pink flowers turning into inflated almost peanut-like seedpods. *Muscari caucasicum* was common and *Prangos* and *Ferula* were growing up rapidly. Then we visited the far side of the river where we found a memorable show of the wonderful *Phelypaea tournefortii*. The impressive scarlet flowers of this strange parasite, essentially a broomrape with one large bloom, are an incongruous sight!

Then it was up through Çaldıran and its wide open highland expanses and over the shoulder of Tendürek Dağı to the pass at almost 2650m. There were so many places along here that we could have stopped at, but it was time to get to the hotel. The views of Ararat are usually spectacular, but

today it was completely shrouded in cloud.



Phelypaea tournefortii

Day 3 May 23rd Tendürek Pass

After breakfast we headed uphill, onto the pass that leads over Tendürek Dağı, the way we had come yesterday. We spent all day exploring the slopes either side of the pass in excellent weather with wall to wall grand scenery.

Our first stop was by a grassy valley with much *Adonis wolgensis*. Further upslope we found our first fritillaries, these little *Fritillaria pinardii* as Snowfinches and Water Pipits flew about us. On the dry ridge above we found a few *Iris caucasica* still in flower and some diminutive *Pedicularis caucasica*, as well as some *Astragalus* species and our first pasque flowers.

We tried a dry slope where there was a nice range of flowers growing with the mounds of *Onobrychis cornuta* but with a strong wind making finding somewhere to make our barbecue difficult we elected to head over the pass and down into the valley. Here we found a disused house so the drivers and Yusuf could make the barbecue and it was surrounded by the most lovely meadows.

These were quite wet! There was an abundance of the marsh orchid *Dactylorhiza umbrosa* here and with them lots of *Primula algida*. This lovely little pink primrose is rather like the Scottish Primrose. There was also some rather small *Primula auriculata* alongside the streams. Adding blue to the display was an abundance of dark navy *Bellevalia paradoxa*. There was white too in the shape of a large flowered *Cerastium*. These meadows were cut by volcanic ribs – I think from lava flows – and these had a completely different vegetation contrasting nicely with the lush meadows. Here was *Salvia staminoides*, *Scutellaria orientalis*, some tiny *Ranunculus arvensis*, *Nonea pulla*, *Onosma araraticum* and *Silene capitellata*. In the shade of one rock grew a huge plant of *Solenanthus circinnatus*. All the while Black-headed Wagtails fluttered about and there was at least one pair of Citrine Wagtails here. Redshanks and Lapwings called. As we gorged on the tasty chicken wings and other picnic fare we watched harriers flying past and Ruddy Shelduck too.

On the way back we stopped by a fantastic display of *Anemone narcissiflora* blowing in the breeze. *Erigeron caucasicum* was here too.

Our last stop of the afternoon was at a meadow on the edge of town where we could hear Quail and see the last remnants of *Muscari coeleste*, an unusual pale sky-blue grape hyacinth with 'open' flowers. A Marsh Harrier cruised past. Salty steppe here had much *Lepidium cartilagineum* blooming and in amongst it a small pink crucifer....

Day 4 May 24th Ishak Paşa & the Çilli Pass

A visit to the grounds of the hotel we used to stay in was well-attended. The Sim-er Motel is sorely missed – it wasn't the most comfortable hotel in the area (the one we were staying in was certainly much nicer in that respect) but the Sim-er had wonderful grounds for birdwatching. The owner is rather keen on natural history and has planted plenty of trees and bushes, and as the surrounding area is entirely treeless this makes it a magnet for birds. Lets hope he re-opens in the future.

Migration was still moving along nicely judging by the numbers of warblers seen. Most numerous were Marsh Warblers, indeed to start with that was all we saw, but as the sun warmed the bushes there were also Common Whitethroats, several Olivaceous Warblers, two Upcher's Warbler, several Chiffchaffs, a probable Green Warbler, and eventually a languid group of half a dozen Garden Warblers. There were Linnets in the Box Elders, Scarlet Rosefinches called but remained invisible, and a couple of Spotted Flycatchers and a Common Redstart. Wood Pigeons flew out of the trees at regular intervals – were these migrants too? Outside the grounds we could hear Bee-eaters and two Black-bellied Sandgrouse flew right over us. In the barren country outside we could see Isabelline Wheatears. A Red-backed Shrike was noted. Best bird, indeed an exceptionally good record, was the male Desert Finch which posed well on some leafless twigs. As far as I can tell this is the both the northernmost and easternmost record of this species from Turkey and only the second in the Van region, the previous being more than thirty years ago in Nemrüt crater.

After breakfast we headed for the Ishak Paşa Palace. The fortress sits high in the colourful multistrata-ed hills behind Doğubeyazıt, a quite fantastic location, and one which overlooks what was once part of the silk route, and today is once again a major trading route. We wandered the recently repaired fortress for an hour and a half, Yusuf, our local guide, telling us of the palace's history and significance.

Next we walked steadily uphill to some very striking arid terrain. A highlight here was a population of hundreds of shining red *Tulipa julia* *Gypsophila pulvinaris* nge ones too but none of the yellow form we sometimes find here. There were some superb mounds of *Androsace villosa*, the pretty little *Silene dianthoides* and the strange sinuate-leaved *Matthiola anchoniifolia*, a plant that after nightfall emits a very pleasant scent. *Scilla monanthos* had finished flowering but *Gagea bulbifera* was in fine form. *Allium akaka* too. Much more overpowering than the *Matthiola* was the 'pudding plant' *Anchonium elichrysofolium*, looking rather like a very neat wallflower. There were banks of *Pedicularis comosa* up here, looking rather different from the wet meadow form seen yesterday. For some the



most exciting plant was the 'vegetable sheep' *Gypsophila pulvinaris* which cloaked large rocks and cliffs in tight rock-like mounds up to a metre across. An extraordinary plant which just reaches into Turkey in this area. The tiny white flowers were well over, but it was the smooth hard mounds of green that impressed anyway. Also

growing up here was *Draba polytricha*, *Coluteocarpus vesicaria*, *Bornmuellera cappadocica*, *Valeriana leucophaea* and a host of interesting *Astragalus* species including *bicolor*, *armeniacus*, *hyalolepis* and the prostrate *viridissimus*. Isabelline and Northern Wheatears were common and we also saw Stonechat. Three bunting species were seen, a couple of Rock Buntings, several Grey-necked Buntings, and several Ortolan Buntings. Red-billed Chough coursed along the cliff tops and an Imperial Eagle soared overhead. Two Griffon Vultures hung in the air over rocky pinnacle. David watched Finsch's Wheatears along the big boulders. We admired bushes of pink flowered *Onobrychis cornuta* by the roadside, finding Pfeiffer's Green Hairstreak fluttering about them.

We enjoyed a picnic in the picnic area above the Ishak Paşa joining several Turkish families doing the same. As we ate Red-fronted Serins flew in to visit.



Ararat

In the afternoon we drove out across wide open landscapes, passing some very rustic villages, to an area of old lava hills that descend from Ararat's western slopes. We stopped by the village and looked at the wetland there. Caucasian Agamas and Eastern Rock Nuthatches vied for our attention on the rocky slope below our viewpoint. Further out there were several Purple Herons, Grey Herons and Night Herons and beyond the reeds some White Storks. Wildfowl were represented by Mallard, Gadwall, Teal, Garganey, and lots of Ruddy Shelduck, and two pairs of Ferruginous Duck. There were Armenian Gulls, several White-winged Black Terns, and a number of Marsh Harriers. A Little Owl was close by us too.

Our last stop was by the lava hills on Ararat's slope. Here there were several highlights. Perhaps the most interesting one was the strange ant-soil-plant relationship we spotted. These were patches of *Nepeta meyeri*. But nothing growing with them – they all seemed to be in the middle of ant nests! Each was certainly surrounded only by soil. We later learnt that this plant exhibits strong allelopathy – it releases no less than ten allelochemicals that inhibit/stop other plants from growing/germinating. There's no doubt that it is extremely effective from what we saw as there was not a sign of green within 50cm of the *Nepeta meyeri* colonies. Apparently there's much research into this particular plant....

The birding proved rather good too. There were numbers of Crimson-winged Finches that at times gave great views. And Scarlet Rosefinches and various wheatears too. Bee-eaters were noted around the pumice quarry. Here we enjoyed picking up giant rocks that seemed light as air! An Upcher's Warbler was well-watched and David found Kay the White-throated Robin she'd always wanted! There were a few perfect *Iris iberica* ssp *elegantissima* in excellent afternoon light on the grassy north-facing slopes of the lava mounds. There were many other flowers too with deep purple *Gladiolus atroviolaceus*, *Vincetoxicum fuscatum* and lots of pretty *Polygala anatolica* in a variety of colours from pink to purple. Also *Cerintho major* ssp *auriculata*, the blue bells of *Campanula stevenii* and some pristine deep red-brown *Orchis coriophora*. Then it was back to the hotel for dinner...

Day 5 May 25th Volcanos and wetlands

It was, finally, a superb clear morning and Ararat shone icily at us as we breakfasted. The light here is so crystal sharp, it seemed you could reach out and touch that magnificent (dormant) volcano. We said goodbye to the kind hotel staff and set off for Lake Van.

We drove up and over the Tendürek Pass, resisting the temptation to stop until we were well down into Çaldıran Ovası. Here we made a brief stop by the fields of orchids, pink *Dactylorhiza umbrosa*. *Primula algida* was in even better condition and a large patch of *Bellevalia pycnantha*. Much paler were blue *Muscari armeniacum*. We took a look at the small buttercup again just to check it really was Corn Buttercup, and then noticed an even tinier member of the same family, the lovely little Mousetail *Myosurus minimus*! A Marsh Harrier flew close and even nearer at hand was a Citrine Wagtail.

We followed the river downstream until it reached Lake Van at Bendimahi and stopped there for a half an hour's birdwatching. Unfortunately a storm rolled in and the winds were strong and after a while it started raining too. But in the meantime we did manage to see large numbers of Ruddy Shelduck and a few Common Shelduck. There were also plenty of Black-winged Stilts, some on nests, and Avocets too. Spur-winged Plovers sat side by side with Lapwings. There was a small flock of Little Ringed Plovers and Little Stints. A Moustached Warbler flew into the reeds (or was that blown into?) and we kept seeing a few Turkestan Short-toed Larks. Flora-wise there was an abundance of *Ranunculus sceleratus* and some nice *Consolida orientalis*.

We continued westward the rain now getting heavy so we decided to take lunch in a roadside lokanta rather than picnic. This was delicious and by the time we'd finished the rain had stopped so we continued to remote Göldüzü, a rustic village on the edge of Arın Gölü. This lake is an even more amazing colour than Van, being bright turquoise in more or less any weather. The 4058m volcano of Suphan Dağı rearing above us to the north had a cloudy hat. Cascading down its lower slopes were great masses of lava that reached close to Arın Gölü. Presumably this dormant (there are mud hot springs on the top) volcano is the reason for the high soda content of Arın Gölü? A bunch of local kids greeted us with enthusiasm and a little sense of wonder – they told us that they hadn't seen foreigners for a while! Unfortunately lakes extremely low level meant there were few birds. We saw only a couple of Hobbies, a few Hoopoes, some more Turkestan Short-toed Larks and Sand Martins overhead and soon decided to move on. Many Calandra Larks and a Short-toed Lark marked our progress back to the main road.



Moving on we stopped in some poplar planted meadows in Adilcevaz. These held an impressive population of *Dactylorhiza umbrosa*, looking rather different from the form we'd seen at high levels in Çaldıran in the morning, here tall and leafy, and very variable in colour, ranging from dark magenta to white, with the latter predominating. Bogbean was also here, some of it in flower. There were plenty of



Olivaceous Warblers in the trees and we noted Marsh Warbler, Syrian Woodpecker and Long-eared Owl. A White-breasted Hedgehog was much enjoyed.

Then it was on to Tatvan, passing numerous possible stopping places on the way, but it really was time to get to the hotel.

Day 6 May 26th

Bitlis Circuit

An early morning birding trip feature a nice selection of birds whilst exploring the wooded slopes behind a tiny village just outside Tatvan. Golden Orioles, Bee-eaters and Hoopoes were vocal and noticeable. Black-headed Buntings sang trop prominent perches and we had good views of a Nightingale. Lesser Whitethroats sang lustily from atop hawthorns. A Penduline Tit hopped about in some low oak scrub and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was drumming in the aspens upslope. We'd gone out in a taxi but when the taxi failed to turn up for our return to breakfast we instead caught a local dolmuş (minibus) which was a fun way to get back to our hotel!

After breakfast we departed at nine and returned to the same tiny village. Our prime target here were peonies and though we found them they were not in flower. The scrubby oak – *Quercus petraea* – was a delight, if rather difficult to wander in! The light shone through the fresh bright green foliage to the accompaniment of loud Nightingale and Golden Oriole songs. In the understory we found Greater Butterfly Orchid, some with flowers just opening to show the flowers to be decidedly greenish.

Soon we found the back road that took us into the green hills and mountains south of Van. We stopped a couple of times in a wide flat valley, the meadows carpeted in buttercups – *Ranunculus constantinopolitanus* – and with patches of *Dactylorhiza umbrosa*. Corn Buntings and Black-headed Yellow Wagtails were everywhere. A nice roadside waterfall cascaded into a marsh where we watched Marsh Warblers and Grey Wagtail. The river waters were full of the water crowfoot *Ranunculus sphaerospermus* and in wet patches grew *Oenanthe sophiae* and *Cardamine uliginosa*.

We descended into a rocky gorge and spent a happy hour enjoying the flora and fauna there. Above the road were two magnificent clumps of *Iris sari* in flower, very large and tall specimens. Only I was able to climb up to them. Along the base of the hillside here we saw *Paracaryums*, Poppies and various legumes which made it a very flowery place. Here we saw our first *Gundelia tournefortii*, a striking thistle that dries into a tumbleweed later in the year. Marianne found *Ophrys straussi*, a nice surprise, hiding amongst the chestnut-leaved Zagros Oak which dominated the hillside. The Large-flowered Venus's Looking Glass *Legousia pentagyna* put on quite a show. We soon started to notice the diversity of clovers here including lots of *nigrescens*, *campestre*, *arvense* and the lovely *pauciflorum*, the latter's unassuming little red blooms turn into furry balls when in fruit. Robert spotted Dippers by the river and there were Long-legged Buzzards overhead and Rock Buntings singing all the while. Though the sun wasn't out there were a few butterflies – notably Freyer's Fritillary. We found the wild chickpea *Cicer anatolicum* and quite a few plants of *Muscari longipes*.



We passed through a couple of very rural villages and stopped by a colourful roadside bank. Here was the stunning *Campanula reuterana* a most lovely bellflower with deep purple centres and paler blue-purple outers. There was a lovely show of poppies and here we found the first of several populations of Bug Orchid *Orchis coriophora* seen during the day. *Anchusa aucheri* grew on the shaley banks. Dingy Skippers and Glanville Fritillaries were seen too

We spent an hour exploring a grassy valley amongst the oak woodland whilst our picnic was prepared. This was a wonderful place with a small stream filled with watercress gentling descending through willows and hawthorns. Many butterflies were visiting the cress. There were Green

Hairstreaks, Small Coppers, Sooty Coppers and Mazarine Blues. A couple of Large Tortoiseshells were seen and there were also Queen of Spain Fritillaries and little-known Bowden's Whites. We found orchids – some *Dactylorhiza umbrosa* and a few *Dactylorhiza flavescens* in good flower. A big surprise was a small population of the unusual yellow, brown and green. These were in fabulous condition and well worth the scramble up to them! Lizards, especially Balkan Green Lizards, were common and continually rustling in the undergrowth. Alison found the carapace of a Spur-thighed Tortoise. The lovely *Cerastium armeniacum* showered the dry hillsides in white blooms. As we ate the delicious picnic – complete with lots of baklava! – a couple of Common Buzzards soared over.





Gladiolus kotschyanus

Later we made a stop in a damp grassland where we found lovely *Gladiolus kotschyanus* in flower and a few *Orchis pseudolaxiflora*, as well as plenty of *Ornithogalum umbellatum*, *Tripleurosperum disciforme*, and *Orchis coriophora*, ranging in colour from almost white to deep red. A Rose-coloured Starling posed atop a hawthorn.



Gundelia tournefortii

Our last stop of the day was at the lowest altitude we would reach on the entire trip at around 1400m above sea level! Here the dry slopes

held a nicely varied steppe flora. The lovely peachy-red flowered *Salvia trichoclada* was mostly across the river. On the near side was *Onosma albo-roseum* and *Campanula involucrata*. Our only Eastern Steppe Festoon of the tour posed nicely in a little boggy meadow where we also photographed Algerian Fritillary. There were none of the hoped for Cinereous Buntings here, only Black-headed. Alison found us an Eastern Rock Nuthatch who played hide and seek behind a rock with us. On the far bank Long-tailed Tits moved through the wild pear trees and an impressive clover akin to *Trifolium angustifolium* was seen. There was a magnificent show of *Aethionema* on the shaley slopes. Also noted here was *Smyrniium cordifolium* and the large white headed *Allium* maybe *multibulbosum*.

Day 7 May 27th

Nemrut Dağı



Iris caucasica

After breakfast we spent the entire day up inside the crater of the Nemrut Dağı volcano. It only took us forty minutes to reach the crater rim where we stopped and admired the view down into the caldera. Some six thousand years ago this would have been a volcano to rival Ararat in size but the top five or six thousand feet blew off and into the stratosphere, though a considerable amount of it landed nearby blocking the drainage of what would have been the upper tributaries of the Tigris. This led to the formation of huge Lake Van, which this morning lay gleaming in the sunlight below us. We could see the two ferries about to cross a few miles out of Tatvan. Looking back inside the crater we could see the marvellous deep blue crater lake that fills a quarter of the caldera, the caldera walls made of cliffs and screes liberally sprinkled with birch and aspen forests and streaked with snow. Nearer at hand lay obsidian and lava strewn hollows and slopes.

We drove down to the boulder fields at the bottom of

the caldera and spent the morning exploring the beautiful rock gardens within. It was *Euphorbia denticulata*, named for the delicately fimbriate red-black shiny glands in the flowers, that first took the interest. Next was *Iris caucasica* which became more prolific as we walked down the slope, joined by bunches of *Onosma bracteatum* and patches of yellow *Linum triflorum*. Dalmatian Ringlets flew back



Puschkinia scilloides



Corydalis oppositifolia



Pulsatilla albana

and forth. We found a lovely patch of *Globularia trichosantha* and below this we encountered our first fritillaries. First the butterscotch bells of *Fritillaria minuta*, set above wide bright shiny green leaves, a distinctive combination and very different from the *Fritillaria assyriaca* with its narrow glaucous leaves and narrow unflared bells. This grew just metres away and throughout the rest of the gullies we found them growing side by side, the *minuta* by melting snow and the *assyriaca* on the drier slopes abutting these, though often they were literally right next to each other. Perhaps not surprisingly there were hybrids, exhibiting various intermediate features, and these were quite frequent. There were a number of plants that anywhere else would have been called *Fritillaria pinardii* but it was difficult to tell here whether they were *pinardii* or whether they were hybrids! Woodlarks sang throughout along with Skylarks too. Chukar were quite common and we also flushed a Grey Partridge, a much less commonly seen species anywhere in Turkey. We found lovely *Corydalis oppositifolia* subspecies *rutifolia* in shaded areas and near these the strange 'Nemrut Dağı' form of *Puschkinia scilloides*, its flowers staying in a partially opened state and the whole plant much taller with long upright hooded leaves. This form is so different that we wonder that it hasn't been given a proper name yet. *Gagea luteoides* was common by snow melt. *Arabis caucasica* and *Solenanthus*

stamineus flowered well amongst the rocks which also held a small population of *Saxifraga sibirica*. Many Spur-thighed Tortoises were found, one huge, and everywhere there were Valentin's Lizards, the males looking very smart with their green marbled backs and blue-eyed flanks.



We returned to the minibuses and set off down to the crater lake. Circling showers avoided us as Yusuf and the drivers set to making barbecued lamb chops! The smell was delicious... The rest of us explored this beautiful spot. Inland of us were herby grassy low rolling hills. Lake side dropped steeply through a rocky Aspen wood. Under these small trees was quite a population of *Dactylorhiza flavescens*, the Georgian Orchid, and just a few pink *Orchis pinetorum*. There were *Geraniums*, tall *Ranunculus kotschyii* and lots of irises including large clumps on the steep ground. A

Bluethroat sang from a hidden perch in the Aspens. Clouded Yellows flew about as we enjoyed those lamb chops and other delicacies in what has to be one of the most stunning picnic locations in a tour with several picnic spots that are top-drawer.

In the afternoon we headed out of the east side of the volcano rim. En route we found a wonderful population of hundreds of *Pulsatilla albana* in fine condition, showering a slope with the furry purple blooms. With them were lots of *Alyssum* and *Bornmuellera cappadocica* whilst *Gagea uliginosa* grew on damp mossy areas. *Ranunculus crateris* and *Ranunculus dissectus* were two rather fine buttercups. A male Rock Thrush sang above us and Water Pipits around us.



We dropped down to Ahlat stopping at the amazing Seljuk Cemetery there. Yusuf gave us a little introduction to this huge site and we were left to wander for half an hour amongst the vast number of often intricately inscribed gravestones emerging from the steppe. Needless to say there were many steppe flowers here including lots of *Anchusa leptophylla* and the lovely orange-lined *Onobrychis atropatana*. We stopped by a wetland just outside



Rindera lanata

the town and in twenty minutes saw a nice range of species including Bearded Tit, Common Pochard, Gadwall, and Reed Warbler.

Day 8 May 28th

South Lake Van

We departed the hotel at nine and headed to a pleasant little area on the shore of the lake a few kilometres out of town. We spent a happy hour and a half here. The light shone through the fresh bright green foliage of *Quercus petraea* (as well as Aspen, *Acer platanoides* and *Sorbus* species) to the accompaniment of loud Nightingale and Golden Oriole songs. Both were seen inside the 'forest'. In

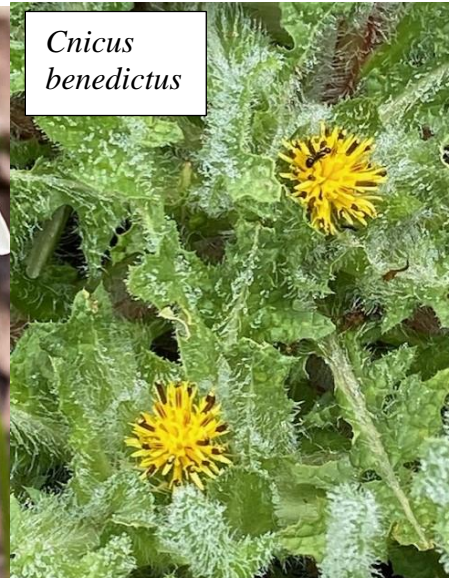


Komper's Orchid

Cephalanthera kotschyii



Cnicus benedictus



the understory we found the lovely large-flowered in fine bloom and Andy soon found some nice *Orchis (Neotinea) tridentata*. The white *Symphytum kurdicum* was common. Balkan Green Lizards scurried away and there were a number of Spur-thighed Tortoises on the hillside. Further up we found more open ground. Here was our prize, the spectacular Komper's Orchid. Most were in bud but one fine specimen had half its flowers already open. A surprise was *Ophrys reinholdii*. Other plants noted here were *Euonymus latifolia*, *Cotoneaster nummularia*, *Centaurea nigrifimbriata*, and the triumvirate of *Aethionemas* – *speciosum*, *grandiflora* and *membraneceum*. A superb 'ornate' Praying Mantis was seen as well as some impressively large fungi.



Campanula stevenii

We drove along the southern shore of the lake passing through plentiful low oak woodland, meadows and steppe, a pleasing landscape and one with a rich diversity of plants. We stopped to make lunch by a river and whilst Yusuf and the drivers got it ready we wandered along tracks up into the oak. There were many species of buttercup here, I think we counted eight? Most impressive were the displays of the tall *fenzlii* and one little stand of the even bigger *sericeous*. There were all sorts of umbels, *Aethionemas* and *Boraginaceae*. Nightingales sang lustily and even sat out in the open allowing us prolonged views. There were lots of Lesser Whitethroats and even a couple of Eurasian Nuthatches. The thistle *Gundelia tournefortii* was dominant on the dry slopes above with some nice *Cynoglossum vanense*. Rock Buntings sang up there.

After lunch we spotted a large group of Rose-coloured Starlings by the road. As we got out of the minibuses they rose as one, we thought because of us, but no, it was a Booted Eagle which literally dropped into the middle of them. What a spectacular sight! It missed though and the starlings were soon telling it just what they thought, then the Jackdaws, then the Hooded Crows...

We now reached the top of the Kizkunkiran Pass. This is a relatively low pass at just over 2000m. The security on the pass top kindly allowed us to drive our minibuses up the side track and so we could get straight out and look at the community of plants growing on the damp north-facing slope. Little *Fritillaria minuta* was just over but there were some *Gageas* (*alexeeenkoana*, *gageoides* and most commonly, *luteoides*) and some patches of *Globularia trichosantha*, but it was the buttercups that took centre-stage. Both *Ranunculus vanensis* and *Ranunculus bulbiferus* are, in Turkey, known only from this site (the latter is found in Iran and Iraq too), and both are rather cute little snowmelt species. There was also *Ranunculus cuneatus* and *Ranunculus brachylobus*. There were decent views of both Rock Sparrows and Ortolan Buntings.

Our last stop of the day was by the wetland at Gevaş. Here the birders headed along the shore and the sand bar that separates a lagoon from the main lake. Most exciting were the numbers of White-headed Duck. We counted at least eighteen of these characterful birds, mostly males. There were also a few Shoveler, Garganey and Tufted Ducks. Moustached Warblers and Bearded Tits were in the reeds. Black-necked Grebes offshore. Meanwhile those of a more botanical bent were exploring some fallow fields behind the marsh. Here they found some superb shows of orchids and *Gladiolus atrovioleaceus* amongst a host of colourful ruderal species. Then it was on to Van...

Day 9 May 29th Erçek Lake

We set off at nine, on to the road to Iran due east of Van. After ten kilometres or so Erçek Lake appeared, a large lake, set even higher than Van at 1900m and surrounded by hill or mountainous steppe, a wide open and very beautiful sparsely inhabited landscape. Our first stop was by a small marsh for many years now the home of a very few pairs of White-headed Ducks. Sure enough these were there, and with numbers the highest we'd seen with at least eighteen birds present. We watched the almost comical males displaying, their bodies swelling as they put their heads down, swollen blue bills pushed out and charge There were also a few Garganey and Pochard and there was a Marsh Harrier too. There were Great Reed and Reed Warblers, Little Grebes, and many Marsh Frogs. One Dice Snake swam across the water. Along the verge were some very showy *Crambes* and *Anchusas*.



Roemeria refracta

Moving on we found ourselves on the wide flat valley floor east of the main lake. Here the damp, slightly salt-imbued steppe had a vast population of the *Orchis pseudolaxiflora*. In places they grew thickly and there were very occasional white or strawberry milkshake forms. *Ornithogalum platyphyllum* was noted. Also the tiny water crowfoot *Ranunculus rionii*. Along the gravel levees we saw some admirable shows of and a not a few *Roemeria hybrida* too. Those on the bridge were treated to a show of very determined Pearly Mullet trying to swim upstream of the rapids.

Our lunch spot was close by a tower hide put up to overlook Erçek's marshes. We watched Black-winged Stilts, Redshank, Little Ringed Plovers and Wood Sandpipers along the shore. As well as the common ducks several more White-headed Ducks were seen and lots of Night Herons and a few Squacco Herons too. A Black Stork joined a group of White Storks and a single Great Egret too. There were lots of Bearded Tits, Moustached Warblers and Paddyfield Warblers in the reeds. And one boy fishing. He was later apprehended by the Jandarma and had his net confiscated! There were also lots of Black-headed Wagtails about and Citrine Wagtail was noted. In the distance we could see many gulls and one hundred and twenty Greater Flamingos.

During lunch a Whiskered Tern was found, then a bunch of White-winged Black Terns and a single Little Tern flew past. Then a storm hit us and we hurried into the vehicles. It didn't last long though and soon we were out retrieving paper plates that had blown about a bit!

In the afternoon we headed back to Van and to Van Castle down by the lake. Yusuf showed us around. He took us to see some cuneiform inscriptions announcing kingly things about the place and then we walked uphill to see a burial chamber outside of which was a cliff face covered in the cuneiform writings. Up above he showed us a flat area, a kind of temple, where drainage grooves were well-marked in the rock, one to drain sheep's blood, the other, cow's blood. We looked out over the old Urartian settlement now visible just as foundations. Mosques out there were from the Ottoman period and nearer at hand was an archway from the Seljuck period. We learnt that in fact it was the Assyrians who had built the castle in the first place, and that they had been usurped by the

Urartians at a later date. Up on the rocks of the castle were *Zygophyllum fabago*, *Lycium ruthenicum*, and some great plants of the showy but spiny knapweed *Centaurea urvillei*. Alpine Swifts and Red-billed Chough overflowed the castle. Olivaceous Warblers and Great Tits were frequent in the poplars and willows along the small river below and I flushed a Little Bittern.

Day 10 May 30th Karabet Pass

Our early morning birding trip took us to the Dönemeç Delta. Bitterns boomed and Savi's Warblers reeled as we took a few moments to overlook the marsh. Birds were flying everywhere. We took a walk with marshes and reed beds around us. We were soon getting ourselves familiarized with both the songs and the appearance of an impressive suite of *Acrocephalus* warblers. Commonest were Moustached and Paddyfield. There were also Reed and Great Reed. Black-headed Yellow Wagtails were common. Water Rails called. Bearded Tits were everywhere. We headed down to the 'coast'. Here we got our feet both wet and muddy! But we enjoyed – there were plenty of White Storks, Little Egrets, Purple Herons and the like. A group of Gull-billed Terns lounged on some bare mud. Red-crested Pochard were frequent in the water and we saw Garganey and Ruddy Shelduck too. There were both Black-headed Gulls and Slender-billed Gulls joining the throng. A Ruff was seen and two Wood Sandpipers.

After breakfast we set off for the high ridges of mountains that line the south shore of Lake Van. We headed up through very rustic Kurdish villages on a good asphalt road. Soon the mountains close to the road became snow-streaked and then patches of snow appeared by the roadside. This road takes



The Karabet Pass

us up over a very high pass, 3000m, and so by the time we reached the top part almost all was snowy around us. We stopped by a clear area, speckled with the pale blue of *Puschkinias*. There were very many of them, tens of thousands. And not just one species. The 'real' *Puschkinia scilloides* showered a pale green slope with blue, but there were also paler ice-blue plants, even more abundant, some along the road edge and many out further. These have only recently been given a name - *Puschkinia bilginii*. *Gagea luteoides* was common and

there were good populations of *Fritillaria minuta* and *Corydalis oppositifolia* too. A couple of *Merendera kurdica* were found growing in a stream. In ponds by the stream were Banded Frogs and lots of Green Toads. Radde's Accentors appeared from time to time, and Northern Wheatears were common. Linnets and Twites too. Alpine Choughs flew over but the best bird was certainly the Lammergeier that drifted quickly by. On the rocks above the snow was the lovely *Saxifraga kotschyi*.

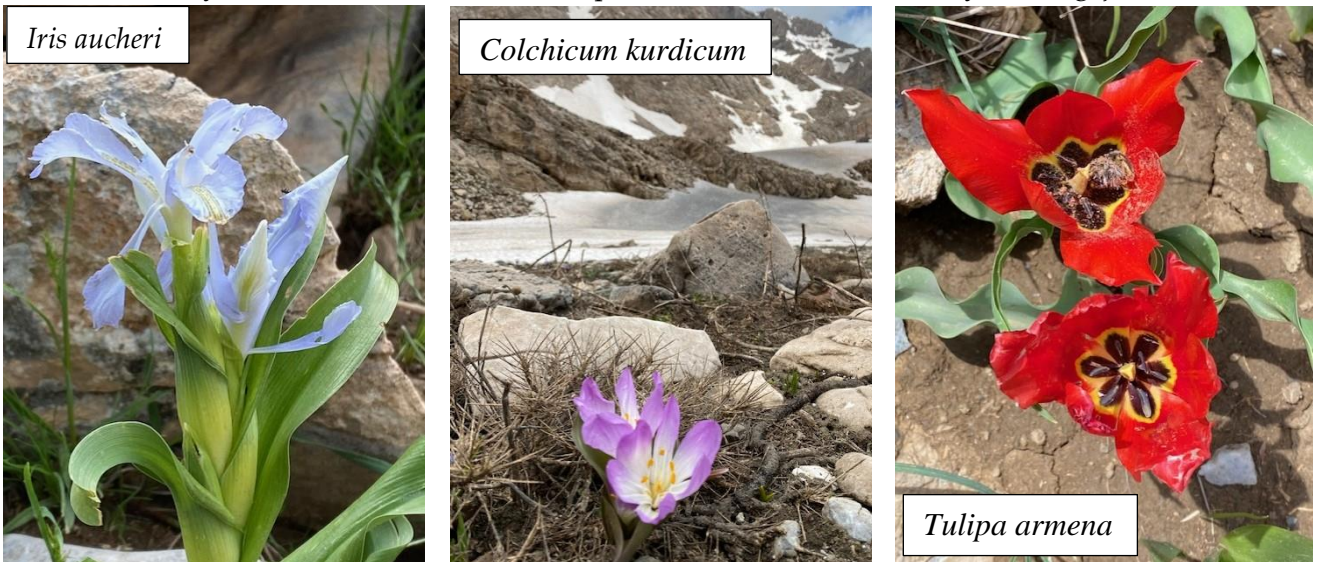
We headed up over the pass not stopping for the continuing show of *Puschkinias* as we went. Around

was a fabulous snowscape, interrupted by a few areas of gravel and turf and by the great cliffs that reared up at the back of the main cirque to our left. We crested the pass, and continued down the far



side, the size of the scenery in all directions impressive. We stopped to enjoy a wonderful little group of *Merendera kurdica* and *Saxifraga kotschyii* on the rocks. Grey Wagtail sang and Shore Larks were noted. A little further on we stopped by a huge cliff, hoping for Wallcreeper. None were forthcoming but we did see a number of Chukar, Snowfinches nesting in a hole above some saxifrage, and David saw several Radde’s Accentors. This time Red-billed Chough cartwheeled overhead.

Our lunch spot was spectacular in all respects. A little roadside knoll had magnificent views down the valley towards Bahçesaray and all round to high snowy peaks. There was a high level of verticality at this spot! As the picnic was set out we explored the little ridge below and found one of the floweriest spots imaginable. There were some wonderful specimens of pink *Tulipa humilis* and further down we started finding some magnificent *Tulipa armena*. Goblets of brilliant red, centred with black and yellow. Inside some of the tulips we found an extraordinary red bug, just red, and



covered in red hairs! There were some fine *Fritillaria crassifolia* about too, with groups of them particularly prolific on an area of limestone pavement where their vari-coloured green (almost pure in one or two) or more commonly dark red brown tessellated bells were shown off to wonderful effect. There were also lovely clumps of *Iris caucasica* here with many flowers in bloom. Andy announced a blue iris. This was a little bit of a shock for one who’d been to this spot many times, but for certain, there it was – a nice tall blue-flowered *Iris aucheri* with three blooms in perfect condition.

New to the tour! *Eremurus spectabilis* would clearly shower the rocky slope with its yellow wands in a



Rindera ceasptiosa



Gagea luteoides

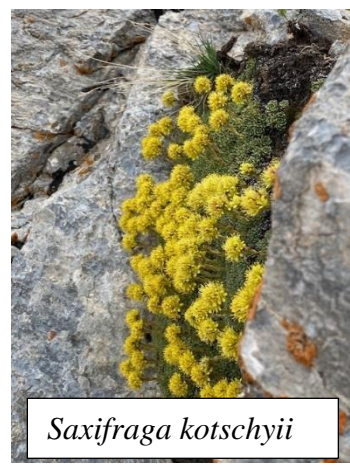


Fritillaria minima



Solenanthus stamineus

week or two. There was the usual suite of alpine buttercups, which is to say four species, but here we saw the unusual *Ranunculus polunini* in bloom. Back on the top of the ridge was the architectural *Rindera ceasptiosa*. Rock Thrushes, Black Redstarts and various wheatears were seen. David was meantime having fun with the buntings trying to work out what was singing. There were certainly Ortolan Buntings and Black-headed Buntings too, but was there a third bunting?



Saxifraga kotschyii

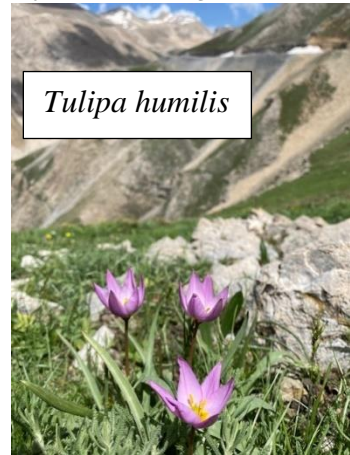
Returning over the pass we searched a gravelly slope for one of our main targets for the day, the lovely golden *Fritillaria minima*, a great rarity known from only one or two locations in the world. Sure enough, here it was, and in abundance, though the best populations were on more difficult to access ground, though there was some for everyone to see.

It was time to head back, but not before we'd stopped for pictures of the very rustic village of Yukarı



Narlıca. Last stop was much lower down, by a rock smothered in the white flowers of the woody-based *Potentilla lignosa*. Pink *Hesperis persica* bloomed on the roadside bank. Crag Martins flew about the rock and there were Blue Rock Thrushes too and, on the top, a single male Finsch's Wheatear posed.

Green form of *Fritillaria minuta* or a hybrid with *F. minima*?



Tulipa humilis

Day 11 May 31st Akdamar Island, the Urartu Carpet Shop & Museum, and Gurpinar

We departed as usual at nine and headed south and then west along the shore to the little ferry terminal and heading out to the island. This is always a most pleasurable experience as the boat chugs across the turquoise water the fabulous views of the mountains south of the lake opens up. Jackdaws were a constant companion to the boat, but as we started to circle the island the birdwatching went up a notch or two. There is a large breeding colony of Armenian Gulls on the island and many Rock Doves too. A few Night Herons sat in trees or flew about, and there were abundant Alpine Swifts and several Lesser Kestrels in the air above us. Landing, we all went up to the newly restored church. The superb relief carvings had been repaired slightly, but were basically unchanged. Showing major scenes from the old testament (Jonah and the whale, David and Goliath, etc), plus the founding bishops. Nevertheless, the main emphasis was on the local fauna (fish, birds, goats, deer, rabbits, etc) and flora, including a frieze of grape vines. Inside, the frescoes had been slightly brightened and the damaged plaster repaired. The whole has now been weatherproofed, with new windows, retiling of the roof and protection of the exterior against erosion. Then we split up and wandered around the island. Anyone going near the abundant nests of the Armenian Gulls were given a good hard laughing for their pains. There were a few Olivaceous Warblers in the *Celtis* trees. Plantwise the abundant tortoises seemed to have eaten most of the vegetation but we did see some nice white *Ornithogalum shelkovnikovii* out of reach on a big rock and there was the big architectural *Smyrnum cordifolium* and a few *Salvia limbata* too. A very old *Pistachia vera* was appreciated.

Back on the 'mainland' we went to the excellent restaurant by the boat landing at Akdamar where we were treated to a fine lunch of 'et sote' served in sizzling dishes, this made of little pieces of various vegetables and lamb, and served with bulgur and salad – excellent!

In the afternoon we split into two groups. Yusuf and Andy's group visited the carpet shop and museum where there was much oohing and aahing at the many wonderful carpets and kilims shown. Afterwards they continued on into Van to visit the new and excellent museum there.

David and I headed into the dry hills by Zerneq Reservoir where we had a relatively unproductive afternoon searching for small birds! We saw Linnets, Tawny Pipits and many wheatears – Finsch's, Northern and Isabelline – and several very nice Grey-necked Buntings. The lovely pink *Hedysarum syriacum* was noted along the roadside here.

Now we headed for the Kurubaş Pass. Here our aim was larks. Initially things didn't seem promising with a dark cloud over us and wind and a resounding silence. But as soon as the sun emerged so did the larks. The first Skylarks were soon joined by Bimaculated Larks and after a little effort we had good views. There were also a few Short-toed Larks too.



Day 12 June 1st Çatak Valley

Those that joined me for the early morning trip to the Dönemeç Delta were in for a treat – documenting a rarely recorded breeding bird for Turkey! We arrived on the lake shore side of the delta and wasted little time walking the near kilometre where the morning before I had found something rather special. Here were no less than four White-tailed Plovers. A rarity indeed as there are few records, but even better, one of them was sitting on a nest. We didn't disturb her from her nest but two days later I was able to see an egg through the scope when she wandered off for a little while! It was great to get such good views of these striking and easy to identify waders. I thought this may be a new breeding record for Turkey as records of White-tailed Plover are few, though certainly nowadays annual. However it turns out there are a few breeding records from the centre and south of the country, though not the east. With them was a Golden Plover in full summer plumage – John's photograph confirmed the white underwing. And there were two nice Collared Pratincoles sitting on the sandy spit too. No sign though of the Black-winged Pratincole that had been there the day before. We headed to a little raised area where we could scan the land further along. There were White Storks, lots of Cattle Egrets, and amongst the vast numbers of Armenian Gulls were quite a few Slender-billed Gulls and Black-headed Gulls. A single White Pelican sat amongst them though there was no sign of the Black-throated Diver which had been there the day before. We walked quickly back to the car passing endless Bearded Tits, Moustached and Paddyfield Warblers as we went, all the while hearing Bitterns booming. Dönemeç is a special place! There was even a single *Orchis palustris*.



This morning was sunny and warm. We set off again at nine, heading for the Çatak Valley. Our first stop was amid open country where areas of relict steppe were interspersed with arable land. Here we enjoyed a wonderful display of hundreds of *Iris paradoxa*, in beautiful condition and glorious clear sunshine. There were some groups of ten or more and lots of variety in the population with some plants having standards strongly blue-ink-lined, others with standards of a curious pale green colour. All though had the narrow velvety falls that are so distinctive. One group had amazing golden-coloured petaloid stigmas. Orange-lined *Onobrychis galegifolia* was common and we all enjoyed lovely *Moltkia caerulea*. We found yellow *Linums*. Three species here – *mucronatum* forming clumps of the bank, *triflorum* down by the road edge and *flavum* on the steppe!



We moved on to a dry rocky gorge. This sunny spot proved attractive to butterflies. Down in the dry streambed were several blues, mostly Mazarine but also Pontic Blue. There were Glanville Fritillaries and in one warm spot we saw Lesser Fiery Copper, Sooty Copper and the lovely Turkish Golden Copper. Rock Sparrows were noisy on the rocky crags and several Crimson-winged Finches and a couple of White-throated Robins were seen. A Golden Eagle appeared briefly. Western Rock Nuthatches were seen, a Tawny Pipit flew past and many Red-billed Chough flew over. Along the

roadside was brilliant yellow *Hypericum scabrum* and yellow umbels too. Up the slope were various *Astragalus* and some very fine clumps of *Aethionema membranaceum* was also seen alongside fine little *Viola modesta* and impressive *Muscari longipes*, as well as a pale lilac broomrape. Wonderful *Allium akaka* posed by the roadside and there were equally fine rock plant in pink silvery-foliaged *Centaurea karduchorum*.



After our picnic we visited a little village where the ferula dominated slopes below the village harboured an exquisite population of *Iris sari*. They were very variable. These were devoured by the iris photographers who moved from one to the other trying wide angles, close ups etc etc. Growing even more commonly here was the lovely *Astragalus halicacabus* with pale pink flowers, but more



importantly, masses of inflated pink seedpods which in places obscured the ground. Olivaceous



Cassida strejceki

Warblers sang from willows where we spotted Pontic Blues. There was an extraordinary variety of other Astragalus. Two *Helichrysums*, *pallasii* and *plicata*, were found as well as a lovely *Allium*, a *Hedysarum*, lots of *Geranium stepporum*, and *Valeriana sisymbriifolia*. A marshy area held some unusual plants such as *Alchemilla*, a giant unidentified clover, and the rare buttercup *Ranunculus strigulosus*. A rather gorgeous tortoise beetle was found here, a group of beetles I am more familiar with in tropical regions. This one was clear orange-red with black spots. This turns out to be which was described from Muş, just west of Lake Van in 2006!

Our picnic was enjoyed under the semi-shade of trees at the edge of a field. We watched as villagers wandered past.

The afternoon was spent exploring a little further down the valley towards Çatak. Here we descended into an area where first Juniper became frequent on the hillsides before descending further into scrub dominated by *Celtis*. We stopped amid the former and took a look around. This was the place where many years previously I'd recorded Turkey's first Plain Leaf Warblers. None of course today, but we did see a very nice male Ring Ouzel and a Lammergeier or two cruised up and down the rugged valley walls. Then two Golden Eagles as well. John found two Red-fronted Serins.

Further down the valley we stopped where a small river came cascading out of the cliffs. A rather lovely spot. Plants of interest here were *Paronychia turcica*, *Stachys laetivirens*, and two *Salvias*, the reddish *Salvia trichoclada* and the very large-flowered *Salvia macrochlamys* with bright cerise and white blooms.

We stopped by a quarry where a small area of natural steppe held a most exquisite display of blooms. First up was a roadside mass of *Linaria kurdica*. These massed yellow blooms were quite a sight. Around it grew *Convolvulus linearis*,



Salvia macrochlamys



Linaria kurdica

and lots of colourful *Astragaluses*. Bimaculated, Crested, and Sort-toed Larks were singing all around us.

Our last stop of the day was in Edremit, by the main lake shore. Here in some fields amid the houses

was a big show of the impressive *Allium hirtifolium*. Syrian Woodpeckers and Olivaceous Warblers were in the old almond trees. There was lots of Yellow Rattle and Common Milkwort too.

Day 13 June 2nd

Güzeldere Pass, Zernek & Albayrak

Early morning birdwatching this morning saw us down at Van Marshes near the castle. Here we enjoyed some very close Savi's Warblers reeling in the reeds with even closer Paddyfield Warblers which really are exceptionally common at this site. There was a Sedge Warbler and several Moustached Warblers too. Hoopoes, Golden Orioles and Cuckoos called as we headed down to some water. Here there was a fine show of sunlit Red-crested Pochard as well as lower numbers of Common Pochard and Garganey. There was the usual selection of waders too.



After breakfast we headed out along the road towards Başkale from the southeast corner of Lake Van. The day once again was bright and sunny and today was exceptionally clear with the snowy peaks standing out very clear above the turquoise waters. Our first stop was by the equally turquoise Zernek Reservoir where we took a look at the steppe cloaking the rather arid hills. We found the strange-looking *Eremostachys molucceloides*. The pale lime bracted *Hymenocrater bituminosus* had blue flowers. Large pale flowers of *Silene swertifolia* perched atop sticky

stems. Orange-lined wands of creamy *Onobrychis galegifolia* were a pleasant sight. There were *Onosmas*, *Astragalus latifolius* and an impressive yellow cupidone-like plant! A nice find was the white and blue-ish flowered *Delphinium albiflorum*.



Fritillaria (crassifolia) kurdica

We continued on up to the Güzeldere Pass not stopping until we reached the top. Here we parked atop a windy ridge at around 2650m with amazing



Ranunculus brachylobus?

views all around. A nice level track took us along to some snow patches. By the minibus the very dwarfed alpine flora was rather good with some nice cushions of *Androsace villosa*, some with flowers so thick that was all we could see. There were straw-coloured pom-poms of *Centaurea vanensis* and a most marvellous deep blue *Veronica*. *Bornmuellera cappadocica* made nice cushions. Walking to the snow we passed the strange inflated seed heads of *Bellevalia rixii*. Once by the snow we immediately spotted one fine *Tulipa koyuncii*, this very local tulip being only known from a few spots in the Van area. There was a nice range of plants here. *Puschkinia scilloides* blazed ice-blue from the wet brown earth alongside *Gageas confusa* and *luteoides*. Fine pink goblets of *Merendera raddeana* bloomed by the snow and on drier spots the ground was in places showered with the variable green and brown-black tubby bells of *Fritillaria (crassifolia) kurdica*. Growing with the latter were some lovely buttercups, the almost fleshy-leave *polyrhizos* with distinctive bur-like fruiting heads and another buttercup with huge heads 3cm across on short stalks – probably a form of Water Pipits and Shore Larks were the main passerines. Overhead we heard Ravens and looked up to see one escorting an Imperial Eagle over the ridge. *Draba rosularis* flowered in the grasses, *Draba polytricha* on the rocks, these alongside *Gagea bulbifera*. Down by a stream grew a beguiling mix of *Primula auriculata*, brilliant blue *Gentiana verna* subspecies *pontica* and *Anemone narcissiflora*. John spotted Snowfinches.



Astragalus nanus



Gentiana verna



Primula auriculata

We descended a little to a sheltered spot where the drivers and Yusuf could prepare the barbecue. A walk up the side valley produced sightings of the hope for male Bluethroat. The race here is 'magna' with an unspotted shimmering blue throat. We also had good views of at least three Radde's Accentors, some Scarlet Rosefinches, several Water Pipits, Black-headed Buntings and the slightly odd local form of Whinchat. There were good displays of *Primula auriculata* along the wet valley floor, in places with *Gentiana verna*, in fact higher up there was a magnificent show of blue and pink provided by these two species alongside the midnight blue *Bellavalia paradoxa*. *Trollius ranunculinus* was abundant in places. *Astragalus nanus* was a nice find. *Salvias stamineus*, *aethiopsis* and *brachyantha* were seen as well as *Nepeta betonicifolia* and some fine *Bellevia fominii*. There were some nice *Allium akaka* too and some superb plants of *Rindera albida*. The drivers and Yusuf had again done us proud, they produced many fabulous picnics on this trip often amid the most sublime scenery. Today's feast of tasty chicken fresh of the fire was one of the best. As we ate Alison very quietly noted that there was a Bluethroat right in front of us. OK, not so quietly! So we all got good views over the next ten



Rindera albida

minutes. There were also Twite perching too. Overhead a brief Lammergeier and then Long-legged Buzzard and Imperial Eagle.

Now we headed downhill and eastwards, eventually reaching the farmed country to the south of Albayrak, just a couple of kilometres from the Iranian border. The views all around in the crystal clear mountain air were incredible. On the steppe next to the road we could already see the shining yellow heads of . This is a fabulous iris, the whole flower being yellow of differing shades, many two-tone, some pale and a goodly number a bright rich butter yellow, even some egg-yolk yellow. The lowering sun allowed some marvellous backlit photos. On one slope we reckoned there to be two to three thousand blooms in a few hundred metre stretch, an absolutely fantastic sight. The wide-open landscapes allowed one to choose a background for those wide angle shots. Isabelline Wheatears and



Iris urumiensis

Tawny Pipits were the main birds. A damp valley floor had many orchids and growing with them were hundreds of little butterworts, *Pinguicula balcanica*. A nice surprise.

Then it was back towards Van, stopping en route for backlit and forelit photos of the rather mythical-looking Hoşap Castle. We went up to look at the impressive gate now sitting pretty in a fully restored set of walls.



Iris urumiensis

Day 14 June 5th

Departure

We had a very civilized leaving time for the airport – 09.15! All was efficient at the airport and we said our farewells. We'd been very lucky both with the weather and what we'd seen – Lake Van's amazing spring bulbs had lived up to their billing and indeed some of the displays, especially of the Irises were the best we could remember.

Systematic List Number 1

Flora

To be added – not ready yet!

To add to plant list –

Rindera ceaspitosa – Karabet

Rindera albida – guzeldere

Hedysarum syriacum – zerneke

Delphinium albiflorum – zerneke

Systematic List Number 2 Birds

Only 2023 records included. The taxonomy and order of the following list largely follows Voous (1977, List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species). An indication of frequency of sightings is given by the number of days out of 13 a species was seen on – thus 4/13 means a species was noted on four days during the holiday. The arrival day in Istanbul is not included.

Little Grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	scattered. 3/13
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>	locally frequent. 4/13
Black-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps nigricollis</i>	several at Gevaş and several at Erçek Gölü
Cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	1 on the last morning Dönemeç Delta
White Pelican	<i>Pelecanus onocrotalus</i>	singles on two dates in the Dönemeç Delta
Common Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	several birds heard on all visits to Dönemeç Delta
Little Bittern	<i>Ixobrychus minutus</i>	1 below Van Kalesi (leader only)
Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	locally abundant. 6/13
Squacco Heron	<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	2 at Erçek Gölü and 1 Dönemeç Delta
Cattle Egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	locally frequent. 8/13
Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	frequent at the Dönemeç Delta
Great Egret	<i>Egretta alba</i>	1 at Erçek Gölü
Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	frequent. 8/13
Purple Heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	frequent at the Dönemeç Delta, also noted near Ararat. 5/13
Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	1 at Erçek Gölü
White Stork	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	scattered throughout. 6/13
Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	1 Bendimahi, single then 5 at 1 at the Dönemeç Delta. 3/13
Spoonbill	<i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	7 near Ararat, several Dönemeç Delta
Greater Flamingo	<i>Phoenicopterus ruber</i>	c.10 at Erçek Gölü (distant!)
Ruddy Shelduck	<i>Tadorna ferruginea</i>	locally common. 10/13
Shelduck	<i>Tadorna tadorna</i>	frequent. 5/13
Gadwall	<i>Anas strepera</i>	scattered. 4/13
Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>	only noted at the foot of Ararat
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	common but in low numbers. 10/13
Garganey	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	scattered. 4/13
Shoveler	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	only noted at Gevaş
Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	frequent at the Dönemeç Delta. 4/13
Pochard	<i>Aythya ferina</i>	Locally common. 7/13
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>	1 at Gevaş
White-headed Duck	<i>Oxyura leucocephala</i>	fantastic year for this species. 18 at Gevaş, 23 at the small wetland close to at Erçek Gölü , numbers up to 17 on each visit to the Dönemeç Delta and a few at South Van Marshes. 4/13
Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	1 Erçek Gölü
Lammergeier	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	1 on the Karabet Pass, 2 Çatak Road and 1 Güzeldere Pass
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	1 Muradiye Şelalesi
Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	2 above the Ishak Paşa Palace
Short-toed Eagle	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	1 Bitlis circuit
Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	widespread. 10/13
Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	uncommon. 2/13
Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	widespread. 10/13

Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	1 above the Ishak Paşa Palace and 1 Güzeldere Pass. 2/13
Golden Eagle	<i>Aquila chrysaetos</i>	3 on the Çatak Road
Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraetus pennatus</i>	1 near Tatvan and 1 below the Kizkunkuran Pass
Lesser Kestrel	<i>Falco naumanni</i>	frequent. 5/13
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	scattered. 3/13
Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>	scattered – ones and twos only. 5/13
Saker	<i>Falco cherrug</i>	1 north side of the Tendürek Pass
Chukar	<i>Alectoris chukar</i>	scattered, occasionally frequent. 5/13
Grey Partridge	<i>Perdix perdix</i>	1 seen and also dead one in Nemrüt Dağı
Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	heard all days in Doğubeyazıt area
Water Rail	<i>Rallus aquaticus</i>	heard on all visits to the Dönemeç Delta
Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	scattered. 4/13
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	locally abundant. 9/13
Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	widespread in wetlands. 9/13
Avocet	<i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	locally frequent in wetlands. 6/13
Collared Pratincole	<i>Glareola pratincola</i>	2 on three visits to the Dönemeç Delta
Black-winged Pratincole	<i>Glareola nordmannii</i>	1 Dönemeç Delta (leader only)
Little Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius dubius</i>	frequent. 7/13
Ringed Plover	<i>Charadrius hiaticula</i>	Erçek Gölü
Kentish Plover	<i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	Erçek Gölü and all visits to the Dönemeç Delta
Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>	1 in summer plumage of 3 dates at the Dönemeç Delta
Spur-winged Plover	<i>Hoplopterus spinosus</i>	several pairs at the Dönemeç Delta, also Bendimahi, South Van Marshes and Erçek Gölü. 6/13
White-tailed Plover	<i>Chettusia leucura</i>	4 at the Dönemeç Delta with one of them sitting on eggs (confirmed on the last morning) represents an important breeding record for Turkey, though not the first as there are two old breeding records too!
Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	locally common. 11/13
Little Stint	<i>Calidris minuta</i>	scattered. 3/13
Ruff	<i>Philomachus pugnax</i>	1 Dönemeç Delta
Black-tailed Godwit	<i>Limosa limosa</i>	1 Erçek Gölü and 5 at the Dönemeç Delta
Common Redshank	<i>Tringa totanus</i>	widespread in wetlands. 11/13
Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>	1 at the Dönemeç Delta
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	noted at Erçek Gölü and at the Dönemeç Delta
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	1 near Muradiye Şelalesi
Black-headed Gull	<i>Larus ridibundus</i>	locally frequent. 5/13
Slender-billed Gull	<i>Larus genei</i>	locally frequent. Max counts near 100. 4/13
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>	singles three times, once South Van Marsh, twice Dönemeç Delta
Armenian Gull	<i>Larus (argentatus) armeniacus</i>	widespread. 12/13
Gull-billed Tern	<i>Gelochelidon nilotica</i>	c.12 on two visits to the Dönemeç Delta
Caspian Tern	<i>Sterna caspia</i>	1 Erçek Gölü
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>	noted Bendimahi and 1 Dönemeç Delta
Little Tern	<i>Sterna albifrons</i>	1 Erçek Gölü
Whiskered Tern	<i>Chlidonias hybridus</i>	noted foot of Ararat & Erçek Gölü
White-winged Black Tern	<i>Chlidonias leucopterus</i>	several & Erçek Gölü
Black-bellied Sandgrouse	<i>Pterocles orientalis</i>	2 at the Sim-er Motel, near Doğubeyazıt
Rock Dove	<i>Columba livia</i>	widespread – many wild birds too. 12/13
Woodpigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>	scattered throughout. 7/13
Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	scattered. 6/13

Laughing Dove	<i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	Doğubeyazıt & Tatvan. 2/13
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	widespread. 9/13
Little Owl	<i>Athene noctua</i>	scattered. 4/13
Long-eared Owl	<i>Asio otus</i>	1 in wooded meadows at Adilvez and a roadkill near Edremit
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>	widespread. 13/13
Alpine Swift	<i>Apus melba</i>	scattered throughout. 7/13
European Bee-eater	<i>Merops apiaster</i>	widespread. 13/13
Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	frequent. 5/13
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	widespread. 13/13
Green Woodpecker	<i>Picus viridus</i>	seen near Tatvan
Syrian Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos syriacus</i>	scattered throughout. 7/13
Lesser Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos minor</i>	heard in two areas just east of Tatvan including drumming birds
Calandra Lark	<i>Melanocorypha calandra</i>	only noted near Arın Gölü
Bimaculated Lark	<i>Melanocorypha bimaculata</i>	scattered south and east of Van 3/13
Short-toed Lark	<i>Calandrella brachydactyla</i>	scattered. 3/13
Turkestan Short-toed Lark	<i>Alaudala heinei</i>	Bendimahi, and Arın Gölü where common
Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	scattered. 4/13
Woodlark	<i>Lullula arborea</i>	scattered throughout. 6/13
Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>	widespread. 10/13
Shore Lark	<i>Eremophila alpestris</i>	frequent above 2000m. 3/13
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	locally abundant – especially at Dönemeç Delta. 6/13
Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne rupestris</i>	widespread. 9/13
Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	widespread. 13/13
House Martin	<i>Delichon urbica</i>	only noted once on north side of Lake Van
Tawny Pipit	<i>Anthus campestris</i>	scattered. 4/13
Water Pipit	<i>Anthus spinoletta</i>	scattered at high altitude. 2/13
Black-headed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava feldegg</i>	widespread. 12/13
Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	two pairs north Çaldıran and also noted at Erçek Gölü
Grey Wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	noted south of Tatvan and also at 3000m on the Karabet Pass. 2/13
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	widespread. 8/13
Dipper	<i>Cinclus cinclus</i>	1 south of Tatvan
Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>	noted on the Bitlis circuit
Radde's Accentor	<i>Prunella ocularis</i>	several on the Karabet Pass – and also noted on the Güzeldere Pass. 2/13
Nightingale	<i>Luscinia megarhynchos</i>	Seen along the south shore of Lake Van and Tatvan area. Heard frequently in some areas
Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	the fabulous magna race on the Güzeldere Pass. Also heard on Nemrüt Dağı
White-throated Robin	<i>Irania gutturalis</i>	2 on the lava hills by the Çilli Pass and several noted along the Çatak Road
Black Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus ochruros</i>	scattered. 5/13
Whinchat	<i>Saxicola rubetra</i>	Güzeldere Pass
Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	only seen once north of Van
Isabelline Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe isabellinus</i>	widespread. 10/13
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>	widespread. 12/13
Black-eared Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe hispanica</i>	scattered. 4/13
Finsch's Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe finschii</i>	locally frequent. 3/13
Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola saxatilis</i>	scattered throughout. 7/13

Blue Rock Thrush	<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	scattered. 3/13
Ring Ouzel	<i>Turdus torquatus</i>	a male along the Çatak Road
Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>	only noted on two days
Cetti's Warbler	<i>Cettia cetti</i>	widespread. 12/13
Savi's Warbler	<i>Locustella luscinioides</i>	frequent at the Dönemeç Delta, also South Van Marshes
Moustached Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus melanopogon</i>	frequent to common at all wetlands. 7/13
Sedge Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus schoenobaenus</i>	noted Erçek Gölü and Dönemeç Delta
Paddyfield Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus agricola</i>	common in all wetlands in the Van area. 5/13
Marsh Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus palustris</i>	scattered. Several in the Sim-er Motel garden, Doğubeyazıt. 4/13
Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus scirpaceus</i>	scattered throughout. 5/13
Great Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus arundinaceus</i>	at most wetlands in small numbers. 4/13
Olivaceous Warbler	<i>Hippolais pallida</i>	locally frequent. 7/13
Upcher's Warbler	<i>Hippolais languida</i>	2 in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt, also 1 Çilli Pass and 1 Dönemeç Delta
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia curruca</i>	scattered. 2/13
Common Whitethroat	<i>Sylvia communis</i>	scattered. 3/13
Garden Warbler	<i>Sylvia borin</i>	several in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt
Mountain Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus sindianus</i>	noted north of Van
Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	noted in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>	2 in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt
Bearded Tit	<i>Panurus biarmicus</i>	common in all wetlands in the Van area. 6/13

Bearded Tit by
Robert Goodsell



Long-tailed Tit	<i>Aegithalos caudatus</i>	scattered. 2/13
Blue Tit	<i>Parus caeruleus</i>	scattered. 2/13
Great Tit	<i>Parus major</i>	widely scattered. 6/13
Eurasian Nuthatch	<i>Sitta europaea</i>	a pair in oak scrub just west of the Kizkinkiran Pass
Eastern Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta tephronata</i>	2 at the foot of Ararat

Western Rock Nuthatch	<i>Sitta neumayer</i>	scattered. 2/13
Penduline Tit	<i>Remiz pendulinus</i>	heard north of Van and seen near Tatvan
Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	locally frequent. 8/13
Red-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius collurio</i>	mostly the Doğubeyazıt area. 5/13
Lesser Grey Shrike	<i>Lanius minor</i>	noted north of Van and in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt
Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	mostly south of Lake Van. 5/13
Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>	widespread. 13/13
Alpine Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax gracilis</i>	common on the Karabet
Red-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax</i>	scattered throughout. 6/13
Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>	widespread. 13/13
Rook	<i>Corvus frugilegus</i>	locally common. 8/13
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus (corone) cornix</i>	widespread. 13/13
Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	only noted north of Van and on the Güzeldere Pass
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	widespread. 13/13
Rose-coloured Starling	<i>Sturnus roseus</i>	widely scattered, good numbers this year. 7/13
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	widespread, near habitation. 13/13
Tree Sparrow	<i>Passer montanus</i>	in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt and at Van Castle
Spanish Sparrow	<i>Passer hispaniolensis</i>	in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt
Rock Sparrow	<i>Petronia petronia</i>	widespread. 8/13
Snowfinch	<i>Montifringilla nivalis</i>	locally common by snow. 4/13
Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>	noted in the oak woods near Tatvan
Red-fronted Serin	<i>Serinus pusillus</i>	noted above the Ishak Paşa and around the picnic site there, also along the Çatak Road
Linnet	<i>Carduelis cannabina</i>	widely scattered. 6/13
Twite	<i>Carduelis flavirostris</i>	locally common in areas above 2000m. 3/13
Crimson-winged Finch	<i>Rhodopechys sanguinea</i>	several on the Çilli Pass, also along the Çatak Road and on the Güzeldere Pass
Desert Finch	<i>Rhodopechys obsoleta</i>	a fine male in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt is as far as we can work out both the easternmost and the northernmost record in Turkey
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	several on the Çilli Pass and some on the Güzeldere Pass
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	scattered. 4/13
Ortolan Bunting	<i>Emberiza hortulana</i>	scattered. 4/13
Grey-necked Bunting	<i>Emberiza buchanani</i>	Zerneke Reservoir and along the Çatak Road
Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>	The thick-billed race frequent in all wetlands south and east of Van. 4/13
Black-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza melanocephala</i>	Widespread. 13/13
Corn Bunting	<i>Miliaria calandra</i>	Widespread. 13/13

In addition a number of birds were recorded whilst at the Durusu Hotel near Istanbul Airport, especially by David and Kay who spent two days there. This is presented separately as the avifauna around the Durusu doesn't have much in common with the Van area!

Little Bittern
Grey Heron
Mallard
Marsh Harrier
Long-legged Buzzard
Aquila eagle sp
Common Kestrel
Hobby
Moorhen
Yellow-legged Gull
Rock Dove
Collared Dove
Cuckoo
Scops Owl
Common Swift
Alpine Swift
European Bee-eater
Barn Swallow
House Martin
Black-headed Yellow Wagtail
Robin
Nightingale
Blackbird
Cetti's Warbler
Great Reed Warbler
Olivaceous Warbler
Sardinian Warbler
Common Whitethroat
Blackcap
Spotted Flycatcher
Great Tit
Golden Oriole
Red-backed Shrike
Jay
Magpie
Jackdaw
Hooded Crow
Starling
Rose-coloured Starling
Spanish Sparrow
Chaffinch
Greenfinch
Cirl Bunting
Corn Bunting

Systematic List Number 3 Butterflies

The taxonomic nomenclature and the systematic order have been taken from Baytaş's Butterflies of Turkey (2007).

Papilionidae

<i>Iphiclides podalirius</i>	Scarce Swallowtail	A scatter of records
<i>Zerynthia deyrollei</i>	Eastern Steppe Festoon	a few south of Tatvan

Pieridae

<i>Leptidea sinapsis</i>	Wood White	Zernek
<i>Pieris brassicae</i>	Large White	scattered
<i>Pieris napi</i>	Green-veined White	south of Tatvan
<i>Pieris bowdeni</i>	Bowden's White	At the <i>Orchis punctulata</i> site on the Bitlis Circuit south of Tatvan. Several in the same gully as the Alpine Green Hairstreaks
<i>Pontia edusa</i>	Eastern Bath White	Scattered
<i>Anthocharis cardamines</i>	Orange-tip	a few along the south shore of Lake Van
<i>Anthocharis damone</i>	Eastern Orange-tip	scattered
<i>Colias alfacariensis</i>	Berger's Clouded Yellow	Nemrüt Dağı
<i>Colias crocea</i>	Clouded Yellow	widespread



Bowden's White



Eastern Steppe Festoon

Lycaenidae

<i>Tomares callimachus</i>	Caucasian Vernal Copper	Çatak Road
<i>Satyrrium marcidum</i>	Rebel's Hairstreak	along south shore of Lake Van
<i>Callophrys paulae</i>	Pfeiffer's Green Hairstreak	Ishak Paşa & lunch spot on the Bitlis Circuit day
<i>Callophrys suaveola</i>	Alpine Green Hairstreak	John photographed what looks like this species on the Çatak Road & lunch spot on the Bitlis Circuit day
<i>Callophrys</i>	Green Hairstreak spp	scattered
<i>Lycaena asabinus</i>	Anatolian Fiery Copper	first day north of Van
<i>Lycaena ochimus</i>	Turkish Fiery Copper	first day north of Van and Çatak Road
<i>Lycaena phlaeas</i>	Small Copper	scattered
<i>Lycaena thersamon</i>	Lesser Fiery Copper	scattered
<i>Lycaena tityrus</i>	Sooty Copper	scattered
<i>Celastrina argiolus</i>	Holly Blue	Bitlis Circuit (John)



<i>Glaucopsyche alexis</i>	Green-underside Blue
<i>Plebeius argus</i>	Silver-studded Blue
<i>Plebeius pylaon</i>	Zephyr Blue
<i>Plebeius loewii</i>	Loew's Blue
<i>Aricia agestis</i>	Brown Argus
<i>Aricia anteros</i>	Blue Argus
<i>Cyaniris semiargus</i>	Mazarine Blue
<i>Polyommatus amanda</i>	Amanda's Blue
<i>Polyommatus coelestinus</i>	Pontic Blue
<i>Polyommatus fatima</i>	Fatima's Blue
<i>Polyommatus icarus</i>	Common Blue

locally very common!
 in the garden of the Sim-er Motel, Doğubeyazıt
 scattered
 One at Gurpınar
 scattered – a very beautiful spring silvery form
 Çatak Road
 scattered - most were of the Eastern *bellis* subspecies
 Çatak Road (John)
 1 south side of Lake Van and several along the Çatak Road
 a nice find north of Van was this uncommon species –
 several amongst the hordes of Green-underside Blues
 widespread

Nymphalidae

<i>Nymphalis polychloros</i>	Large Tortoiseshell
<i>Cynthia cardui</i>	Painted Lady
<i>Polygonia egea</i>	Southern Comma
<i>Issoria lathonia</i>	Queen of Spain Fritillary
<i>Melitaea arduinna</i>	Freyer's Fritillary
<i>Melitaea cinxia</i>	Glanville Fritillary
<i>Melitaea punica</i>	Algerian Fritillary

south of Tatvan and Nemrüt Dağı
 widespread
 widely scattered
 scattered
 south of Tatvan
 widespread
 one seen south of Tatvan

Satyridae

<i>Lasiommata maera</i>	Large Wall Brown
<i>Protoerebia afra</i>	Dalmatian Ringlet
<i>Coenonympha pamphilus</i>	Small Heath

Ishak Paşa Palace
 Nemrüt Dağı, also noted along the Çatak Road
 widespread

Hesperiidae

<i>Spialia phlomidis</i>	Persian Skipper
<i>Carcharodus alceae</i>	Mallow Skipper
<i>Carcharodus lavatherae</i>	Marbled Skipper
<i>Erynnis tages</i>	Dingy Skipper

First day north of Van and along the Çatak Road
 one south of Tatvan
 along the Çatak Road
 one south of Tatvan

Systematic List Number 4

Reptiles & Amphibians

Green Toad	<i>Bufo viridis</i>	noted at several localities
Desert Treefrog	<i>Hyla savignyi</i>	noted on the Bitlis circuit
Banded Frog	<i>Rana camerani</i>	Almost everywhere, especially common in high altitude open sites
Marsh Frog	<i>Rana ridibunda</i>	Most common amphibian: in every site with water
Stripe-necked Terrapin	<i>Mauremys caspica</i>	Common around Van Lake, Erçek etc
Spur-thighed Tortoise	<i>Testudo graeca</i>	common. Plague of them on Akdamar Island!
Caucasian Agama	<i>Laudakia caucasica</i>	Common in rocky places around Ararat
Dwarf Lizard	<i>Lacerta parva</i>	high steppe areas
Balkan Green Lizard	<i>Lacerta trilineata</i>	a number of records
Valentin's Lizard	<i>Lacerta valentini</i>	one of the commonest lizards in the area
Snake-eyed Lizard	<i>Ophisops elegans</i>	scattered north of Lake Van
Dice Snake	<i>Natrix tessellata</i>	small wetland by Erçek Gölü

Systematic List Number 5

Mammals

White-breasted Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus concolor</i>	A live one seen in the poplar meadows at Adilcevaz and quite a few road kills
Eastern Hedgehog	<i>Erinaceus roumanicus</i>	Durusu
Asia Minor Suslik	<i>Spermophilus xanthoprymnus</i>	widespread
Brown Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	scattered records
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>	just on seen