# Tajikistan

# & Uzbekistan

A Greentours Tour Report

 $7^{th}$  –  $18^{th}$  April 2012

Led by Chris Gardner & Oron Peri

# Day 1 7<sup>th</sup> April To Dushanbe

The long but unavoidable trip east to Dushanbe was delayed by an hour at Istanbul and was followed by slow processing at the airport. This meant we arrived at the hotel in the early hours with the birds starting to sing, but in time for a couple of hours of sleep.

# Day 2 8<sup>th</sup> April Karatag

Everyone managed to wake up again and we were on our way west by mid-morning. Despite a late breakfast we had an early lunch at the town immediately before the Karatag Valley enjoying samsa, kebabs, chips and tea. However, before heading up the valley we back tracked a couple of kilometres to where Oron had seen a superb specimen of *Eminium lehmanii*, with its very dark purple spathe and distinctive dissect mature leaves. A few others were scattered about the roadside as bemused locals looked on at the cameras bristling around the smelly aroid.

Entering the valley we hadn't gone far when the first bright yellow *Iris bucharica* appeared and then more and more until they were ever present with some superb denser populations crowding the rocky slopes. We stopped at one particularly good patch as an adult Lammergieier cruised across the slope on the opposite side of the river. Exploring the slope we found not only an abundance of rich yellow irises but also some fine clumps of *Onosma irritans* on the rocky crags above. A Pied Wheatear perched on boulder and Oron found a Central Asian Green Toad.

The valley narrowed further up with cliffs coming to the road and growing on these and the large boulders were plenty of pretty pink *Pseudosedum longidentatum*, the pale pink brassica *Parrya beketovii*, white *Valeriana ficariifolia* as well as tufts of delicate yellow *Gagea gageoides*. A large (closed) flower of *Tulipa praestans* was just a tease, set high on a ledge out of reach. Brown Dipper was calling and we saw it a few times as we drove up the valley crossing a small side stream and then stopping beside a slope with thousands of *Anemone petiolulosa*. On a rockier area were also

some perfect *Fritillaria bucharica* and quite a few *Bongardia chrysocoma* with their distinctive pinnate leaves, the leaflets stained red at the base.

Blue Whistling Thrush was seen as we descended and there was time for one last stop on the way back for another colony of *Eminium lehmanii* with some enormous spathes that were crowding the bank of a small graveyard. There were also the leaves and buds of a huge onion, *Allium karataviense* and more of the small *Solenanthus sp*.

We had dinner in a restaurant with rather lavish ceilings.

#### Day 3 9<sup>th</sup> April Romit

A long but rewarding day saw us heading east towards Romit and then following the river into the Zerashan. *Iris vicaria* started to appear on the granitic slopes and we stopped for a good population in a rundown facility with a dried up swimming pool and verdant lawns peppered with *Gagea gageoides*, fine tall *Anemone petiolulosa* and a few pinkish *Anemone tschernjaewii*, as well as some good forms of the iris, *Muscari negelctum*, and a decent spike of *Corydalis popovii*. Further along there were many large leafless walnut trees and small villages and along the edge of one Liz spotted some bright red *Tulipa praestans*. We went into the village and found the field with the tulips and set about photographing them much to the bemusement of the village children. There were a few *Corydalis ledebouriana* and *Fessia (Scilla) puschkinioides* and pair of very smart Yellow-breasted Tits.

Lunch was in the next village along, Viston, where we were treated to a lavish spread of sweets, jams, preserved fruits, delicious cherry juice and then big plates of plov washed down with plenty of tea, all set on the floor with thick carpets and cushions (but our creaky joints didn't think much of it after a bit). The season was clearly early this year and the planned walk near the village to find *Iris rosenbachiana* had to be aborted. Instead we went further upstream seeing a stunning White-capped Water-redstart as we crossed the bridge. A few kilometres drive up and we eventually located some fine irises among an area of walnut and cherry woodland growing with plenty of the blue form of *Fessia puschkinioides, Gymnospermium alberti* and oceans of *Corydalis ledebouriana*. On the higher grassy slopes was plenty of Brown Bear dung and a Large Tortoiseshell was settling on a tree, occasionally sallying out and gliding around.

Time was moving but we called in at another village where there were a few *Fritillaria eduardii* but alas only in bud, although there was the odd pink *Iris rosenbachiana* and even an okay *Crocus korolkovii*. A small flock of Bramblings were feeding in a garden the males looking very dapper in their summer plumage and as we drove back there was a superb view of a juvenile Golden Eagle being dive-bombed by a Kestrel.

#### Day 4 10<sup>th</sup> April Varzob Gorge

Another fine sunny day for a drive into the mountains, soon leaving the city behind and climbing steadily up along the Varzob Gorge passing the immense President's Dacha (summer house) and then stopping to try and get information about possible sites for *Fritillaria eduardii* but they were all too far away. Instead we continued up and then stopped near a cliff face where there were a few cushions of *Dionysia involucrata*. There were a couple of small plants low down with tantalising buds and we could see a few deep pink flowers on one of the upper cushions so we hoped they might open a bit later once the sun had come round. For now we drove on and then stopped in a superb area with hundreds of glowing rich scarlet goblets of *Tulipa praestans* all fully open in the sun. It was a stunning sight the tulips set among thousands of *Gagea gageoides* along with a few *Fritillaria bucharica* and the odd *Solenanthus circinnatus* with their peculiar scorpioide cymes bristling with yellow stamens.

*Iridaceae* continued to be the theme at our next stop a lot higher up with large snow patches on the slopes and spectacular mountain views. On a broad grassy flat beside the river where clumps of *Crocus korolkovii*, as well as hundreds of blue *Fessia puschkinioides*, swathes of *Corydalis ledebouriana* and some fine *Gymnospermium alberti* (although the latter had smothered the ground in large areas for much of the journey after the tulip stop). We drove a bit further on but couldn't find any more snow-free areas and so turned around and descended to a small restaurant for a filling lunch.

We opted for a walk into the hills through areas of woodlands with many different trees from planes and poplars to apples and pears. Butterflies were quite numerous with Brimstone, Swallowtail (feeding on *Pseudosedum lievenii*), Wood White, Clouded Yellow and many unknown blues. Unfortunately there were no frits here either, the year was decidedly early and they'd finished, but there was at least a stand of *Thermopsis dolichocarpa*.

# Day 5 11<sup>th</sup> April Nurek

The fantastic weather continued and we had blue skies almost all day long. We drove south towards the large Nurek reservoir with views of the long chain of the Gissar Mountains to our left and stopped first in a large elm plantation where we found many *Anemone tschernjaewii* along with a few of its red cousin *Anemone bucharica*, the pretty fine-leaved buttercup *Ranunculus tenuilobus* a few scarlet pheasant–eyes *Adonis aestivalis*. Crested Larks, Olive-backed Pipits and Corn Bunting were seen in the adjoining overgrown vineyard. The brilliant red of *Anemone bucharica* grew in number as we climbed further and then rounding a bend there was a slope covered in them, a dazzling sight with patches of cerise Judas Tree *Cercis griffithii* forest in the background. Scattered among the abundant red were a few of the yellow form as well as a couple of hybrids between *bucharica* and *tschernjaewii*. There were also several fresh Vernal Hairstreaks and a couple of decent *Bellevalia turkestanica*. We searched for the latter at another site further on

but they were finished this year, but there was the ample compensation of first a sub-adult Lammergeier cruising over very close and then great views of two Egyptian Vultures. We were now descending towards the town of Nurek with wonderful convoluted hills and deep valley views. A couple of big white flowered *Astragalus retamocarpus* caught our eye and as we photographed these Oron walked on and found the lovely *Iris stolonifera* growing below another huge clump of *Astragalus retamocarpus*. There was also a red tulip which looked very much like *Tulipa fosterana* and searching a bit further afield we found a very fine one fully open.

Lunch was in the town and afterwards we drove on up along the road above the reservoir passing superb tracts of Judas Tree woodland in full bloom and there were many fine specimens of these at our next stop. We had hoped to still find *Fritillaria eduardii* but even here none were obvious and it just wasn't meant to be. Nonetheless we climbed up the slope in the hope of finding one somewhere achieving a magnificent view of the huge reservoir and the many red-rock islands and convoluted shore. We also found several interesting plants as we went including *Biebersteinia multifida*, another lovely *Iris stolonifera*, colonies of pretty pink *Primula algida* and a fine *Onosma setosa*. A Shikra soared overhead as we walked back down intending to drive straight back from here, but these things don't always go to plan and there were three good stops on the way. The first was for an area of *Cercis griffithii* woodland and although the light had largely gone from the slope we did find a superb clump of *Onosma setosa*. Next were a few bushes of yellow-flowered *Rosa kokanica* (?) and then the icing on the cake a superb colony of an unknown *Eremurus sp* (we initially called it as *olgae* but this species has much denser panicles of white flowers) the many spires of soft yellow flowers glowing in the late sun on slope where there was also *Arnebia coerulea*.

The ever ridiculous car washing and wanton police stops meant we arrived late but after a quick change we went out to a Turkish restaurant for a good meal.

# Day 6 12<sup>th</sup> April To Samarkand

Today was always going to be a long one as there was a large distance to cover as well as a slow border crossing. We rumbled along to the border on the newly dug up highway and said farewell to our reliable driving team. On the Uzbek side our bus and guide, Zahid, were waiting and we set off quickly stopping for the loo and then putting some kilometres behind us before a late lunch. Unfortunately my intended short cut had suffered a wash-out so we had a longer detour before finally spotting a few *Tulipa micheliana* in some short turf. Its smaller cousin *Tulipa montana* was at our next short stop along with a small *Saponaria sp*. It was a long journey today and eventually we arrived in Samarkand at our pleasant hotel.

#### Day 7 13<sup>th</sup> April Amankutan

A fine breakfast got the day off to a good start with all manner of pancakes, cheese, meat, mulberry jam and scrambled eggs on offer. Amankutan is a superb tract of granitic mountains, an extension of the Gissar Range and full of new flowers. It did not take too to reach the pass (a mere 1500metres) where we began our floral feast with a fine colony of *Iris warleyensis* a gorgeous lilac and purple juno that was growing alongside clumps of yellow-flowered Astragalus janiszewski. In an adjacent gully were a couple of rich-red *Tulipa fosterana* along with lots of hairy leaved buttercups Ranunculus paucidentatus as Clouded Yellows zipped about on the warm morning. Moving across to a boulder strewn plateau Nuala and Helen found a Roller which posed well for views. On a north-facing slope were a few decent Primula fedtschenkoi, Corydalis maracandica and at least three Gagea spp. However, it got even better on much larger slope with a few snow patches where there were superb Corydalis maracandica, purple-striped white Colchicum kesselringianum, Eranthis longistipitata and extraordinary forms of Corydalis ledebouriana deep pink with reddishpurple and gold lips and erect spurs. There were also many good golden Crocus korolkovii and as lunchtime approached the *Tulipa turkestanica* began to open, some with a number of flowers on the stem. Lunch was had admiring the view and then afterwards as we began to drive down the far side of the mountain a Long-legged Buzzard soared over. We stopped first for some very fresh Iris magnifica including a whopper with eight flowers and then lower down near some tea houses was abundant Astragalus sieversianus an impressive legume with tall hairy stems crowded with pale-yellow flowers. Oron caught a Glass Lizard and the Long-legged Buzzard reappeared before it was time for tea. Rock Buntings were calling a lot so Helen, Nuala and I went in search of these eventually finding one creeping among the shrubs. There were also a few more very fine Tulipa fosterana and big billowing masses of Crambe kotschyana on the rocky slope behind the tea house. A couple of Greenish Warblers were seen in a tree before it was time to start back and there was one stop on the way back for a slope with two fine Astragalus species.

#### Day 8 14<sup>th</sup> April Samarkand

Blue-tiles, domes and fantastic architecture aplenty today as well as spin around the food market with all sorts of tempting sweets on offer, with commentary and tales of Timur provided by Zahid. The wildlife highlight was undoubtedly the superb aerial display of Alpine Swifts some of which were nesting in holes at Gul-e-Emir.

We had an ample dinner in a private house in the evening.

#### Day 9 15<sup>th</sup> April To Beldersay

The rain began during the night and continued during our drive to Tashkent and all the way to Beldersay. In truth there was nothing much to stop for on the way to Tashkent, only loos and

coffee. Then after a tasty lunch we were set to continue and start plant hunting but a nose-bleed that took a long time to stop necessitated us visiting the local hospital before continuing so it was too late to look for plants by the time we reached the Tien Shan.

#### Day 10 16<sup>th</sup> April Chimgan

The rain had stopped but cold mists were swirling about the landscape. Immediately around the hotel were many *Gymnospermium albertii, Corydalis ledebouriana* and *Gagea glacialis* (?), with *Eranthis longistipitata* still closed tight as Mistle Thrushes rattled about the junipers. Things needed time to warm up so we first descended a bit stopping for some good plants of *Iris tuberganiana* a greenish-yellow juno. Further downhill were a couple of very fresh *Fritillaria severzovii* and some splendid *Solenanthus circinnatus*. Patches of blue were appearing in the sky as we headed towards Chimgan, stopping a short distance before for a big colony of *Colchicum luteum*.

It was still unusually cool as we climbed up to a saddle between the mountains passing flowering honeysuckles and dwarf cherries, many more *Corydalis ledebouriana*, *Fessia* (*Scilla*) *puschkinioides* and unopened *Tulipa turkestanica*. Lunch was in the shelter of a big juniper to cut out the cold wind and then we ascended the final rocky stretch to where there was a good number of *Tulipa x tschimganica* and although they were all still closed the vibrant colour of the flowers was still obvious. There were also a few *Fritillaria stenanthera* in good condition along with *Astragalus atrovinosa* and the lovely purple-marked glaucous leaves of *Tulipa greigii* (although at least a ten days from flowering) as Rufous-naped Tits were flitted about the junipers.

We walked back down to somewhat warmer climes and then drove in the direction of the hotel stopping for five Himalayan Griffon Vultures soaring on a thermal. Back at the hotel there was time to go out in search of *Crocus alatavicus* and we located a good colony mingled among dozens of *Colchicum luteum*, including one that was teased open to show the bright yellow anthers. There was also a fine view of Chimgan Mountain in the sunshine as the clouds began to properly slip away, hopefully for at least another twenty four hours.

# Day 11 17<sup>th</sup> April Charvaq Reservoir

Alas the weather was still on the gloomy side but at least there was no rain and the sun was trying to peek through. We returned to the crocus site of yesterday and managed to persuade another to open that was conveniently next to a *Colchicum luteum*. Driving down from the hotel a Himalayan Griffon was on the wing and we stopped at an excellent population of *Iris tuberganiana* with many fine flowers and colour variants. It seemed best to spend time at lower altitudes today so we dropped down to Charvaq Reservoir where there were abundant stands *Thermopsis alternifolia*. Even better, in a nearby rocky gully were many big spikes if *Eremurus* 

*lactiflorus* with a fair smattering of elegantly shaped bright red *Tulipa griegii* mixed among them. The foxtail lilies really were in fine condition with milky-white flowers topped by reddish buds. There was also a plant or two of *Geranium tuberosum* and *Arnebia tschimganica* with bright yellow flowers, which on the grassy slope above species was much more common.

Lunch was at a summer camp where we could sit and eat in the colourfully painted shelters as thunder rumbled across the hills. Despite the threat of imminent wet stuff we donned waterproofs and climbed up onto a rocky ridge where there was another superb display of *Eremurus lactiflorus*. A shower swept across as we came down but this was short-lived and had stopped by the time we found an attractive *Onosma sp* with pale yellow flowers.

Driving back to Tashkent there were big populations of *Eremurus regelii* in bud on the hillsides and Common Terns, Redshank and many hirundines along the braided river channel before we reached the city, arriving in good time to prepare for tomorrows' journey. We had a good final meal and then said our goodbyes at the hotel. Five of us had the very early flight to Istanbul in the morning the rest had a lie in until 5am before their flight to Bukhara where more blue tiles and elegant architecture awaited.

# Day 12 18<sup>th</sup> April To UK

Airport formalities went smoothly enough and we arrived somewhat bleary-eyed at Istanbul, separating to go into the city, back to England or back to Merlin.

#### Several went on the extension to Bukhara, not described here...

# Systematic List Number 1 Flora

Compiled by Oron Peri

#### AMARYLLIDACEAE

Allium severtzovioides

#### ARACEAE

Arum korlokowii Eminium albertii Eminium lehmannii

#### ASPARAGACEAE

Bellevalia turkestanica Feesia puschkinoides Muscari neglectum Polygonatum sewerzowii

#### BALSAMINACEAE

Impatiens parviflora

#### BERBERIDACEAE

Bongardia chrysogonum Gymnospermium albertii Leontice ewersmannii

#### BIEBERSTEINIACEAE

Biebersteinaceae multifida

#### BORAGINACEAE

Arnebia tschimganica Onosma setosa var dicroantha

Onosma irritans

Solenanthus circinatus Solenanthus sp.

# BRASSIACEAE

Alliaria petiolata Capsella bursa-pastoris Cardaria draba Crambe cordifolia tall spikes, pink, roadside near Tashkent

in bud, common and widespread in shady areas Karatag valley, Warzob, Romit leaves, Charvak reservoir, Beldersay

solitary flowering stem, stunning blue-purple color, widespread [syn. *Scilla puschkinoides*] widespread Romit Charvak Reservoir

in buds, common and widespread in shady humid places.

widespread widespread Karatag valley

silvery fennel like leaves, yellow flowers, Nurek

showy species with deep yellow flowers, Charavak Reservoir large yellow flowers turning orange, on the way to Samarkand under Kishtnova growing on cliffs, large yellow flowers, all parts of the plant with long white hairs, Karatag Warzob With yellow flowers at Karatag

Serrated leaves, white flowers, Warzob widespread widespread in lowlands mainly in disturbed grounds large semi shrub with white flowers, Romit, Tj. Parrya beketovii [syn Achoriphragma beketovii ]pink flowers with a darker cross in the center CANNABACEAE Celtis australis subsp caucasica Widespread CAPRIOFOLIACEAE Bolbosaponaria sewerzowii small species, similar to saponaria with pink flowers, Romit Valeriana dioscoridis scattered in shady humid places Valeriana ficarifolia like a small version of V. dioscoridis, Romit COLCHICACEAE Colchicum luteum Chimgan, Beldersay Colchicum kesselringii Amankutan COMPOSITAE Achillea santolinoides subsp wilhelmsii low growing, narrow serrated, scented leaves, Nurek finely cut, silvery leaves highly scented, Chimgan Artemesia persica Tragopogon malikus glaucus curly leaves, large pink flower, chimgan CRASSULACEAE Pseudosedum lievenii cerise flowers, leaves like encores, growing on walls, widespread Pseudosedum longidentatum slightly larger than C. lievenii, leaves do not curve, Karatag Rosularia turkestanica rosette of succulent leaves, Chimgan **CYPERACEAE** miniature Carex with black inflorescens Carex pachystylis LAEGNACEAE Elaeagnus angustifolia scattered along roadsides and rivers EUPHORBLACEAE Euophorbia helioscopia Scattered GENTIANACEAE Gentiana olivieri grassland, Amankutan GERANIACEAE Erodium cicutarium Widespread Geranium kotschyi subsp charlesii similar in a way to G. tuberosum accept leaves are on the main

Geranium molle Geranium tuberosum

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stem, Romit

Amankutan

Charavak Reservoir

#### IRIDACEAE

Crocus alatavicus Crocus korlokowii

Iris bucharica Iris magnifica

Iris rosenbachiana Iris stolonifera Iris tubergeniana Iris vicaria

Iris warleyensis

# IXIOLIRIACEAE

Ixiolirion tataricum

#### LAMIACEAE

Hypogomphia bucharica Lamium amplexicaule

#### LEGUMINOSAE

Astragalus aksaricus Astragalus siversianus

Astragalus stenanthus

Trigonella grandiflora

Cercis siliquastrum

Styphnolobium japonicum Thermopsis alterniflora Thermopsis dolichocarpa Robinia pseudacacia

#### LILIACEAE

Fritillaria bucharica Fritillaria edwardii Fritillaria swerzowii Fritillaria stenanthera Gagea gageoides Chimgan, Beldersay Yellow flowers, common near melting snow, Romit, Amankutan, Chimgan Juno, yellow flowers in astonishing numbers, Karatag - valley Juno, tall robust species with whitish/lavender flowers, yellow patch on falls, Amankutan Juno, colorful and variable, grassy steppes Romit Aril, bluish/purple with markings, widespread. Juno, lemony/green flowers, Beldersay Juno, widespread, white flowers with yellow patch on falls, Romit Blue/lavender color with big yellow patch on deep purple falls, Amankutan

Widespread, common

Nurek, lovely, large, deep pink flowers widespread

low growing, yellow flowers almost sessile , Chimgan TJ. Large species, stem covered densely with yellow flowers, Nurek, Amankutan pink/purple flowers, looks like clumps of Allium Amankutan, S. of Samarkand relatively large species in this genus, yellow flowers, near Tashkent Judas Tree. Widespread, the C. Asian form with deep purple flowers [syn *Sophora japonica* ]Charvak Reservoir Yellow flowers, Charvak Reservoir tall shrub with yellow flowers, Warzob scattered in lowlands

widespread and sometimes abundant in buds, Romit under Beldersay scattered at higher elevations, chimgan, Beldersay the most common species, slender with 'zigzag' stem with tiny bulbils in the axils Gagea graminifolia

Gagea lutea Gagea ova Gagea liotardii

Tulipa fosterana Tulipa greigii

Tulipa micheliana Tulipa montana

Tulipa praestans

Tulipa x tschimganixa Tulipa turkestanica

#### **OROBANCHACEAE**

Parentucellia viscosa

Pedicularis olgae

#### PAPA VERACEAE

Corydalis ledebouriana

Corydalis maracandica Corydalis popovii Fumaria parviflora

#### PRIMULACEAE

Anagallis arvensis Dionysia involcrata Primula algida Primula fedtschenkoi

# RANUNCULACEAE

Adonis aestivalis Anemone biflora var. gortschakowii Anemone biflora var. petiolulosa Anemone bucharica Anemone tschernjaewii Anemone tschernjaewii x bucharica Ceratocephlus falcatus Erantis longistipitata nice low growing clumps with very starry flowers and pointed channeled leaves, Karatag large species, solitary, wide, shiny basal leaf, Romit, Warzob white flowers, similar in form to G. gageoides, very common [syn G. anisanthos] single fleshy, bright green basal leaf, at the hotel ground. Amankutan, Nurek Glaocus leaves with purple markings, Charvak Reservoir, chimgan deep red flower on a short pedicel, Chimgan, Derban small species with undulate glaocus leaves, yellow anthers, Derban Coral/red flowers, hairy stem and leaves, Widespread usually in large numbers Chimgan common at higher elevations, Amankutan, Chimgan

small velvety leaved species, semi parasitic, tiny yellow flowers, Nurek creamy flowers turning pink as they mature, widespread.

widespread near malting snow pinkish/white flowers with dark cherry red edges.

pink flowers, karatag, Romit Nurek

blue form, widespread starting to flower, Warzob Nurek Amankutan

On the way to Nurek slender species, yellow flowers, Charvak Reservoir finely cut leaves, yellow flowers, Karatag, Romit showy red flowers, occasionally yellow forms pink flowers a natural hybrid with deep pink flowers, Nurek tiny, yellow annual similar to ranunculus, widespread common at high elevation near melting snow Ranunculus tenuilobus Ranunculus paucidentatus Thalictrum isopyroides

ROSACEAE

Rosa kokanica

SIMAROUBACEAE

Ailanthus altissimum

shrub with large deep yellow flowers , Nurek

small, finely cut leaves, yellow anthers, Charvak Reservoir

robust species, trilobed, very hairy lanceolate leaves, Amankutan

like a finer version of R. millefoliuatus, Nurek

Tall tree, smooth trunk, reddish new leaves, widespread

widespread

*ULMACEAE Celtis australis subsp caucasica* 

VIOLACEAE

Viola suavis

#### XANTHORRHOEACEAE

Eremurus albertii Eremurus lactiflorus Eremurus olgae

Eremurus robustus

smaller then *V. odorata,* with round serrated leaves Karatag, Romit

robust plant with pink flowers, very rare! ,Karatag, Nurak showy species with orange colored buds opening to white flowers [syn *E. angustifolius*] Nurek, tall slender species with white flowers and yellow/green center, might be a form or even another taxon massive species leaves only, widespread mainly in the shade of trees.