

International Rock Gardener



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May 2011



As we celebrate the centenary of the rock garden at RHS Wisley, with an article by Paul Cumbleton, we introduce to the [SRGC Forum](#) a new section on Garden History. Dr John Page is our guide to this subject and his introductory article can be seen here. [This forum section](#) is open to all to contribute information about historical rock gardens and indeed garden history in general. The past is always a valuable lesson in any field.

Cover picture: *Campanula morettiana*. Photo by Gita Piatková (see page 14)

---Mountains in the Gardens---

A HUNDRED YEARS OF ALPINES AT WISLEY by Paul Cumbleton

This year of 2011 marks the centenary of the construction of the rock garden at the [RHS Garden, Wisley](#). I wonder, when the decision was taken to build it, if the instigators had any idea that their creation would still be one of the most popular attractions at this famous garden a hundred years later and enjoyed by about a million visitors each year?

It is a great privilege for me to be responsible for carrying on the good work of previous generations and helping tend the rock garden and the associated alpine meadow and glasshouses. It has also been fascinating in this centenary year to look back at the origins of Wisley's alpine riches. It was only 5 years after the RHS was given Wisley in 1903 that the decision was made to build a rock garden. The decision was inspired by the writings of the great plant hunter Reginald Farrer who in 1908 published his book "My Rock Garden". F.W. Meyer, the rockwork designer for the firm of Robert Veitch and Sons was originally employed to create the new rock garden, but he had barely received the commission when he died and the project was suspended. In 1910 it was revived and put out to tender. The company of James Pulham and son won the contract and built the rock garden under the supervision of landscape designer Edward White.

Work commenced in January of 1911 and was completed by August of the same year.



Natural sandstone rock was sourced from a quarry near Crowborough in East Sussex. About 550 tons were brought by rail to Horsley, the nearest station, and then by road to Wisley. To get the rock to the site from the road, a light railway was built across the garden, with further rails laid on site to help move the rocks around (left).

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The largest pieces were around 2 tons – I can imagine the effort and work involved without the use of more modern machinery! Here are some more early pictures from 1911 of the construction:



I love the old clothes worn by the man in this picture, though I'm not sure a white shirt is a good choice when doing this kind of work!

Approximately 58,000 plants were originally planted, taking 3 years or so after construction had ended. Even so, some complaints were received that the area looked under-planted! More plants were added and in one sense, planting has never ended as of course there is a continual cycle

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of renewal. Back in 1911 there were no computers and sadly even paper records are few, so we only know the names of a very few of the original plants – about 86 altogether. For example, there is a record from May 5th 1911 that The Tulley Nursery, Kildare, Ireland, gave a collection of alpines including *Morisia hypogea*; *Soldanella clusii*; *Saxifraga longifolia*; *Primula calyana*; *Parochetus communis* and *Saxifraga bathoniensis*. Another record shows that the famous E. A. Bowles (Mydleton House) gave a wide range of cuttings and alpines including *Androsace primuloides*; *Corydalis ochroleuca*; *Dianthus calalpinus*; *Iberis petraea*; numerous *Saxifraga*, *Sedum* and *Sempervivum* and *Seseli caespitosum* (Note that some of these names have changed since then).

The earliest pictures of the planted rock garden are from 1914:



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Since then there have been extensive changes over the years with re-laying of rocks and re-designs of various areas. Some of this work was necessitated by the fact that the whole construction has a tendency to slip slowly down the steep slope on which it is built. One of the most recent changes came in 2004 with the construction of a new waterfall at the top of the rock garden. There had been a waterfall there originally but over the years it had stopped functioning well and the planting was also well in need of refreshing. A Japanese designer, Professor Fukahara, designed it and came and supervised the build personally. Here are three pictures from the same viewpoint at different times:



The site as it was in 2003 before work started



As it looked in October 2004 with the construction finished and some planting in place. The stone had been freshly quarried so looked very stark at first.



Now in 2011 the rock has weathered considerably, the tones are more mellow and there is good growth of mosses and lichens in places.

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The waterfall itself is much improved with a larger flow. Again, here are before and after pictures:



To celebrate our centenary year we wanted not only to look back at the past but also to the future and to build something new for future visitors to enjoy. With the recent upsurge of interest in crevice gardens, this seemed a natural choice and we were most grateful to Zdenek Zvolanek for coming and designing and building this for us. The progress is well documented in my [Wisley Logs](#) but here is a reminder:



The site of the new crevice garden before work started

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Above: The site during construction

Below: Construction finished



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Planting started in March 2011, with Zdenek returning to help us. We aim to plant roughly 400 plants initially but then much of the planting will be added later as seeds we have sown get to a size suitable for pricking out straight in to the crevices.

Conclusion

Wisley has a rich 100 year history of growing alpines and is looking very much to the future and to carrying on this long tradition. Further information about the history is published in an article in the April issue of the RHS's magazine 'The Garden'.

(Please note all the black & white photos I have used in this article are copyright of the RHS and should not be reproduced without permission.) P.C.

Post Script ED: The following three photos were taken by Anne Spiegel, on an April visit to Wisley before the Alpines 2011 Conference and show the layout and preliminary plantings.



On the home page of the [SRGC Website](http://www.srgc.org.uk) and on the [main page of the International Rock Gardener](http://www.internationalrockgardener.com) there is now a PayPal "Donate" button which will allow those of you appreciative of the efforts of the Scottish Rock Garden Club in bringing you the website and features such as the IRG to make a donation to support the work of the SRGC on the internet.

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Below: The initial planting at the new Wisley crevice garden.



The Wappinger Falls garden of Anne and Joe Spiegel in New York State has been featured in the Newsletter of the [NARGS Berkshire Chapter](#) by Cliff Booker, in a report of his NARGS Speaker Tour and he has shared more pictures of the garden in the [SRGC Forum](#), and Anne has also described her new [crevice beds](#).

Cliff describes the Spiegel garden as 'perhaps the most beautiful alpine garden I have ever photographed' and it is easy to see why!

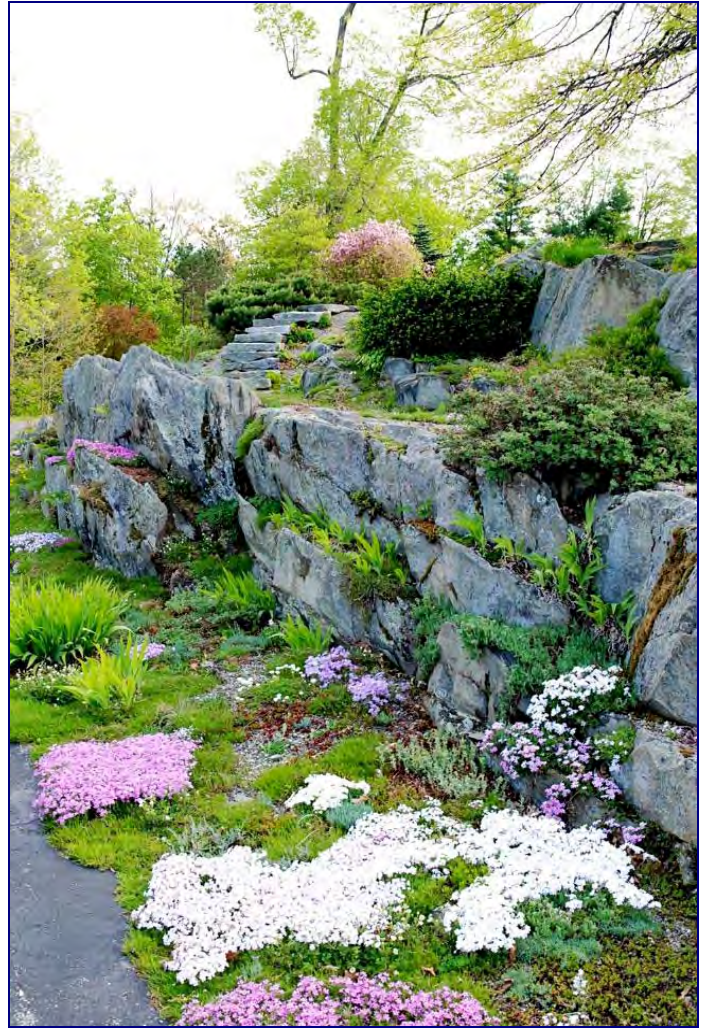
Cliff's articles about his experiences as a Speaker on a NARGS tour can be found in the Rock Garden Quarterly journals of Winter 2010 and Spring 2011.

Photos of the Spiegel Garden by Cliff Booker

Below: Western Phlox and planters



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Above left: Creators of the Spiegel Garden: Anne and Joe with their faithful dog Ranger.

Below: cliffs and boulders

Above right: an escarpment



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--- Focus on a Plantsman---

RHAPSODY IN SOFT YELLOW Text and photos by Zdeněk Zvolánek



A rhapsody is a highly emotional composition and an art which we rock gardeners need to learn soon to restore our stolen happiness lost to the recent killing dire winter, which pushed down all spirits, even those of optimistic dogs. I was lucky to obtain a healing mood from fresh primulas in rainbows of colours in the peak of their spring beauty in March in Southern England. I felt like a lucky human between dozens of new cultivars, “singing Jo-Jo happy-hippie Jo” to myself and then I discovered the really outstanding rhapsody performed by David Philbey and his shining flock of dwarf primroses. Imagine a miraculous grandpa from Dutch fairy tales or a kind of Santa Claus who knows everything from the kingdom of Primula and who is a gifted storyteller; that is David Philbey from Petersfield, England.(left)

I have met many amateur breeders of rock garden plants, every one was specialised and not fully open (cooking his own batch of knowledge-porridge) but David is a divine oldie and when I

happened to meet him in Wisley this year he immediately felt like an old friend. He is a perfectly seasoned grower, a collector of prizes at the AGS and Primula Society shows for his last 40 years. He ‘calls a spade a spade’ and he does not like the modern trend of changing good show rules to dilute the quality of exhibits (making it easier for lazy growers), so he is a good old (perhaps difficult) element for some new show organisers or primula show judges.

Some readers will remember his article (AGS journal) about growing dwarf primroses and saxifrages or dionysias in his tufa columns with a fixed flat bottom of the stone in a ceramic dish and dripping water from flasks hanging above this miniature garden. He has only two tufa columns now in his alpine house, because nobody is able to transport these heavy bodies to the shows.

People loving primroses, like me, surely did forget David’s article (AGS journal) about the 100 best cultivars in the genus Primula in cultivation. Every cultivar had its small picture there and David offered short comments to each of the beauties.

Left: David’s sense for fun and good play is seen at his trough (in a competition) showing to Britons the possibility to landscape a primrose grit garden (a rock garden without rocks).

I decided not to cover all David’s hybridising activities. He pollinated and selected primroses for 30 long years and there are many hybrids and selected and named forms of



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Primula allionii in his history as an amateur breeder. My intention is to tell you the story of David's dream, now fulfilled, which is only 20 years old.



The dream was to make a new fragrant compact dwarf hybrid with soft yellow flowers of good size. The only way was following steps of Mrs. Judy Burrow, who crossed a white form of *Primula allionii* with *Primula auricula* and raised the well-known *Primula x loiseleuri* 'Lismore Yellow' (left).

He selected as one parent the classic alpine primrose *Primula auricula* var. *ciliata*. It is a fine form, a small neat edition of the type *Primula auricula* var. *auricula*. This variety has flowers in one-sided umbels on 3-inch scapes. They are tubular, yellow with white-eye and very fragrant. The second parents were some white clones of *Primula allionii*.

The basic problem of this combination is the power of *Primula auricula*, which is always dominant in resulting hybrids with its dark yellow flowers and robust habitat.



It is seen in David's cultivar 'Vivienne' (right) and partly in one pretty *P. x loiseleuri* (below) from the master's collection, which is without label and cultivar name because I lost my notes with names of the photographed primroses.



It was a difficult breeding and selection process using back crossing with the parents. Of great spiritual help to him was the hybridiser of primroses, the late Margaret Earle; she tapped his chest and said "David I believe that you will achieve your aim if you are patient and do not give up".

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Some English friends tried similar pollinating trials and we can compare here the beauty of a *Primula x Lindum* hybrid (below) bred by Martin and Dreena Thompson.



David allowed me to photograph his brand new soft yellow cultivar with correct proportions and fine fragrance, which has fulfilled all his tough criteria. He will describe it as *Primula x loiseleuri* 'David's Dream' but we cannot know what his next dream will be.



Primula x loiseleuri 'David's Dream'

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---Plant Portrait---

Campanula morettiana by PEPiPEDIA



We obtained an excellent picture of the rare alpine saxatile bellflower, *Campanula morettiana*. The Moravian collector and plantswoman Gita Piatková photographed this richly flowering specimen last year at high altitude in the Dolomites. It is a dwarf tufted perennial, only 5 cm high, growing in cracks on steep dolomitic walls. The large flowers are solitary on short scapes. The basal rosette leaves are densely hairy. An easy method for propagation is to divide happy, strongly growing plants. It resents wet conditions in winter.



Right: *C. morettiana* growing in tufa
photo [Michal Hoppel](#)

---Plant Portrait---

Androsace zambalensis

by [Jozef Lemmens](#) (JL), [Belgium](#), and Jiří Novák (JN), [Pardubice](#), Czech Republic.

I (JL) found [Androsace zambalensis](#) only once and this was in Nepal (Marsyandi valley) on a trip with Jan Burgel and Tim Roberts many years ago.

A. zambalensis is to be found on the screes that are facing north-east. The rocks of the debris slopes were mixed with a light acid loam soil, containing large amount of small rocks. In the most sunny places these plants were very compact and beautifully in bloom.

We found *A. zambalensis* towards Thorung La (5200 meters). Most of the cushions had a diameter of between 10 and 20 cm. The rosettes of *A. zambalensis* are more robust than those of *A. delavayi* and various flower buds are formed on each short flower stem.

My (JN) plants are from seed given to me by Josef Jurášek. True alpiners suffer in our flat lowland near river Labe (Elbe) during high temperatures in summer so I planted my seedlings in different crevices with a northern aspect, where there is plenty of light but no access for scorching sun. Plants were nicely setting new rosettes but the hot summer time stopped their growth. The best place is in my trough with the roots running on the cool stony wall of the trough or in a crevice between rocks. If a plant is happy in its cooler position, it is as easily grown as *Androsace villosa* (actually one synonym is *A. zambalensis* var. *villosa*). This species, which grows also in Tibet, Sikkim and Western China, was described by Handel-Mazzetti in 1927.

Plants are cushions up to 2 cm tall and the size of sessile flowers is 5-8 mm.

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The rosettes are like a felt (dense indumentums) and propagation by cutting of rosettes is easy in slightly wet conditions. Below: photos of *A. zambalensis* in outdoor cultivation by [Jiří Novák](#).



---Plant Portrait---

Dicentra peregrina (Rudolph) Makino

text and photos by [Kirsten Andersen & Lars Hansen](#) of Herskind in Denmark.

Dicentra peregrina is an herbaceous perennial growing from a short upright rhizome with fibrous roots. The leaves are grey-green, glaucous and deeply cut with linear lobes each less than 1 mm wide. The flowers are usually nodding, white to purple/red.

The species name "peregrina" is Latin for "immigrant", probably because it is the only species of the genus *Dicentra* found outside of North America. The species is distributed in Japan, the Kuriles, Sakhalin Island, Kamchatka and north-eastern Siberia.



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Dicentra peregrina is in our opinion the most exciting among the genus *Dicentra*. We have grown it for about 20 years in our garden in Denmark. In some years all our plants almost disappeared but have always managed to seed around and the seedlings will grow to flowering sized plants in one to two years. We have tried to use different locations and types of soil through the years and we have had the best result when we put the plant on a southern slope with roots and rhizome positioned behind a stone. The soil must be well drained and contain humus to ensure adequate moisture in the root zone. It is important that the soil never dries out completely.

Dicentra peregrina is easy to propagate from seed. The seeds should be sown immediately after they are harvested in July/August. The seeds germinate in the following year in February/March and usually we have a very high germination percentage. It is also possible to divide the plants in late autumn or early spring while they are dormant. We don't use this method since the propagation by seed works perfectly.

With regard to the cultivation of *Dicentra peregrina* it is undoubtedly an advantage that we have relatively cool summers in Denmark. The average temperature in June, July and August is around 15.3 °C.



---Plant Portrait---

Cheilanthes gracillima by Zdeněk Zvolánek

I have found a very good photograph of the best small fern for a crevice garden so it is my duty to introduce it to the readers of IRG. Joyce Carruthers photographed this nice specimen of *Cheilanthes gracillima* in the rock garden of [Hans Roemer](#) in Victoria, BC, Canada, together with a well decorated concrete mermaid designed by his wife Heidi. Hans has local granite stones and local suitable weather for cultivation.

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This quite charming fern is smaller than Ceterach and Asplenium and more elegant than Pellaea. *Cheilanthes gracillima*, in the opinion of Hans Roemer, is the most beautiful saxatile fern of all in western North America. Because it grows in localities with different rainfall in Canada, Hans believes that it is suitable for outside cultivation in continental Europe.

This species, called the lace lipfern, is a true chasmophyte, saxicolous and a xerically adapted fern. Its ability to withstand full sun exposures and dry summer periods is very important for rock gardeners with sunny rock gardens equipped with vertical crevices. It is always found in the cracks, thin fissures and chinks in nature, never in shade.

I know personally only one locality in Vancouver Island, where this diminutive and showy saxatile fern can be seen: it is Mt. Finlayson, a granite peak 400 metres above the Pacific Ocean level. A similar plant (slightly hairy), which I saw on steep Montana limestones is named *Cheilanthes feei*. Plants in nature are, at most, 30 cm across.



Cheilanthes gracillima in the garden of Hans Roemer

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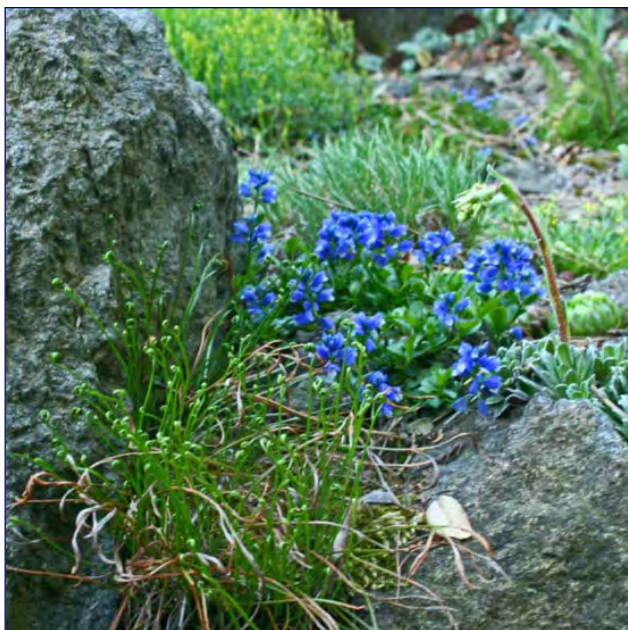
Cheilanthes feei, which is known as the Slender Lip fern, is a more robust brother of *C. gracillima* from western America limestones. I photographed *C. aff feei* in the happy crevice garden of Joyce Carruthers in Victoria in strong morning sunshine in semi shade. So I apologise for the over strong light contrasts in the picture. The original of this specimen is from the foot of the highest mountain of Idaho called Mt. Borah, where it was in partly shaded fissures.

The late Dr Ed Lohbrunner, plant hunter, alpine nurseryman and one of [VIRAGS'](#) founders wrote in his article on the dwarf ferns of British Columbia in

1964 : “*C. gracillima* is always in exposed south-facing situations where summers often pass with no more than a single shower. The new fronds are grey-green, resembling a delicate lace formed by tiny beads. As they age, they deepen to dark green and remain until the following year’s growth has fully developed. This fern will tolerate watering if planted where the water cannot accumulate around the crowns”.

Ed Lohbrunner is commemorated by VIRAGS with an annual event to bring a noted speaker to Victoria for a public lecture and by the [Lohbrunner Botanic Garden](#) at the University of British Columbia where the *Cheilanthes* has been featured in the famous [UBC Botany Photo of the Day](#). The E.H. Lohbrunner Alpine Garden was constructed between 1974 and 1978 using 2000 tonnes of pyroxene andesite from British Columbia's Okanagan Valley. More specialized than an ordinary "rock garden", it was a challenge to duplicate the stony, porous soil of the mountains at sea level. At nearly 1 hectare, this is one of the largest alpine gardens in North America. It is organized geographically with seven areas representing continental regions of the world. Many of the plants were donated by the late Dr. Ed Lohbrunner (1904-1986), a Victoria area nurseryman and internationally known plantsman, after whom the garden is named.

This little fern has been known for a long time, as can be seen from a paper from October 1923, [An Ecological Study of *Cheilanthes gracillima*](#) by F.L.Pickett in the Bulletin of the Torrey Botanical Club Vol. 50 No.10, but is not well-known in cultivation.



In spring time when the new fronds are unrolling (translucent scales are seen) plants have silver-grey colour. Later, in dry conditions, plants roll their fronds inwards and show the reddish brown reverse with spores and new brown scales.

The lace lipfern is always so tightly wedged in crevices of hard rocks, that it must be “mined” rather than dug when collected. This fact protects its populations from four-legged and two-legged animals. I must try to get somehow some spores for the trial in my steppe rock garden, where *Asplenium septentrionale* is quite happy.

Left: *Asplenium septentrionale* and *Polygala calcarea* ‘Lillet’ in the ZZ’s garden, ‘the Beauty Slope’.

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---Plant Portrait---

Ebenus laguroides by McPavlis photos: Mojmír Pavelka

Ebenus laguroides needs some help to be brought to the attention of rock gardeners, because this small shrub, a Turkish (Cilician) endemic, has had the minimum of advertisement in the old or new handbooks. Below: *E. laguroides*, Karaman, Turkey.



Cushion forming companions such as [Pterocephalus pinardii](#) or [Convolvulus assyricus](#) are flat carpets (30 –90 cm broad) pink in flower, but Ebenus forms condensed tufts up to 30 cm in diameter decorated with quite substantial flower heads painted in pink. The heads are spherical with very hairy sepals and flowers are up to 2 cm tall. The pink is an unusual shade, setting off the grey hairs very attractively. Flower heads are not higher than 15 cm, but some stems can be up to 30 cm long when the plant is in seed. This plant is decorative with its very dissected hirsute leaves (8-12

leaflets, which are lanceolate and 2 cm long). Its decorative seed-heads are rolled along by the cold wind in the steppe in August. The detail in Mojmír's photo shows only longer stems, the leaves (sorry) are from other companion plants in the steppe.



Left: *Ebenus depressa*, Darende, Turkey

The steppe of Ala Dag offers at a higher elevation (1900m) an even smaller, dwarfed version for our rock gardens. It is *Ebenus depressa*.

Ebenus (Fabaceae family) is related to the lovely Turkish Hedysarums with pink-red flowers. From around 1990 Josef Jurášek distributed both these species of *Ebenus*. The third species which is mixed in the Ala Dag steppe plant community is *Ebenus cappadocicus*.

ED: Fabaceae, the family of [Ebenus](#), is the 2nd most economically important family

after Gramineae (and 3rd largest family after Compositae and Gramineae) in the Turkish flora, according to Davis in 1988 and Huber-Morath in 1970. The [seed oils](#) of the fifteen Turkish species are particularly useful in this respect.