International Rock Gardener

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---International Rock Gardener---

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Gerrit Eijkelenboom is a keen plant lover from Lelystad in the very low-lying province of Flevoland in the Netherlands. Describing himself as a "gardener on the sea bottom", he grows a wide range of both rock garden and shade loving plants and has something of a fondness for Epimediums and Meconopsis - the latter being quite a struggle for him to grow well in his local climate. Gerrit and his wife enjoy plant hunting by camera on holiday and he contributes photos of some orchids seen recently in Crete.
Jan Jílek who divides his time between the Czech Republic and Samarkand in Uzbekistan, has a website which contains many photographs of rare and exciting bulbs. Jan is another of those with little English who still takes the time to contribute to the SRGC Forum in our strange language! Cover picture: *Ophrys cretica* by Gerrit Eijkelenboom.

---Gardens in the Islands---

Wild orchids from Crete text and photos by Gerrit Eijkelenboom

In spite of the absence of necessary rains and snow in the mountains, plantlife was exuberant when my wife and I arrived on April 5th for a two week botanical journey. We stayed exactly in the middle of the island and planned to visit the west and east parts of Crete. That was a mistake.
Crete is 260km from west to east and 60km from north to south. It is sometimes called a continent in the Mediterranean Sea. A huge range of mountains form the backbone of the island with many peaks up to 2500m.

Left: *Anacamptis pyramidalis*

The high plains of Crete are famously covered by tulips and crocuses in March, but we did not see a single one.
As soon as we arrived in the afternoon we started to explore the immediate surroundings of our apartment and the first thing we saw was ***Anacamptis pyramidalis***. Because of its striking colour this plant turned out to be our guide for the rest of our trip.

Gerrit

Right: *Ophrys heldreichii*

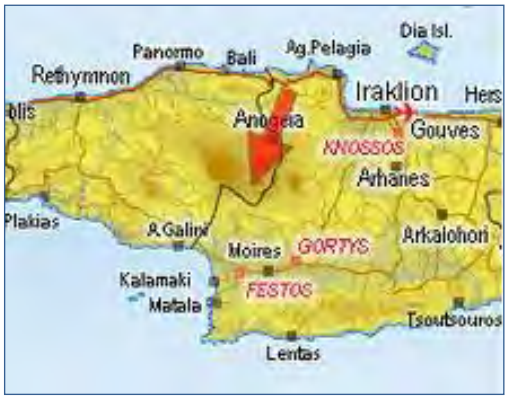
What we sometimes did: “Botanizing by car”. Slow driving, when possible and at the same time looking out for *Anacamptis*. We noticed that where *Anacamptis* was growing, other orchids could also be found.
The very first surprise was ***Ophrys heldreichii*****,** one of the most spectacular species emblazoned with a beautiful pattern. The large lip in the middle has a raised protuberance. The petals and sepals are pink.

A few metres away we found the next beauty, ***Ophrys episcopalis***, the large flowered bee orchid. This sports an impressive large and undivided lip, also with a protuberance, which is very big, yellow and turned upwards. The shield has a yellowish-green pattern. Also with pink petals and sepals.

Above and right: *Ophrys episcopalis*

Below: *Orchis italica*

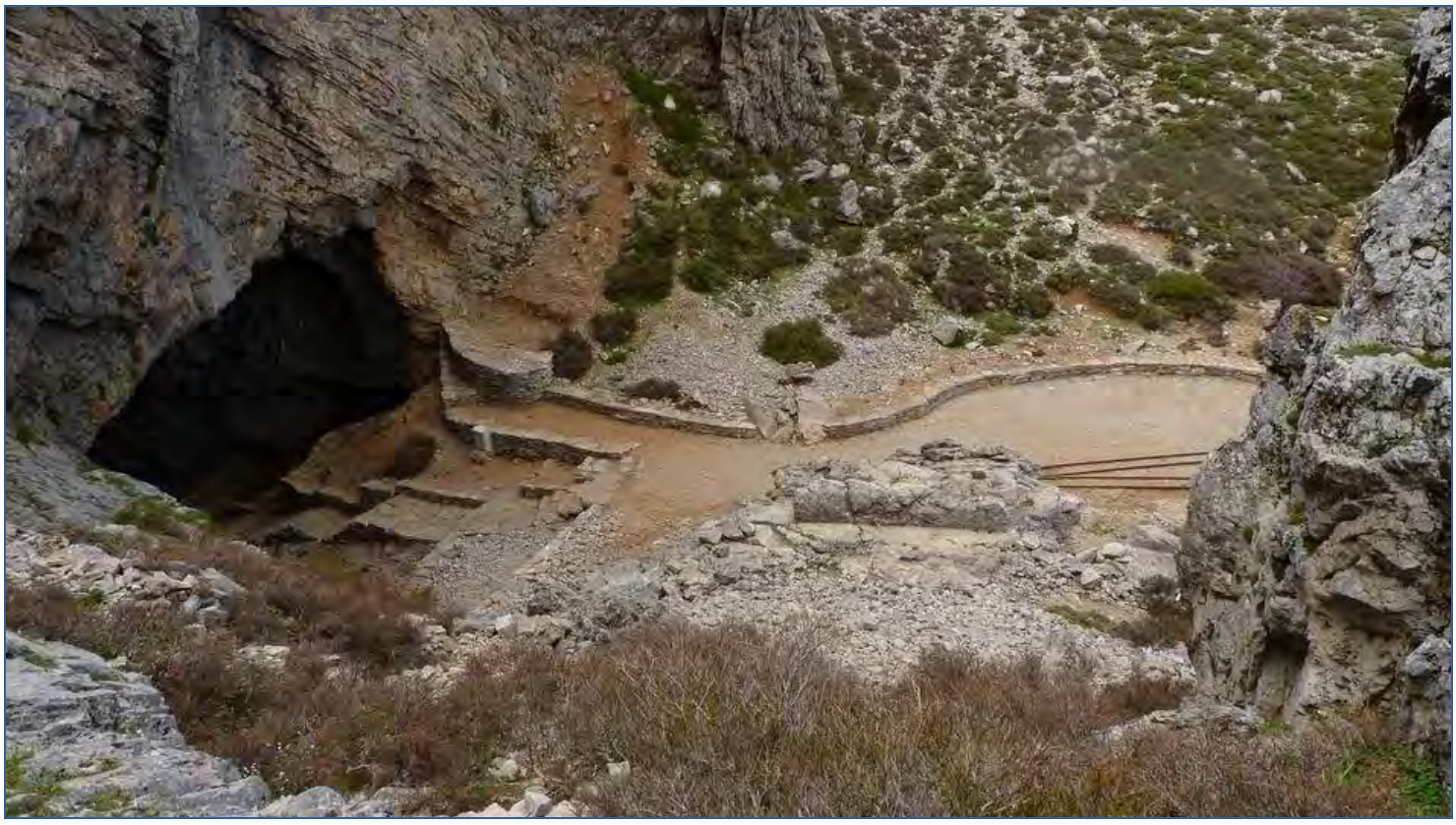
In an olive-grove not far away, there was ***Orchis italica***. You have to look twice because of the resemblance to *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. A dense spike. The sepals and petals form a dome. The individual flowers are said to resemble a naked man.
This was the result of the first day after arrival. After leaving our home on a cold winter night, we were euphoric. And the Greek wine tasted good.



The next day we went on to the **Nidha** (Nida) **plateau.** And on our way to it, we interrupted the trip to explore a hillside with *Anacamptis* and there was ***Orchis sitiaca***, endemic to the mountains of Crete. The particular characteristics are the green nerves on the inside of the petals.

Right and below:
Orchis sitiaca

Eventually we reached **the Ideon Cave** (below), the place where, according to mythology, Zeus was nurtured. This was the end of the road. No orchids were found on the rest of this day.

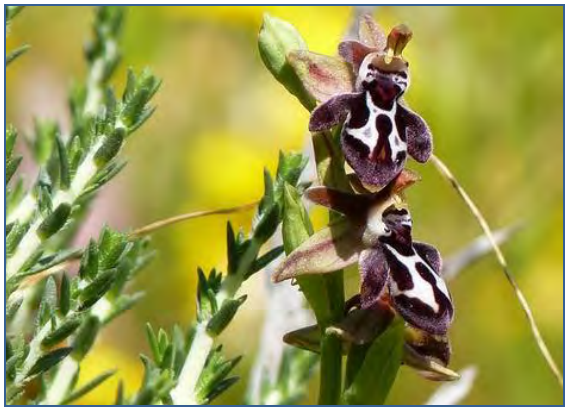


On a stroll next day near our apartment we found this one, ***Ophrys phryganae*** (above); easy to determine. And this one, ***Orchis quadripunctata*** (right): Easy to recognize because of the 4 dots on its lip. Yes, four dots indeed when you look intently. Both were growing next to the path.

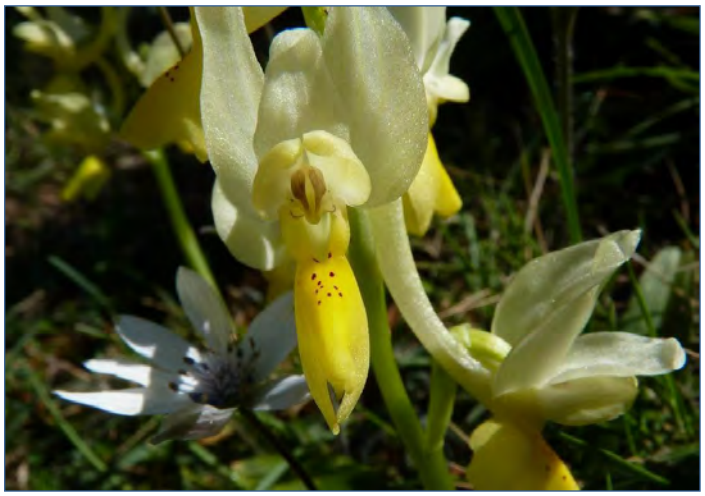
The Lasithi plateau in the east was our next destination. A huge closed basin at an altitude of 800m, in former days filled with thousands of windmills, but they now exist only on picture postcards. But it is a Mecca for orchid hunters - only hunting photos of course!

The first one there was ***Ophrys tenthredinifera***, (left) the wasp orchid. One of the most beautiful orchids with an undivided lip, yellow on the edges and brown in the centre. The petals and sepals are pink.

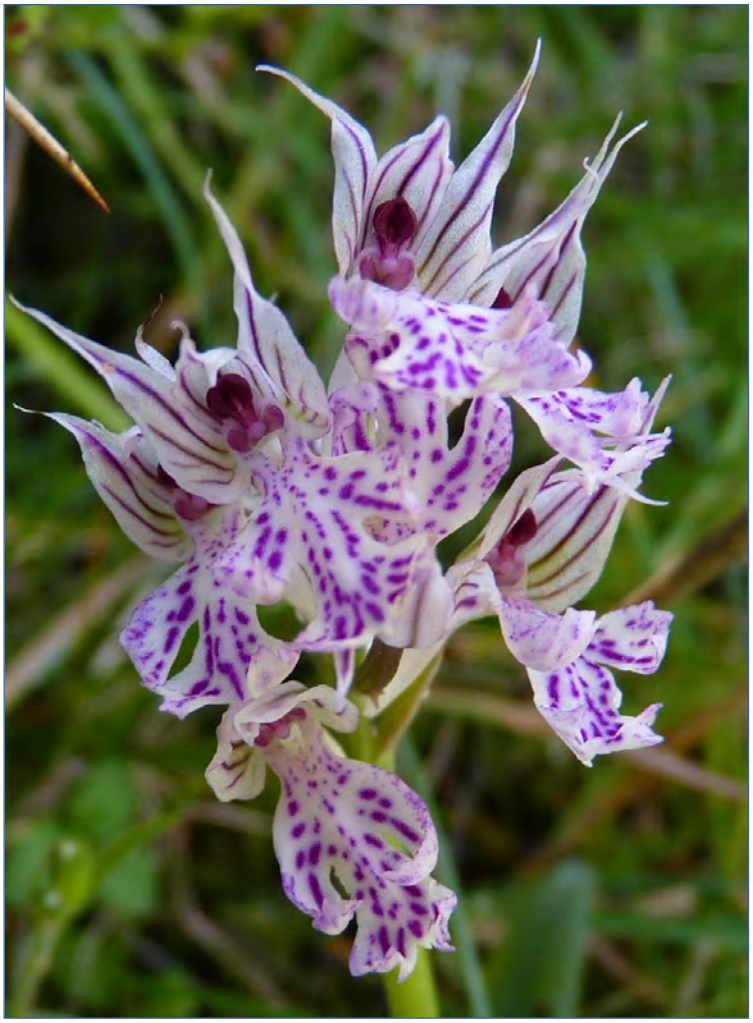
Here too, we began to see ***Ophrys cretica***.



Ophrys cretica (above) has brownish red petals and the sepals are brownish green. The lip is divided with 3 lobes. The two side lobes are rather pointed at the end. This differentiates it from ***Ophrys ariadnae***, which we found later. Sometimes *ariadnae* is considered as a subspecies of *cretica or kotschyi.* The side lobes are rounded. The pattern on the lip is more elaborate. It is difficult to make a determination. Left: *Ophrys ariadnae* (for comparison).

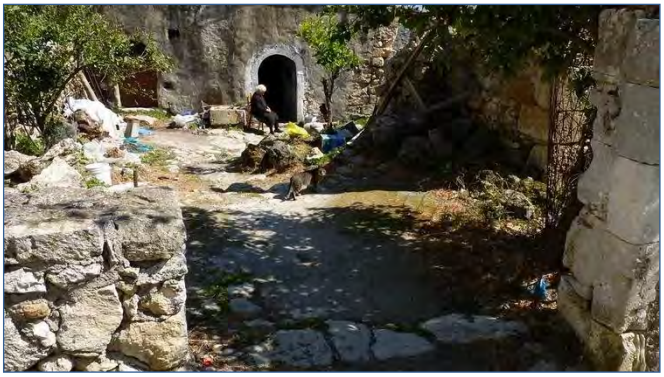


Growing in one of the valleys around the high plain of Lasithi, is this yellow beauty called ***Orchis pauciflora*** (right).

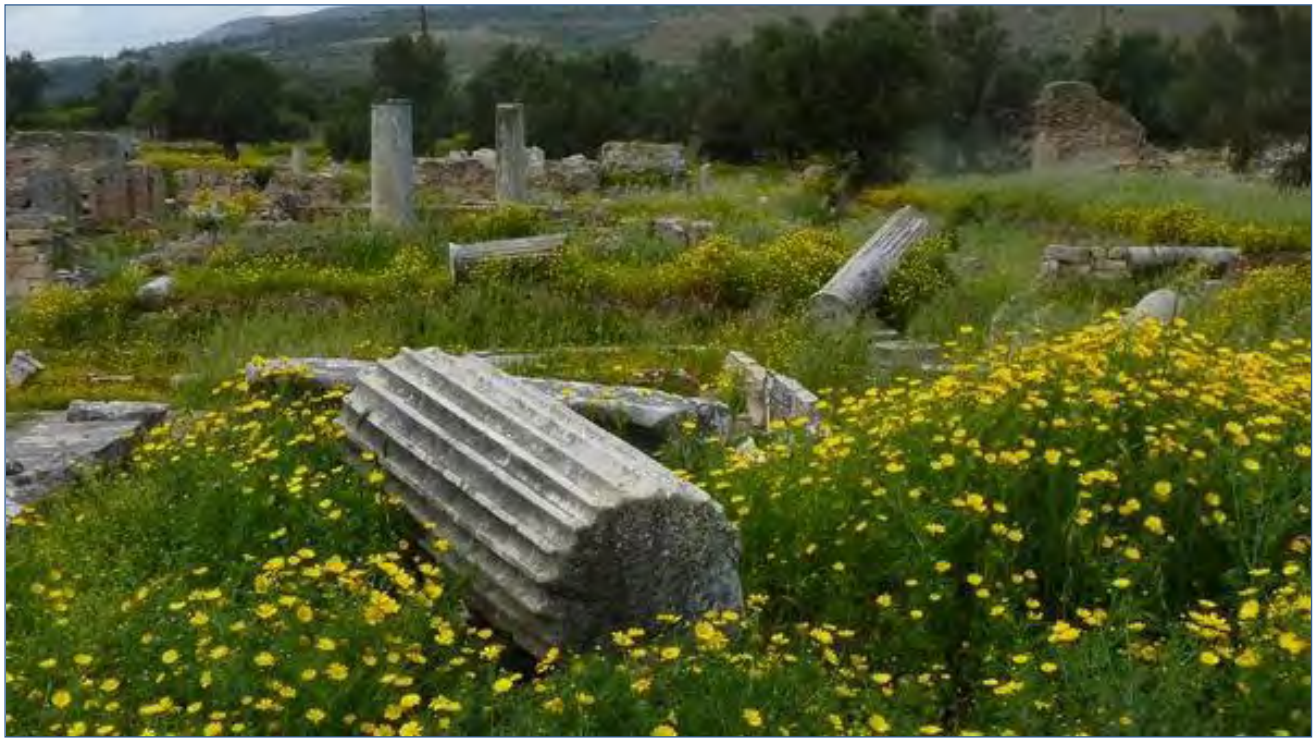


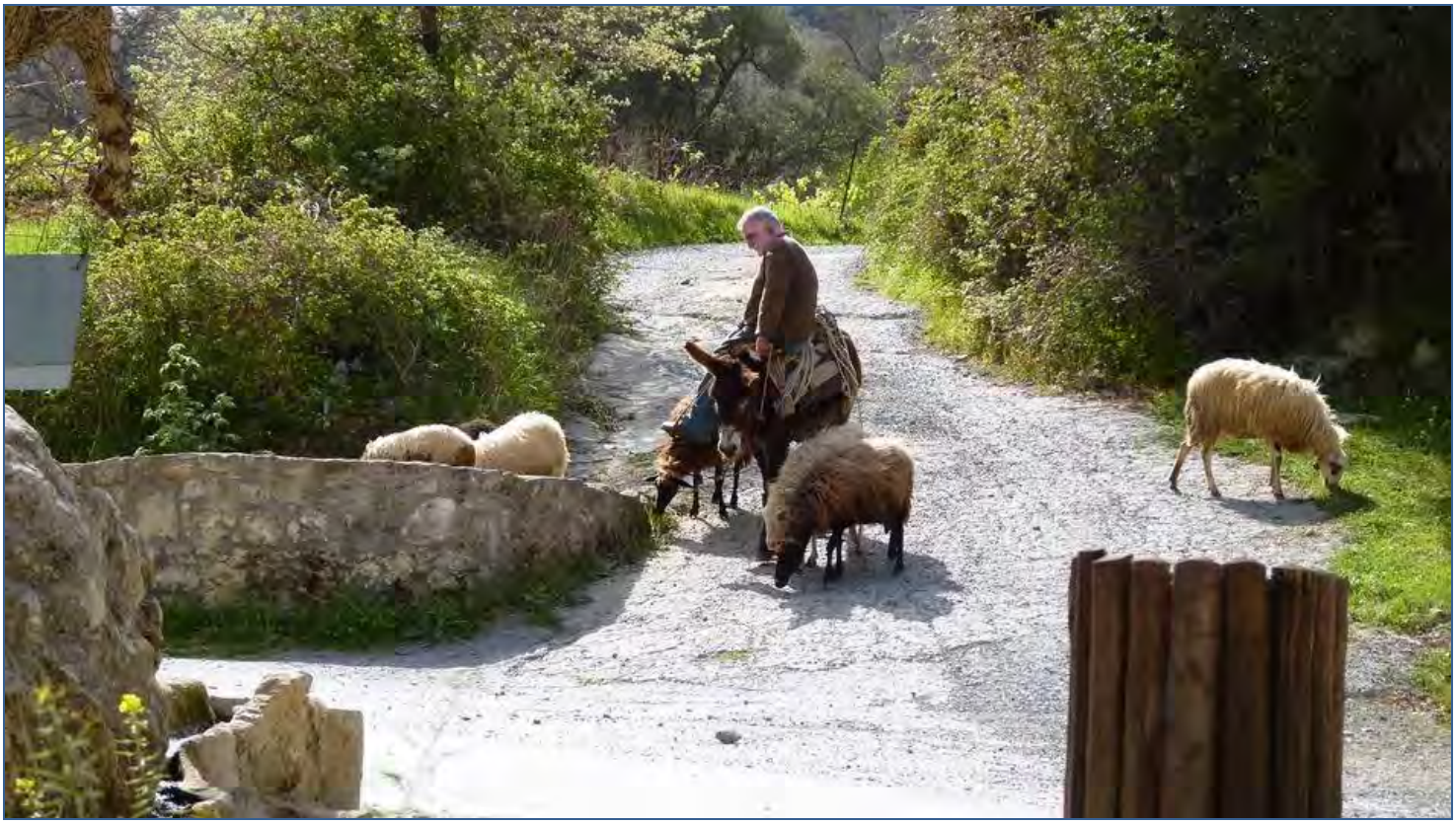
Another one is ***Orchis tridentata***, the three-toothed orchid. On the end of each sepal you will see, with a little difficulty, three teeth. All of the tips of the lobes are pointed.

Orchis tridentata – and close up of the "teeth"

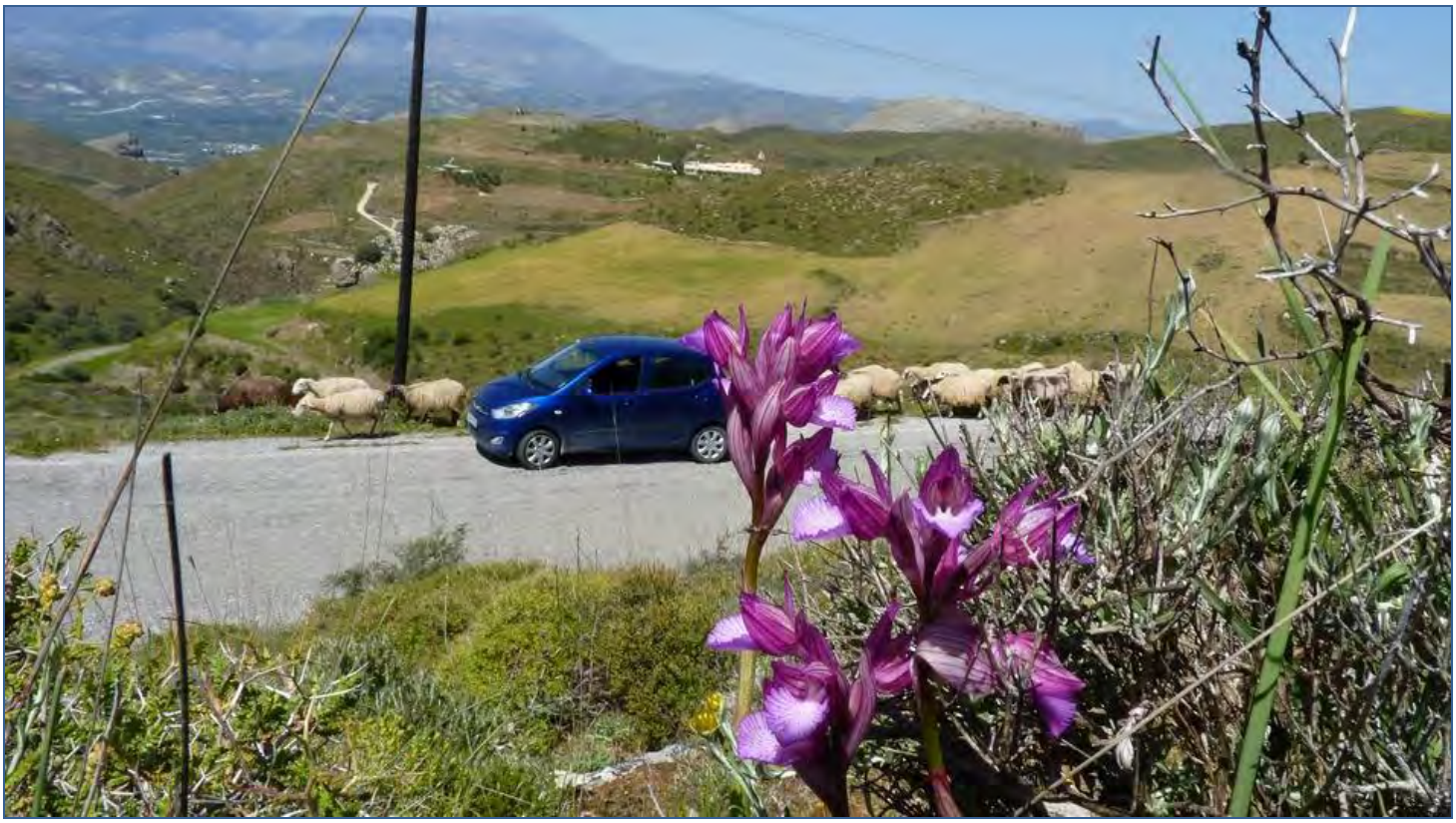


The rest of our stay, we spent botanizing on the Mesara plain in the south. This is the largest plain of Crete, where time stands still. No tourists to be seen here. Some of them visit the **archaeological sites** of Phaestos and Gortyna (below).



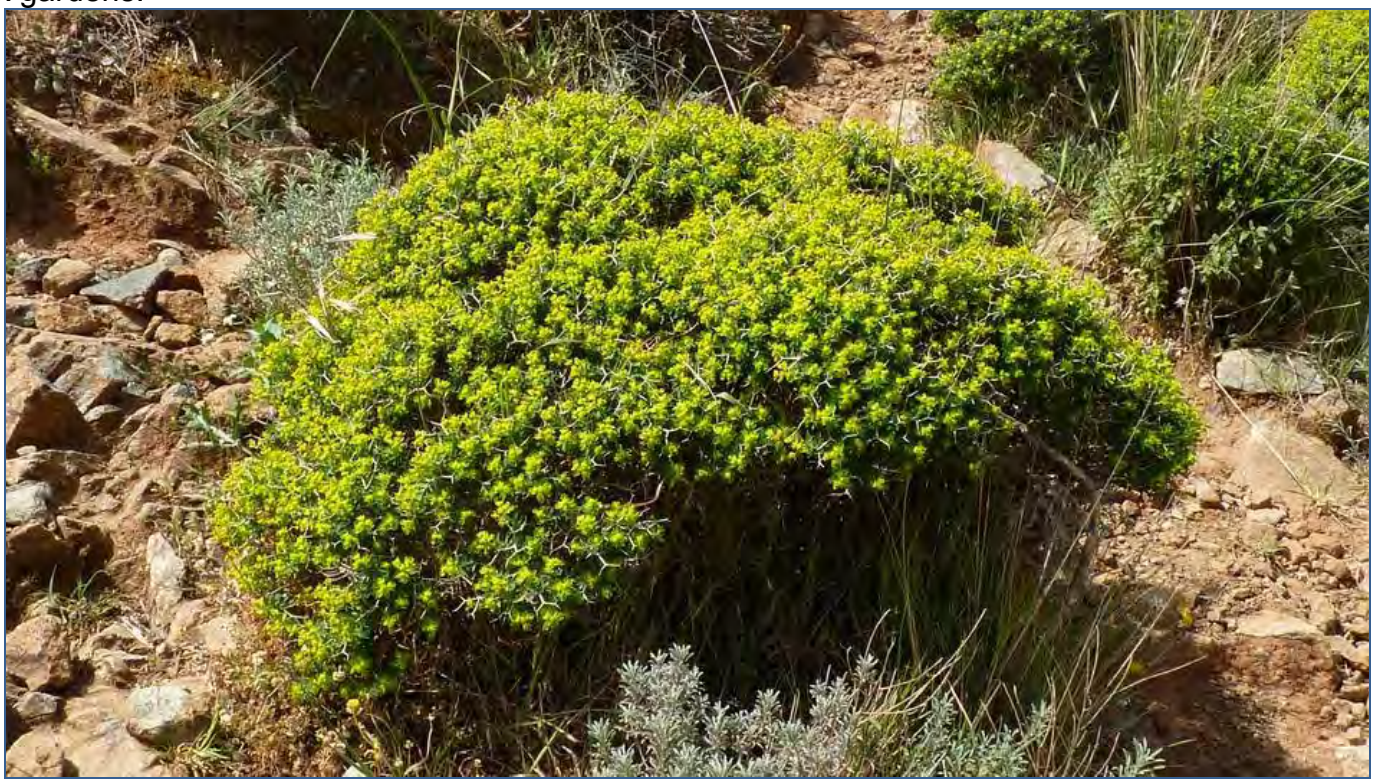


Threats don't come from men but from animals. Sheep and goats go around freely and eat all they can find. Looking out over the Mesara plain and the highest peak of Crete, Psiloritis, 2456m (Mount Idha)*, we find ***Orchis papilionacea* subsp. *alibertis*** (a synonym of *Anacamptis papilionacae*), endemic to Crete, flowering a month later than his look-alike *heroica*. At the same time a herd of sheep pass by.

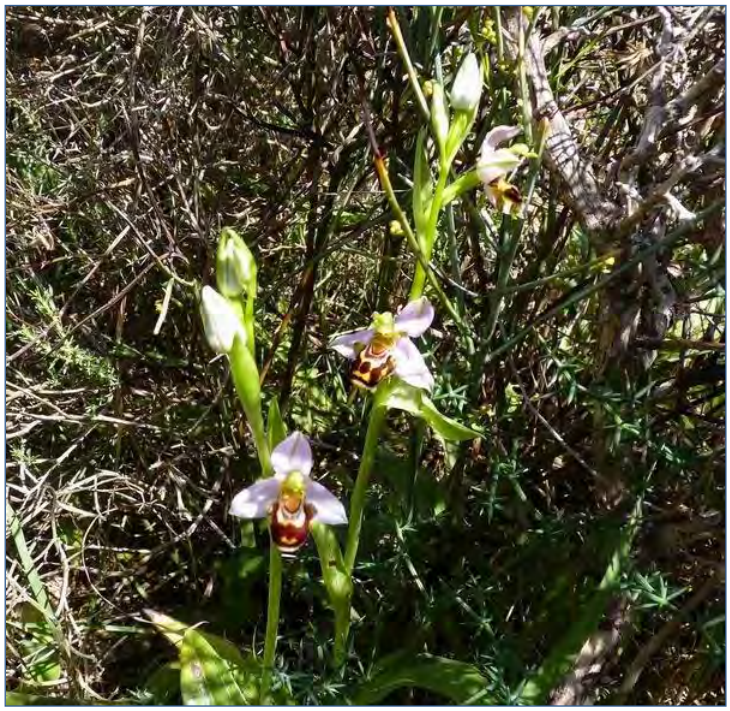


* Ed. These names are often seen with varied spellings and roots; Ida/Idha (Psiloritis) or Gortyn/Gortnys/Gortnya and so on.

Here in the Mesara plain and its surrounding hills one will see how the orchids are adapted to a harsh life; a dry stony soil and very high temperatures. The habitat is called phrygana and the vegetation offers protection for the plants. In France it is called maquis and garrigue. Thorny bushes up to the knee, so you'd better wear long trousers. No ugly shrubs. This one on the photo is a lovely species. ***Euphorbia acanthothamnos***. There are also *Acantholimon*, which most of us know very well from our rock gardens.

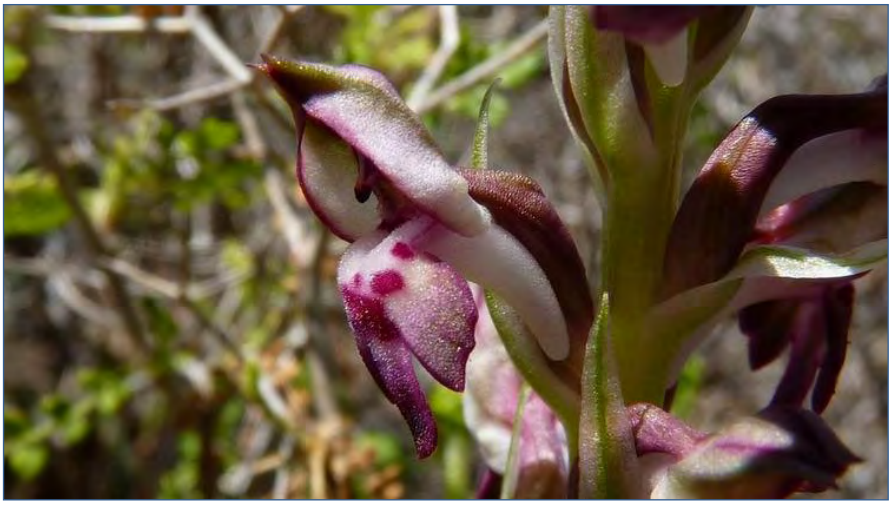


Euphorbia acanthothamnos



Next orchid is ***Ophrys apifera***, the bee orchid (above). Behind the flower you see a thorny shrub. The white buds are characteristic. It is a self pollinating species. On the picture you see a little ball just above the sexual organ. That ball contains pollen. The wind moves it and the pollen touches the pistil. This can also be done by insects.

On the same spot, we found ***Orchis fragrans*** (below), a very tiny species. Look out where you go, because you will easily step on it. As the name says it is a scented plant. The sepals and petals form a sharp dome. It has a three-lobed lip: the middle one is longer with many red spots.



Ophrys boryi: The lip is light coloured at the centre with irregular dark spots.

Another red coloured one is ***Orchis collina***, the hill orchid (below). With long and brownish-green sepals, an undivided lip mostly dark pink and light-coloured at the base.

Orchis collina

Orchis simia, the monkey orchid, is both fascinating and spectacular. The flower is pink with white in the centre; the appearance of the flower recalls that of a monkey. A rare species, we only saw it once.

The Mesara plain offers more surprises. The 'blue' rainbow orchid ***Ophrys iricolor*** is impressive by its blue colour and a purple colour on the lower surface of the lip. Sepals are green and the petals brownish-pink.


Ophrys iricolor

The last one from the Mesara is ***Ophrys mammosa***, the breast orchid. A curious name obviously inspired by the similarity with the female human body. As a matter of fact, when you look closely, you'll see two hills at the edge of the lip.
Actually I am not a 100 % sure of its name. Other possibilities are *Ophrys herae* and *Ophrys sprunneri* and it may be that hybrids form between those three.


Ophrys mammosa

I come to an end. This article was not meant as a scientific contribution. It might inspire orchid-lovers to travel to Crete to see these and many other orchids. And those who don't may like the beauty of these orchid genera. G.E.

Juno zaprjagajewii (Abramov) text and photos by Jan Jílek, Czech Republic
(translated by ZZ)

I apologise for using the good old name of Juno Tratt. - even though nowadays it is the name Iris that is frequently seen - I do not follow it! The name of the Genus Juno was clear to separate a lovely specific group of plants and there was under this name no doubt about what all gardeners were speaking about. Today, if you have not mastered all the names of the Genus Iris, you must consult the Internet, just to know what we are talking about.

Juno zaprjagajewii is a majestic plant, which was discovered quite late in 1975 and later described by Abramov. I know personally one of the members of the expedition which found this species in the South West Pamir Mountains. The name of the herbarium type locality is Nishup in Tajikistan. Localities known from seed collections vary from 2200m to Bidchon Dara, at an elevation of 3200m.

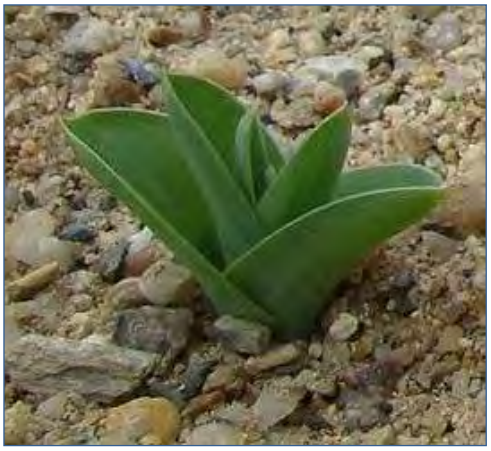
I. zaprjagajewii (N.V. Abramov)

Synonym
Juno zaprjagajewii N.V. Abramov.

Distribution
C Asia: Pamir Mountains.

Description
Bulb tunics brownish-grey, papery; storage roots much swollen. **Leaves:** lower up to 4 cm wide, clustered together, sheathing the stem, not fully developed at flowering time and overtopped by the flowers, greyish-green (shiny according to original collection), falcate; margin distinct. **Stem** very short, carrying 1–3 flowers. Bract and bracteole membranous, sheathing the tube. **Flowers** white with a yellow crest; tube 6–9 cm long; falls about 4 cm long, the claw not widely winged but with down-turned margins, 2 cm wide, the blade about 1.5 cm wide, white

Left: From A Guide to Species Irises: Their Identification and Cultivation by the Species Group of the British Iris Society, Christabel King and William R. Killens (Jan 2012).



Above: Emerging foliage of *Juno zaprjagajewii*

The great advantage of this species is its ability to fill an alpine house with a remarkable scent of primroses. It is a Juno with 1-3 flowers in creamy white colours, just with a rose pink shadow and its veins in red Bordeaux tone. The crest is waved, yellow at bottom and white at top. The plant is 10-15cm tall in flower and its flower colours are always the same.

Sometimes, during a spring spell of hot days, the flowers develop before leaves, but usually this plant has leaves and flowers at the same time. The leaves are decorative in both shape and colour; broad and greyish green. With us the blooming time is in March and April: it depends where it is cultivated (alpine house or outdoors).

Above: *Juno zaprjagajewii* growing in a nursery bed of Jan Jílek.

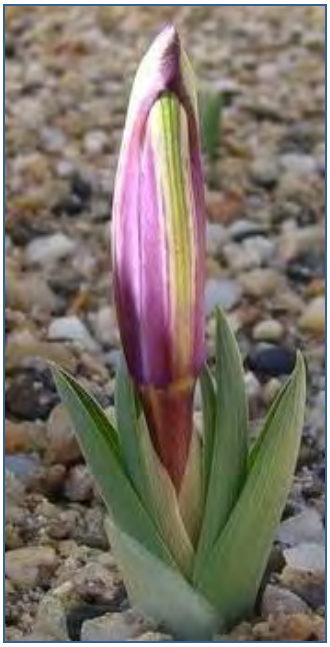
It is the latest flowering species of all the Tajik Junos from Tajikistan.
They flower in this order: *Juno nicolai*, *J. rosenbachiana*, *J. baldshuanica*, *J. popovii*, *J. zaprjagajewii*.

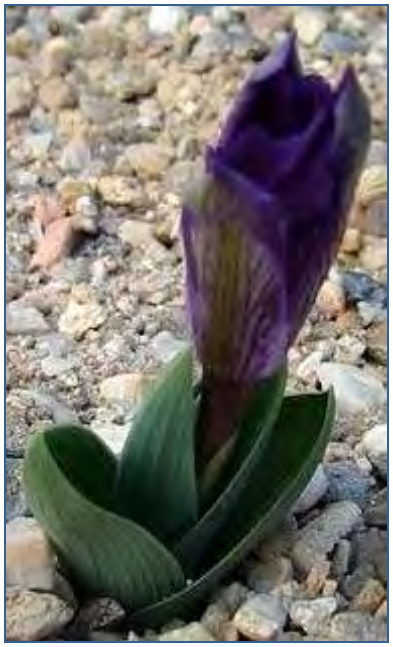
Right: Jan's *J. nicolai* flowering under snow at the end of March 2013.

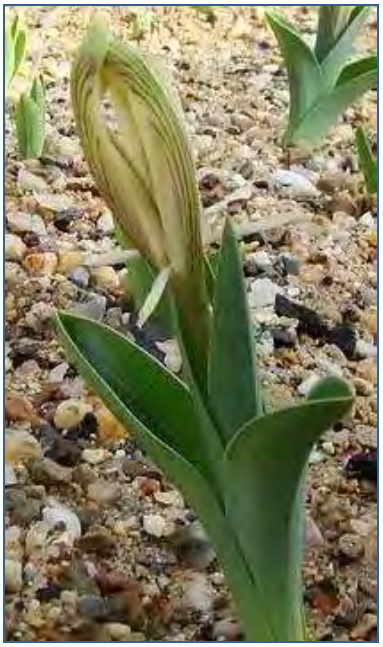
J. zaprjagajewii differs from all above-mentioned Tajik Junos, in the fact that I have never seen its hybrid in nature. It will, however, hybridise in cultivation.

Juno zaprjagajewii x *rosenbachiana*

Above: *J. baldshuanica*
Left: *J. baldshuanica x rosenbachiana*







Buds of: *J. nicolai, rosenbachiana, popovii and baldshuanica*

It is bad luck that *J. zaprjagajewii* is not so easy to satisfy as its four Juno countrymen. This Juno asks for perfect drainage and a high content of sand in the substrate. Without this its fat roots are prone to rotting. The death is a slow one: the plant becomes weaker and weaker, year after year: no flowers appear and in the end, it is gone. The perfect drainage it needs is provided in nature as sheet or surface drainage on very steep stony slopes. The beauty of the plant makes attempts to grow it worthwhile.

I have plenty of home-grown seed because of friendly local insects. Seed resembles seed of *Juno nicolai*. I sow the seed quite late: from early December towards January. My seed is given up to Fortune outside in the garden: getting rain, snow and frosts. It is given is no cover and the germination is 99%. Through my own observations, I have found that the fertility of seeds lasts up to 20 years.

Seedlings need careful watering to avoid rotting the young leaves. I prefer to soak pots from the bottom so the roots have available moisture and young bulbs are in a drier condition. When I plant them, they obtain a fertiliser under plant root system, later, after blooming the fertilising is given via the leaves.
I do not recommend that you keep adult plants out in the garden in summer time, without the protection of some cover against wet. There is always the hope of sometime having the luck of finding a blessed place, where this Juno will be happy with no care. Everything always depends on green hands, green fingers and probably - green heart. J.J.

[Ed.: Oron Peri reports, with fine photos, about a visit to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in April 2013 **here** in the SRGC Forum.
Juno/Scorpiris are one of the most popular of the Iris Sections in the Forum : e.g. this thread]

Two forms of *Juno nicolai* from the Varzob region of eastern Tajikistan shown in the SRGC Forum by Jan Jílek
More Junos from Tajikistan, from OronPeri, who uses the name Iris: *I. magnifica, tubergeniana* and *warleyensis.*