

International Rock Gardener

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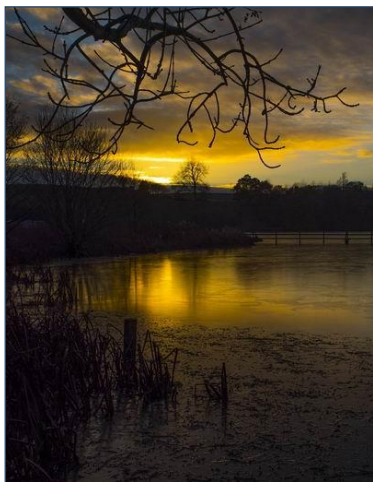
December 2016



It is a delight this month to publish the description of a plant named by Fritz Kummert in tribute to the legendary German plantsman Wilhelm Schacht. The commemoration of such people in this way is something that can carry their name to a new generation.

As winter envelops us in the northern hemisphere we look back to sunnier days in Sicily, as Gerrit Eijkelenboom writes about the flowers he and his wife Iep, encountered there in May. Their focus is again mostly on the range of orchids to be seen.

Remember, if you feel you have an article that would make good copy for this magazine, please do get in touch – [email the Editor](#) - we are always glad to hear from you with your articles or ideas.



In previous years the IRG has provided a calendar for readers to print out and use for the year – we are again pleased to be able to do so. [This link](#) will take you to a copy of the IRG 2017 calendar of plant and nature photographs which were all taken by the Scottish Rock Garden Club's Webmaster, Fred Carrie. We rely on him for solutions to all technical matters for the Club. Fred used to run the former Tough Alpine Nursery in Aberdeenshire and has served the Club in many ways, such as a former picture editor for the printed journal, The Rock Garden, as well as his busy schedule as webmaster.

Cover photo: December sunset over Balgavies Loch, Angus, by Fred Carrie. [This is the same as our calendar cover – [download the calendar supplement to print HERE](#)]

---Plant Description---

A New Saxifraga Hybrid in the Kabschia Group is described: Fritz Kummert

The wild collected hybrid between *Saxifraga ferdinandi-coburgi* and *S. sempervivum* was found by chance in an Austrian alpine garden.

During a visit on 14.05.2010 to the alpine garden of Gerald and Annemarie Guebitz in Graden, Jaegerwirt-Ehrenbauer-Weg (1082m) near Koeflach in West Styria, I was shown several small *Saxifraga* cushions, raised from cuttings which Gerald had taken on 26.07.2007 during an excursion on the mountain massif of Slavjanka, in southern Bulgaria.

I immediately remembered the verbal reports of Wilhelm Schacht of Frasdorf, Germany, about the excursions he had made with the King of Bulgaria, Boris III of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, to Ali Botusch, (which was the Turkish name of a part of these mountains during the timespan Schacht worked as a leader of the Royal Bulgarian Gardens between 1928 and 1944) and asked for some cuttings as a remembrance of this great horticulturist.

I was able to root one cutting with lance-shaped leaves, which later proved to be *S. ferdinandi-coburgi*, and one cutting of a medium-broad-leafed plant, which branched into three shoots covered with short, blunt-ending leaves. The third cutting with spiny leaves I was unable to root; in my opinion it was *S. sempervivum*.

During the winter of 2012-2013 the development of one flower stalk was observed with great anticipation. On 18.03.2013 the first flower opened and proved the plant to be the hitherto unknown hybrid between *Saxifraga ferdinandi-coburgi* and *S. sempervivum*.

As the rumour of the finding of the same hybrid near Drama in Greece in spring 2016 reached my ears I decided to describe it formally as *Saxifraga* × *schachtii*, in honour of one of the greatest plantsmen of the 20th century.

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***Saxifraga* × *schachtii* KUMMERT nothospec. nov. – flower detail**

***Saxifraga* × *schachtii* KUMMERT nothospec. nov.** (*Saxifraga ferdinandi-coburgi* KELLERER & SUEND., Allg. Bot. Z. Syst. 1901: 116. 19) × (*Saxifraga sempervivum* K.KOCH, Linnaea 19:40, 1846).

Abstract: A new *Saxifraga* hybrid in the *Kabschia* group from the Bulgarian-Greek border is described.

Zusammenfassung: Ein neuer *Saxifraga*-Hybrid in der *Kabschia*-Gruppe von der bulgarisch-griechischen Grenze wird beschrieben.

Correspondence to: fritz.kummert@gmail.com

Bulgaria : about 36km SE Sandanski on the Bulgarian-Greek border, on Mount Slavjanka, 200m above the forest boundary ascending from N to the summit, in limestone-rich dry grassland, 2000-2100m; (23 ° 38'54.47 "E; 41 ° 23'38,19" N ± 300 m) coll. Gerald GUEBITZ, Graz, A, as cuttings, 26.07.2007. - cuttings of the original plant on 14.05.2010 by Fritz KUMMERT and in Rollsdorf 36, A-8181 St. Ruprecht a.d.R. cultivated and collected on 15.03.2016 for a descriptive document.

BG: etwa 36km SE Sandanski an der bulgarisch-griechischen Grenze, am Berg Slavjanka, 200 m über der Waldgrenze beim Anstieg von N auf den Gipfel, in kalksteindurchsetztem Trockenrasen, 2000-2100 m; (23°38'54,47"E; 41°23'38,19"N ± 300 m) coll. Gerald GUEBITZ, Graz, A, als Steckling, 26.07.2007. - Stecklinge der Ursprungspflanze am 14.05.2010 von Fritz KUMMERT übernommen und in Rollsdorf 36, A-8181 St. Ruprecht a.d.R. kultiviert und am 15.03.2016 für einen Beleg gesammelt.

Description: This nothospecies forms hard domed cushions made up of tight rosettes on short caudices. Leaves: slightly succulent, oblong-lanceolate, grey-green in colour and 3.5 to 8mm long, upper epidermis greyish through calcareous excretions, four or five (rarely six) lime secreting glands on the upper leaf-surface; cilia on basal part (6)7-8(9): Flower Stem: 4cm with 9+ adpressed stem

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leaves, both with cilia. Inflorescence: five to six flowers in corymbose cyme, corolla vase shaped, 8-9mm across, Petals obovate, separate to touching, prominent and three times as long as the sepals and narrowed in a short claw. Claw and basal parts of the petals are yellow, the obovate upper part carmine-red. Calyx: 3mm long, pinkish-red and densely hairy on the basal parts. Pollen: yellow. All these observations took place in cultivation in the alpine-house of the author, where the temperature is allowed to drop to -7 °C.

The required herbarium sheet of the HOLOTYPE is deposited in the herbarium of the Landesmuseum Joanneum, Graz (L.M.J.) under the number GJO 83206.

**Kummert, Fritz (2016) A New Saxifraga Hybrid in the Kabschia Group
International Rock Gardener (IRG)(ISSN 2053-7557) 84: 2-9 (2016)**



***Saxifraga x schachtii* – floral stem**

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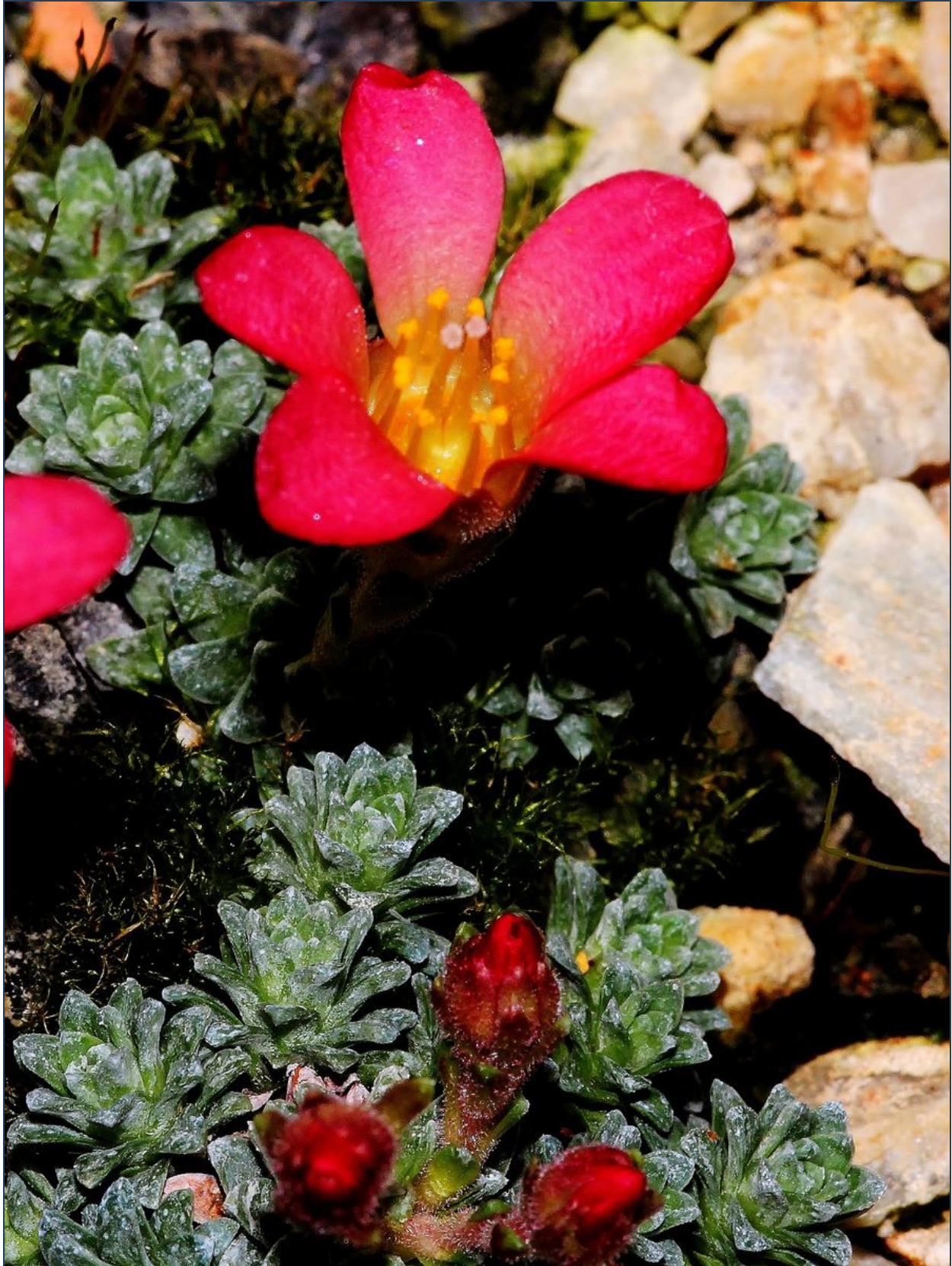
Saxifraga x schachtii – foliage



Saxifraga ferdinandi-coburgi foliage



Saxifraga × *schachtii* – showing sepals and buds



***Saxifraga* × *schachtii* – rosettes, buds and flower: cushion approx. 25mm high**

This highly interesting hybrid was named in honour of Wilhelm Schacht (11.12.1903 -17.02.2001). He was born as son of an artist in Würzburg and had his apprenticeship in Horticulture in Rothenburg. He worked at all the famous nurseries of Germany. In 1927 he received the offer to work as Supervisor of the Royal Bulgarian Gardens for Tzar Boris III of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha. He began to work in Bulgaria in 1928 and stayed there until 1944, when he returned to Germany. In 1947 he began to work at the

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[Botanical Garden Munich-Nymphenburg](#), where he worked for 21 years until his retirement in 1968. He was famous for his plant knowledge and his keen photography, always accompanied by his Hasselblad camera.

As per the naming code, cultivar names have to be given, if more than one form is known. This is the case here. For the form from Slavjanka we choose the name 'Tzar Boris'. This is an advance notice as cultivar names can only be published fully in a print medium.

Kabschia hybrids vary greatly, particularly with regard to which is the seed parent. The hybrid from Slavjanka is, with high certainty, the cross between *S. ferdinandi-coburgi* as mother (seed) and *S. sempervivum* as father (pollen). With Saxifraga the mothers have a greater influence on the offspring than the fathers. If there are any problems in cultivation the flowers may become almost stemless.



Above: *Saxifraga* 'Tzar Boris'

Right: Tzar Boris III, photo courtesy of the [Bulgarian Archives State Agency](#).



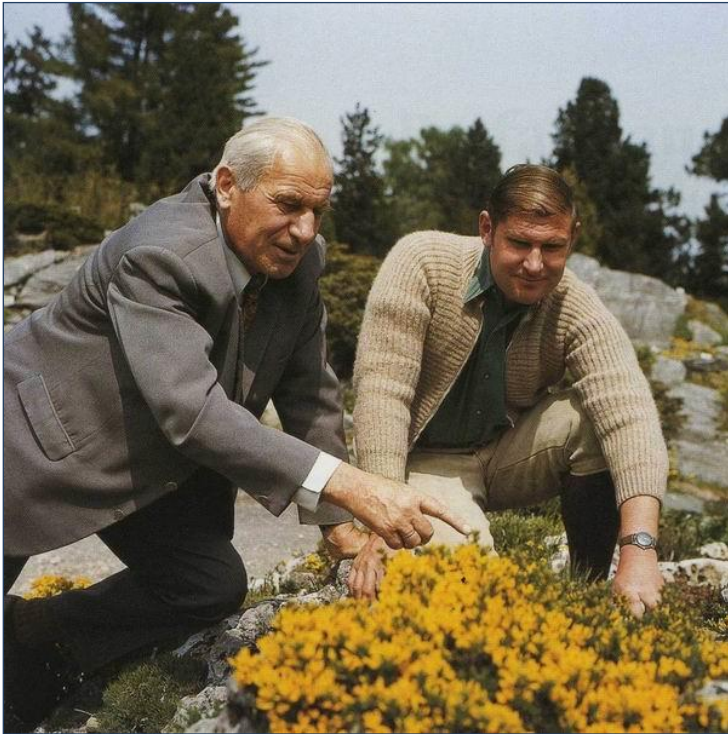
Private remarks are not necessary (but nice to make!)

Just some memories about the Schachts....

When I obtained my driver's licence in 1966 I took several special plants from our perennial nursery and drove via Linz, visiting Sigurd Lock, whom I had met shortly before at an excursion of the DDG (German Dendrological Society), to Munich. At Nymphenburg I asked for [Dr Schacht](#) and met him at the Pfeffer-Huette. I gave him my plants, I can only remember one, a very good form of *Dianthus freynii*, and there followed the ceremony I had to undergo each time we met: I was tested about my plant knowledge! Later I used to visit him whenever I came through Frasdorf, at first alone, later with my wife.

Later he became more and more hard of hearing, but he was able to lip-read even complicated botanical names. My wife and I visited the Schachts shortly before an election in Bavaria. My wife, Mrs Schacht and I spoke about the polling, Wilhelm was as angry as Rumpelstiltskin, he was unable to participate on our discussion, because he supposed plants to be the subject of our talk, and not politics.

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Wilhelm got annoyed if something didn't work or go his way. Wayne Roderick from California told us the following story: Wilhelm came to CA, but in the depth of his heart he only wanted to take pictures of *Xerophyllum tenax*, covering the mountain slopes in masses! Wayne showed him the most wonderful things, but Wilhelm stayed defiant! *Xerophyllum* was the object of desire - but it had not burned enough that year to get the Bear Grass flowering.

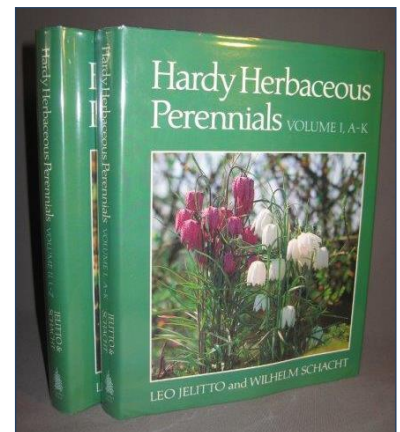
Nearly each time I visited Wilhelm asked for deeper information on his *Clematis* 'Golden Tiara'; he liked this plant very much. His windowsill was never without *Tropaeolum tricolor* in winter.

It was always a pleasure to visit the Schachts! Less pleasant were the bells of the nearby church, which was nearest the lodging.

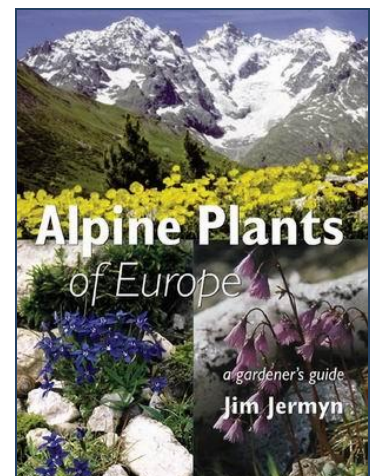
Fritz Kummert

Above: **Wilhelm Schacht and his son, Dieter** – photo courtesy of [Jim Jermyn](#).

Below: **Fritz Kummert with Zdeněk Zvolánek** – photo by Zdena Kosourová.



Books Wilhelm Schacht co-authored with Leo Jelitto.



Book by Jim Jermyn with photographs by Wilhelm Schacht and Dieter Schacht.

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--- In the Wild ---



Spanish skies – by Gerrit Eijkelenboom, December 2016

In [IRG 81](#) we read that Gerrit and Iep (Ibeltje) Eijkelenboom spend some weeks in Spain each winter – and this photo is from their time there in December 2016 - it was shown in [the VRV forum](#) - but this month they write about the flowers they have seen in Sicily earlier this year.

Orchids and some other species from Sicily by Gerrit Eijkelenboom

Before travelling to a new area in order to search for orchids, one has to gather information about 'findspots', the best period to travel, accommodation, car rental and timetables of the airlines. Nothing is more frustrating than the outcome that all efforts were in vain because of the absence of the orchids or being out of flower. Constantly it is in your mind: Am I too late or am I too early? But there is one truth: you cannot see them all at the same time. Some orchids come into flower as early as January and some in May. Generally, you could say, the best time to visit Cyprus is mid March, Rhodes the end of March and the beginning of April. For Crete it is the first two weeks of April, and Sicily the second and third week of April.

Unfortunately there is almost no information available about the best areas to go, and in which period. There is no botanical guide for Sicily. There is only brief information on the internet, left there by previous travellers. It is my aim to provide information in this report for future travellers to Sicily.

My wife and I had planned to take this trip to Sicily from the last week of April until the first week of May - 11 days altogether to find as many orchids as possible. I knew, of course that this period was actually too late. And so indeed it turned out to be, especially in the south-east of the island, which otherwise would be a promising location. Almost all orchids there had vanished. But in other regions, in mountainous areas, there we found more than 30 different orchids.

With a helpful friend, who had visited Sicily some years before, I had formed a rather good idea which places and areas I should examine. On the map which follows you see the most promising areas from Sicily.

1. In the west: Bosco della Ficuzza, south of Palermo.
2. In the north: The Madonie Mountains, south of Cefalu.
3. In the north-west: The Nebrodi Mountains.
4. In the south-east.

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Map of Sicily with promising areas marked

Some words about roads, distances, airport and Italian driving-style: From Messina in the east to the westernmost point, it is 364km. From Palermo, the capital to Siracusa it is 275km. The motorways are toll-free, except from Cefalu to Messina, but in this case, extremely cheap. It is very quiet and the Italian drivers are disciplined, no longer the wild drivers known from early times. Allow extra time when arriving and departing an airport. We arrived on Catania airport and finding out the right place to pick up your rental car was terrible. At the end, when departing, take many hours more, to cope with the chaos at the airport.

We stayed in Cefalu, a chaotic, hectic but charming little town. From here three of the promising findspots were easily to reach.



Cefalu

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One of the most renowned orchids from Sicily is *Ophrys lacaitae*. We found it on the very first day along a roadside in a sharp bend in short grassland. Only one specimen. A week later we found some more plants in the same place. Take the road from Cefalu to Isnello in the direction of the Madonie Mountains. Take the road from Isnello to Piano Zucchi, (Plain of Zucchi). Some kilometres before you reach the high plain, there it is.



Ophrys lacaitae

A species with broad yellow margins, spreading then reflexed forwards. The speculum like a necklace is H shaped. The brown colour fades towards the yellow field of the margins. Extremely beautiful. The appendage is prominent, directed forwards.

April 24, 2016, 800m. Isnello.



Ophrys lacaitae

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Belonging to the same group - fuciflora group - *Ophrys oxyrrhynchos* is probably endemic to Sicily. The findspot of this species is the same as above, on an embankment beside the road, some hundred metres before. The second picture is taken at 'Bosco della Ficuzza'. Later more about this findspot. *Ophrys oxyrrhynchos* is a wonderful species too. Easy to recognize, because of its broad and wide sideskirts and the colour of the sepals (green). The colour, markings and shape of the lip vary. Pictures taken April 24 and 27 2016, Isnello and Ficuzza, 700m.



Ophrys oxyrrhynchos

Along the same track - from Isnello towards the Zucchi Plain - we saw the first peonies. All of them were out of flower, but on a higher elevation, we saw some of them still in flower.

There is much said about this species: for [example in the SRGC forum 2011](#), one of the Paeonia threads. White flowering peonies occur on Crete: *Paeonia clusii*, on Rhodes: *Paeonia rhodia* (*clusii* subsp. *rhodia*) on some places on the Greek mainland, the islands Andros and Euboia: *Paeonia mascula* subsp. *hellenica* and on Sicily: *Paeonia flavescens*. This is the old name. The white flowers turn somewhat yellowish, when dried, whence it's name 'flavescens'.

The Kew Plant List declares *P. mascula* subsp. *hellenica* as an accepted name and *P. flavescens* as a synonym of *P. mascula* subsp. *russoi*.

Paeonia flavescens has a slight pink mark on the petals as you can see on my picture.

It is a common species on the island and later we saw masses of them, mostly out of flowers, in open spaces in the woods, along roads leading towards mountainous areas.



Paeonia flavescens

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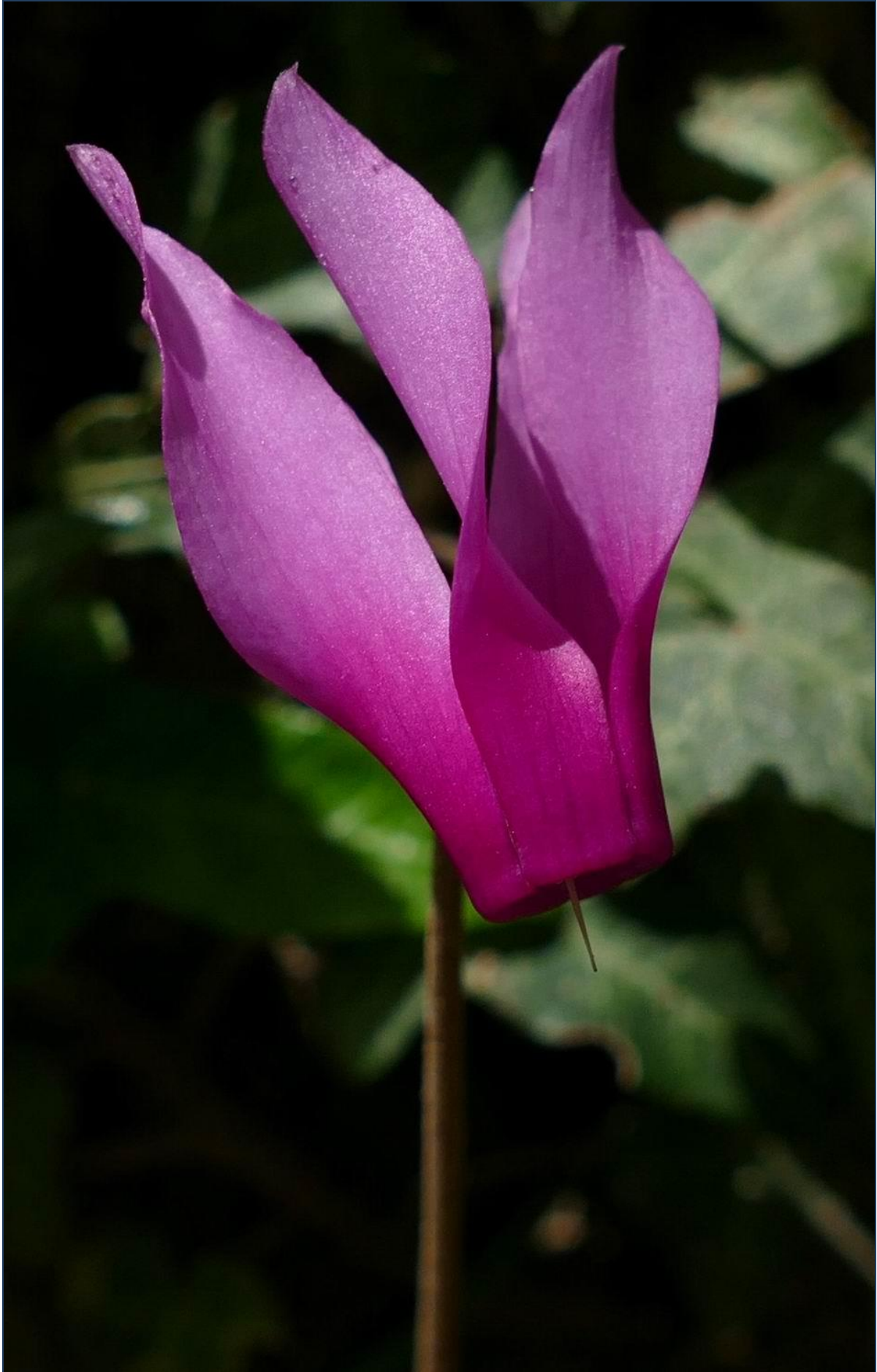


Aristolochia rotunda

In the same habitats, - clearings in woods - we found *Aristolochia rotunda*, with its heart-shaped leaves, clasping the stem and *Cyclamen repandum*, present everywhere on the island under trees. *Primula vulgaris* was also there.



Primula vulgaris



Cyclamen repandum

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The next orchid, still along the same road, is *Aceras anthropophorum* in 2 colours, red and yellow, April 24 2016, 800m, Isnello.



Ophrys lutea is a species of the western Mediterranean, April 24 2016, Isnello, 800m

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Ophrys phryganae is a species of the eastern Mediterranean. This one replaces *O. lutea* to the east. The borderline between those two lies on Sicily. From Sicily there are some reports from *Ophrys phryganae*, but it is not a common plant. So, I am glad to show here the two species together. Delforge writes (page 420) "Maybe Sicily".

The difference between the two is the shape of the lateral lobes. In *O. lutea*, the lateral lobes are spreading, then reflexed. In *O. phryganae* the lateral lobes first bend downwards and then turn upwards. April 27 2016, Figuzza, 900m



Ophrys phryganae

The road leading to the Zucchi plain (1100m) continues towards the Piano Battaglia (Battaglia Plain, 1600m) At the branching of the road, take the road to the left and you will arrive soon on the high plain. We found there a hostile environment. It was very cold, with stormy winds. We were looking for the refuge of the last specimens of *Abies nebrodensis*, but the weather was so bad, we decided to turn back. By the way, after a stroll on the plain, I concluded, there was not more to see in the grass than grass.

Back again, just before the same fork in the road, we parked the car at a path, to the left. After a hundred metres, we found small rocky slopes with many orchids from the *Ophrys subfusca* group. A difficult group to determine, which can cause a headache. Not to me anymore, fortunately.

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Ophrys flammeola

Ophrys flammeola (*Ophrys fusca* subsp. *flammeola*) - belongs to the subfusca group.

- Sepals green (as all of the members of this group) but here, whitish green.
- Broad yellow margins around the whole lip.
- Thick white hairs at the base (= near the stigmatic cavity)
- Kinked at the base and turned upwards at the end of the median lobe.
- Tip of the median lobe separated by a notch.

April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1500m.



Ophrys numida

Ophrys numida (*Ophrys lutea* subsp. *numida*) Belongs to the subfusca group

- Lip angled downwards.
- Lateral lobes rounded and spreading, reflexed (= slightly turned upwards).
- A dilute reddish zone between speculum and lateral lobes.
- Tip of the median lobe separated by a notch.

April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1500m.

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Ophrys archimedeae (*Ophrys lutea* subsp. *archimedeae*)

Belongs to the subfusca group. Endemic to Sicily.

- Lip broad.
 - A broad yellow band around median and lateral lobes.
 - End of the median lobe straight.
 - The end of the median lobes is speckled with white hairs.
- April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1500m.



Ophrys archimedeae



Back to the car we continue our way towards the fork and there we turn to the left in the direction of Polizzi. Now we descend. The landscape is open, facing the south. Here on these sunny cold slopes, we saw the slopes totally covered by ***Iris pseudopumila***. In purple, yellow and lilac.

Iris pseudopumila



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Anacamptis brancifortii



We continue our way downwards. When the road reaches the first trees of a wood, about 1km downwards, park your car and go to your left to examine a huge hill of short grassland, hiding many treasures. On this fabulous findspot at 1200m you will spend hours and hours. The first thing to see is *Anacamptis brancifortii*. Thousands of this lovely species in full bloom here on this slope. Endemic to a part of Sardinia and northern Sicily. It replaces here *Anacamptis quadripunctata*. No confusion to other species is possible. April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1200m.

Matthiola fruticulosa (below) with its grey linear leaflets, poses before the mountain chain at the end of this rich hillside.



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The yellowish tubular bells of [*Onosma echioides* subsp. *canescens*](#) are also found here.



Fedia cornucopiae, an annual, is everywhere.

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The fantastic blue cups of *Linum punctatum*. This prostrate form makes sometimes a full circle.



In front of a *Euphorbia* sp. with orange bracts, we see *Ophrys tenthredinifera*.

Ophrys tenthredinifera subsp. *grandiflora*. Maybe the most beautiful of all orchids. This subspecies grows on Sicily and adjacent southern Calabria. The tuft of hairs above the appendage, very prominent, is distinctive. April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1200m.

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Ophrys tenthredinifera subsp. *grandiflora*

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At the same habitat in the vicinity of the latter ophrys, many *Neotinea tridentata* can be found. The sepals form a loose helmet, which is not closed, but slightly open at the tip, so that they are pointing away from each other, like 3 teeth. April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1200m



Neotinea tridentata

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Anacamptis papilionacea, the well-known butterfly orchid. April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1200m.



Ophrys speculum. An insect-like hairy orchid. Mostly early flowering, mostly in coastal areas but here present at 1200m. April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1200m.

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Ophrys sabulosa

The last orchid on this findspot is *Ophrys sabulosa* (*Ophrys fusca* subsp. *sabulosa*) - a species endemic to Sicily.

- The lip makes an sharp angle downwards to pendant.
- Kinked at the base, with a prominent groove, with white hairs.
- It is a very large orchid.
- Sides of the lateral lips rounded and turned down.
- The speculum often marbled dark bluish or milky.
- No central groove.
- The edges of the lip are yellow. April 24 2016, Battaglia, 1200m.



At 6 o'clock next morning we are ready to drive eastwards towards our next promising findspot, 250km to the south-east - but only after taking this picture of the **Tyrrhenian Sea**.

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The most well-known findspot there is the [Necropoli di Pantalica](#). When we arrived, it turned out to be a dry and barren land. Most of the plants were withered and all of the possible orchids were gone. Obviously we were too late, as most of the orchids were gone - except one. In an abandoned yard, there was a group of amazing *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. This orchid is one of the most common and widespread of all. However I have never seen what we saw there - such a colour. The most deep purple you can imagine. April 27 2016, Pantalica, 300m.



Anacamptis pyramidalis

Most unexpectedly, the day ended well. In hopes we might still find some orchids we went to the highest mountain in that region, Mount Lauro, west of Buccheri. From here we had an excellent view towards the large Plain of Catania and **Mount Etna**. I think the distance from our point of view to the top of the mountain is 90km.



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I knew that Mount Lauro (c.1000m) is home to an endemic with the name *Ophrys laurensis*. At the south side of the mountain a vast meadow of some kilometres lay in front of us, ready to explore.

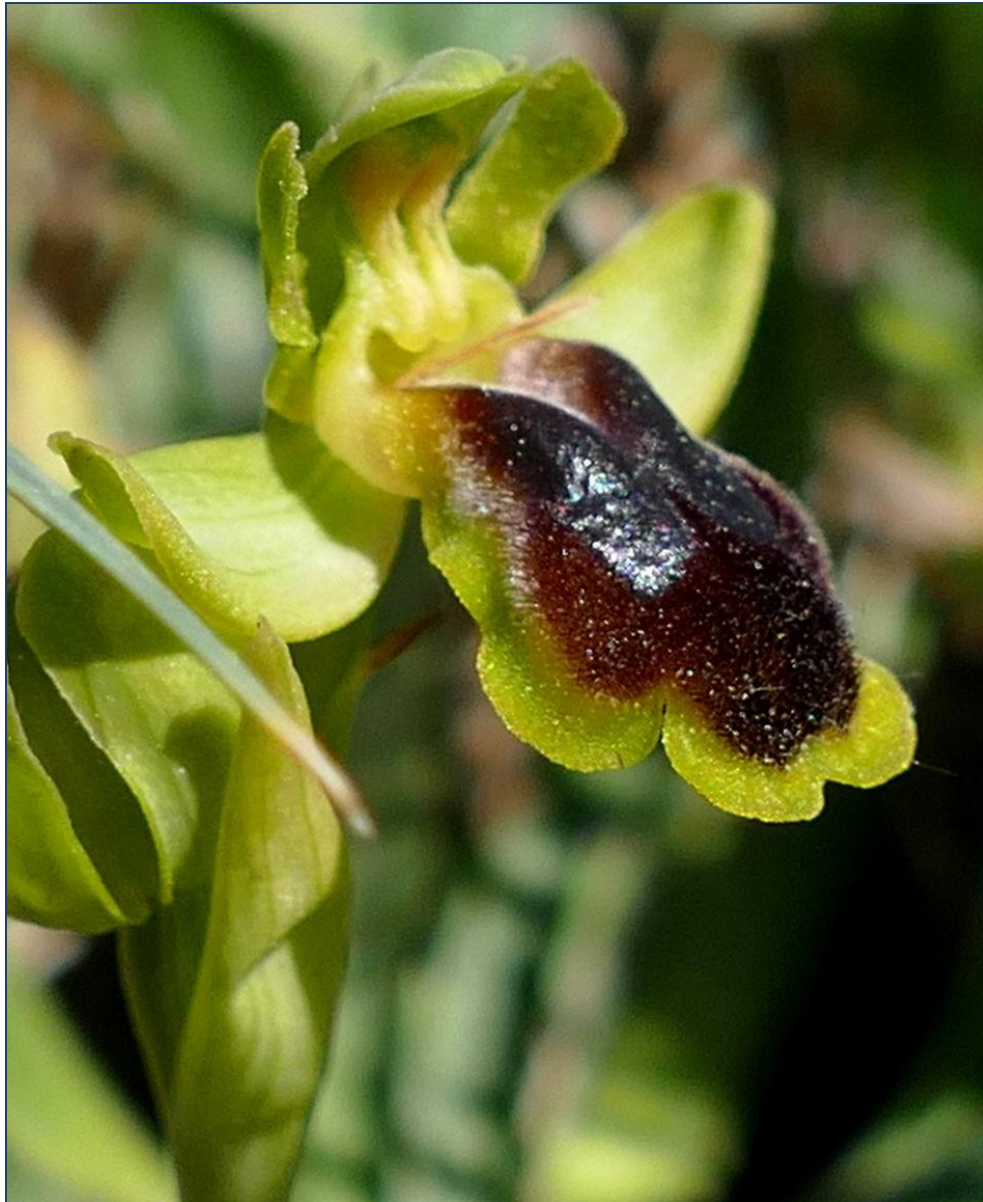
There we found *Ophrys laurensis*.

- *O. laurensis* is a species with small flowers, not easy to recognise in the grass.
- The lip is broadly, bordered yellow, turned down and then reflexed.
- White hairs at the base, in a deep groove.
- The speculum is glossy.

April 26 2016, Buccheri, 1000m

Because of this find, we felt our trip was not in vain.

The species we missed seeing are: *Ophrys lunulata*, *Ophrys biancae* and *Ophrys panormitana*.



Ophrys laurensis

An other important findspot is the Bosco della Ficuzza about 40km south of Palermo. Ficuzza is a village on the road to Corleone, well-known from the Godfather trilogy.

This village is small but on the main square a huge building houses a school. Drive around this building and after that a road starts towards a mountain chain far away. This road leads initially through a wood. The road ascends and after some kilometres the trees are gone and instead of them, you will see a sort of alpine meadow on both sides of the road.

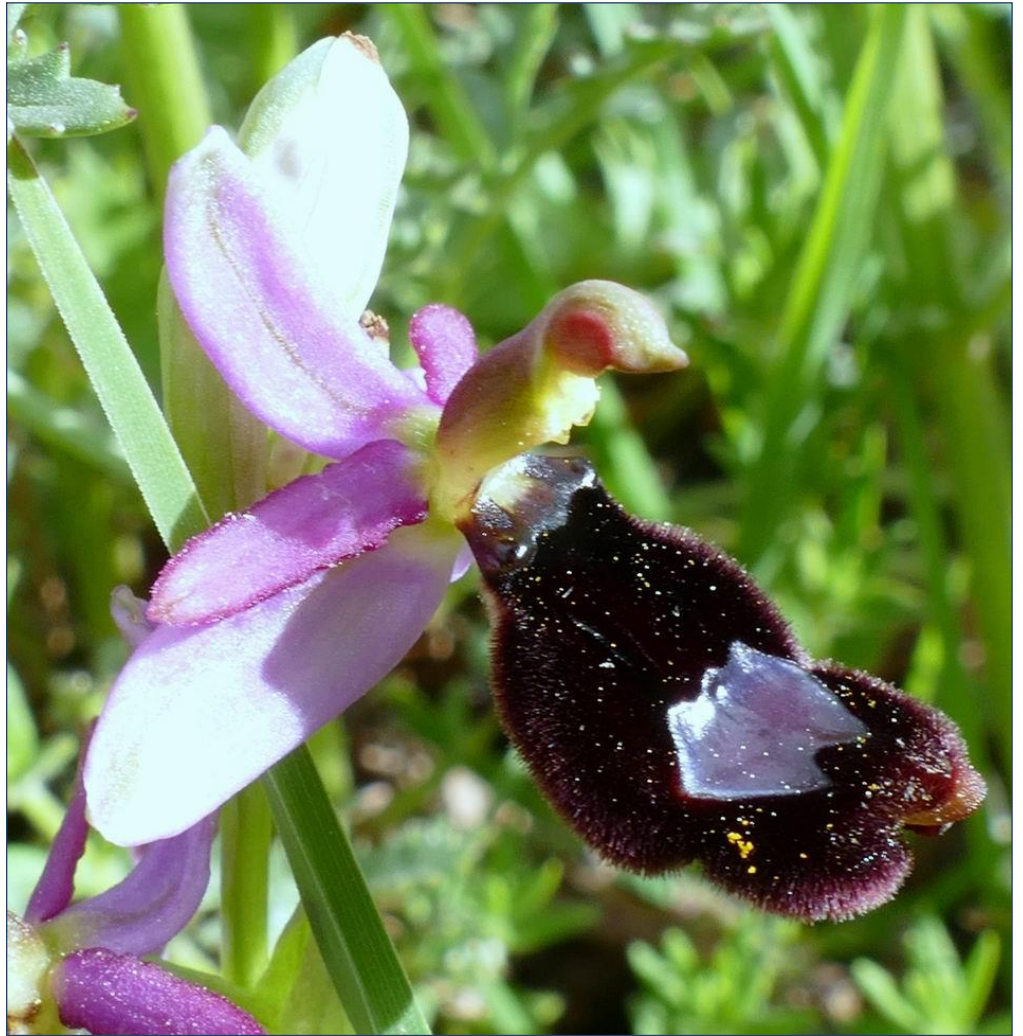
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Along the forest road you must make many stops to explore the wood. There are many open spaces, where orchids grow.

Ophrys bertholonii: An oddity, because of its saddle-like shape.

"The curvature of the lip.....unique within this genus, result of an adaption to two bees.....which have the characteristic of arching the abdomen to copulate."
(Delforge page 613)
Now you know why.

April 29 2016, 700m,
Ficuzza



Ophrys bertholonii

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Bosco della Ficuzza is also home to ***Ophrys pallida***, an endemic plant and also an oddity. It belongs to the obaesa group, but "...the very particular structure of the lip are unique...may indicate an ancient origin for *Ophrys pallida*". (Delforge page 406)
April 29 2016, 700m Ficuzza.



Ophrys pallida



In the vicinity of the latter two ophrys we found, in a rather dense woodland, the stunning ***Limodorum abortivum***.
April 29 2016, 700m Ficuzza.

Limodorum is dependant throughout its life on mycorrhizal fungi. Its roots are connected to the roots of Cistus and trees. But it also contains chlorophyll. Cleistogamy is significant in Limodorum. Many flowers do not open and there is flowering and fruiting underground. This cleistogamy is profitable, because it requires less plant resources to produce seeds, nectar, large amounts of pollen, especially in unfavourable sites. On the contrary, self-fertilization may suppress the creation of genetically superior plants. Limodorum is known for its absences and can disappear for several years, particular during drought and when vegetation becomes too dense. Limodorum often occur in large groups. We saw it here in this wood, but also on Rhodes. *Limodorum abortivum* is not a rare species. It grows throughout Europe, from Portugal to Israel, from Germany to North Africa.

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Limodorum abortivum



Anacamptis longicornu

After the trees are gone, an open habitat appears. In short grassland we found the next species:
Anacamptis longicornu.

- Lateral lobes are very dark violet.
- Centre of the lip is whitish with 2 rows of 3-6 dark purple spots.
- It has a very large spur, thickened at the end.
- Spur straight to slightly curved, Often vertical.

April 29,2016, 900m Ficuzza.



Ophrys obaesa (*Ophrys fusca* subsp. *obaesa*) is an endemic species to Sicily, with a

- dense inflorescens and flowers grouped at the tip and the
- lip (near) horizontal.
- On this lip you see several swellings.
- Between those swellings, there is a clear depression.
- Colour often is chestnut brown.
- Often you will see a small orange band along the margins.

April 29 2016, 900m Ficuzza.



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Left:
Bellevalia dubia

Far left:
Bellevalia romana

Two pretty bulbous species grow on these vast meadows:
Bellevalia dubia, with light-blue flowers.
Bellevalia romana, with almost white tubular bells.

On April 30, we visited the Madonie Mountains again and we took another route. So we saw different plants. In a small meadow, water was streaming, and formed small pools. This is an ideal habitat for ***Anacamptis laxiflora***. They are strong stately plants, with a deep red-violet colour.

- The centre of the lip is white.
- The lip is unspotted.
- A large spur, is pointing upwards.

Confusion is possible with *Anacamptis picta* (*A. morio* subsp *picta*), but the presence of dots on the lip is distinctive. *Picta* with, *laxiflora* without.
April 30 2016, 300m Isnello.



Anacamptis laxiflora



---International Rock Gardener---

Our next trip to a new area was to the mountains of Nebrodi. It was already May and the chances to see more orchids became less every day. From our 'hometown' Cefalu a motorway leads along the northern coast to Messina, in the very east of the island. This autostrada goes through tunnels more than over land. After about 50km a road penetrates the Nebrodi Mountains. It is an inhospitable wilderness, the most untouched part of the island. Hills and mountains are covered by a thick forest. Only a few roads run from the north to the south.



Thalictrum calabricum

The first thing we saw, heading towards the mountains was a very special Thalictrum. I am so glad to see this. It was raining, so the picture is not so good, but nevertheless, *Thalictrum calabricum* is special.



Further along the roadside, we explored an interesting site where we found *Ophrys apifera*.

This is a late flowering species. Most of the time, one will not find it. It is an interesting species, because of its capability of self-pollinating. This Ophrys is very successful and widespread, because it likes to grow on disturbed land.

---International Rock Gardener---



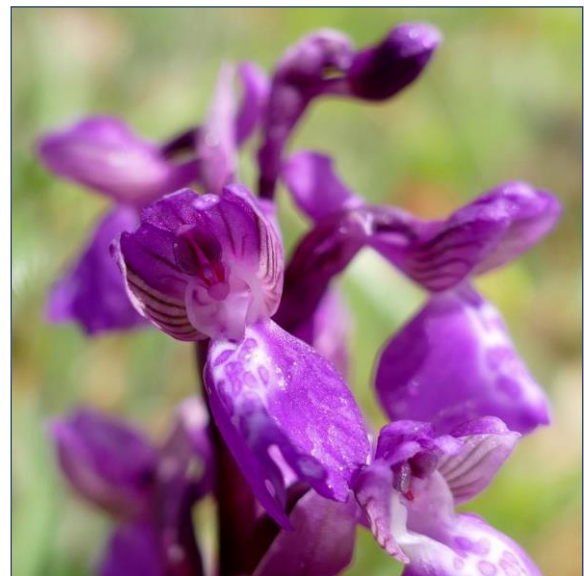
In this particular meadow, some groups of onions hit our eyes. The name is ***Allium nigrum***.



In the lower part of the Nebrodi, along the roadside we found ***Anacamptis picta*** (*Anacamptis morio* subsp. *picta*) with:

- Unspeckled leaves.
- Loose inflorescence
- Inside the helmet (hood) formed by the tepals, you'll see green stripes.
- The lateral lobes are turned down.
- Lip dark spotted on a white underground and the
- Spur pointing straight upwards.

May 2. 2016, 400m Nebrodi.



Anacamptis picta

---International Rock Gardener---

The road continues, with many bends. Eventually it reaches the highest point: Portella della Miraglia. Here we went to the left, in the direction of Mount Soro. After a couple of hundred metres, there was a hillslope without trees, a place to explore.

There we found one *Dactylorhiza* and somewhat further on, three and at the end hundreds.

Its name: ***Dactylorhiza markusii*** (*Dactylorhiza romana* subsp. *markusii*)

Distinguished by the long lower flowerbracts. Longer than the flower. When they are not, it is *D. romana*.



Dactylorhiza markusii

Dactylorhiza markusii has an unspotted lip, according to Delforge, page 178. The species from this particular findspot have dots and lines mostly. Some are indeed unspotted.

D. markusii is usually whitish-yellow, according to Delforge. The plants we have found are pink, purple, red, lilac and salmon. Only one individual was whitish-yellow.

During our visit on that marvellous findspot, it began to rain.



---International Rock Gardener---

A few minutes later the rain turned into snow. The wind increased and became a blizzard. In no time the landscape turned into a winter landscape. We waited in the car till it was over. And when the snow stopped, I took the opportunity to make special pictures of orchids in the snow. May 2 2016, 1600m Nebrodi



Dactylorhiza markusii in snow



---International Rock Gardener---

On the same slope we found a late flowering *Neotinea lactea*. This species ought to have been out of flower for many weeks, but here it was, still in bloom.

- The inflorescens is ball-like to ovoid
- The sepals form a closed helmet.
- A strong spur points downwards.

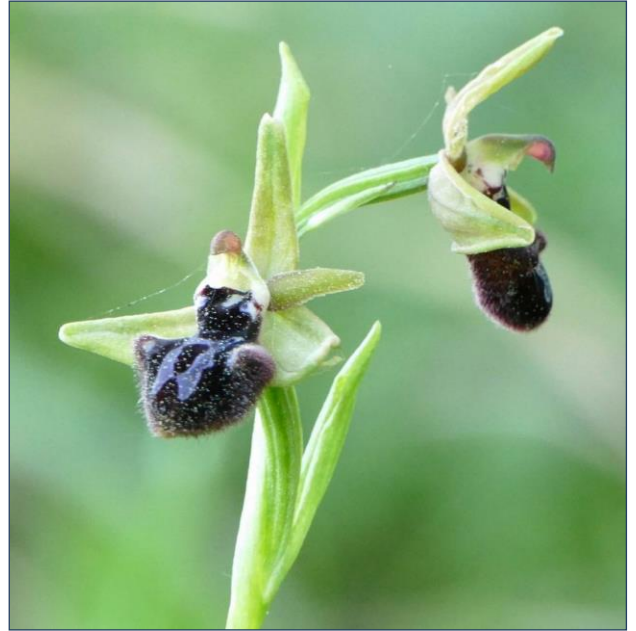
Confusion is possible with *Neotinea tridentata*, where the latter forms a more open helmet, where the three sepals are pointed and curved upwards, hence its name.



Neotinea lactea close -up



---International Rock Gardener---



Ophrys incubacea

After descending somewhat, we looked at the southside of the mountain. There we did find some more species. *Ophrys incubacea* was easy to recognize because of the big **H** on the lip and because of the strong humps near the shoulders.



At the same place we found a white flowering *Orchis italica*. I don't know whether it is special or not, but I have not seen this before.

---International Rock Gardener---

During our stay on this island, we saw many *Serapias*. I think it is a difficult genus to determine. I am not 100% sure about the next species presented - but nevertheless here they are.



Serapias vomeracea



Serapias lingua



Serapias vomeracea is widespread and sometimes abundant.

Serapias lingua is easy to recognize and with mostly beautifully coloured lip.

Left: *Serapias cordigera*: Typical of this plant is the heart-shaped lip, hence its name.



Serapias orientalis* var. *siciliensis April 30 2016, Madonie Mountains.

***Serapias orientalis* var. *siciliensis*.** A critical taxon, which most often appears to fall within the normal range of variation of *S. orientalis* var. *orientalis*.

---International Rock Gardener---



Serapias orientalis var. *siciliensis* April 26 2016, south-east of Sicily.

All pictures by the author, Gerrit Eijkelenboom.

Determination of *Bellevalia romana*, *B. dubia*, *Allium nigrum* by Luc Scheldeman, Belgium

Book: [Pierre Delforge: Orchids of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.](#)

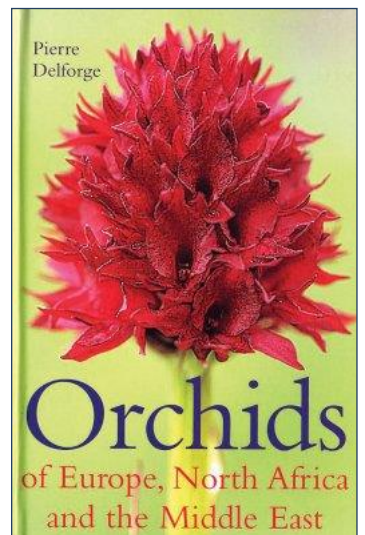
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The IRG Team's New Year's gift to readers is our calendar, with fine photos by Fred Carrie – [you may download that to print out from this link.](#)

Wishing our readers a Happy New Year!

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