

International Rock Gardener

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John and Anita Watson complete their series on their Corona Virus travails and recovery, showing just how important their own garden has been to their recovery and how chances to make small trips to see nature in habitat has proven vital to their feelings of well-being in a particularly anxious period. Clearly, the pandemic of this disease is far from over, or even under control, in too many places, but for many the world is “opening up” again, in small measures at least. I hope that anyone venturing abroad once more does so safely, and that those remaining close to home can gain both succour and fun from the flowers they’re growing and those in nearby nature. To this end, you may wish to try to raise some unusual colour forms of your favourite species; Jaroslav Baláž suggests how!

Cover image: *Echinopsis chiloensis* flower, photo Anita Rosa Flores (Anita Watson).

I was delighted by the news that Jānis Rukšāns of Latvia has been chosen as the first recipient of the Sir Daniel Hall Award by the Royal Horticultural Society, in recognition of his significant personal achievement relating to bulbs. His commitment to cultivation, exploration and education has produced an impressive collection of work that earned the RHS Bulb Committee’s commendation. Dr. Rukšāns, as readers of IRG will know, has dedicated many years to his studies of bulbs in the wild and cultivation and is a stalwart supporter of the Scottish Rock Garden Club and this acknowledgment of his standing in the world of horticulture is most welcome.



This accolade is to be ‘Awarded annually by the RHS Bulb Committee in recognition of significant personal achievement relating to bulbs and other plants within the committee’s remit.’ Committee chair, Theresa Clements, wrote to Jānis that: “Your mixture of interests in bulbs and politics makes you a very worthy recipient of an award named in honour of Daniel Hall, you have a lot in common.”

Tremendous news of this exciting new honour for Jānis! Congratulations !!

M. Y.

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--- Covid Tale ---

Life goes on. After the storm comes the calm

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Introduction

As regular IRG readers will be aware, this is the third and last part of a trilogy describing our sorties (which importantly include around our own garden!) and ups and downs during the period of the pandemic. It runs from the moment restrictions began in 2020 up to the end of January this year. The first part (Flores, Watson & Petterson 2020), starting from the beginning of sanitary cordons, narrated our consequent limited but otherwise free early local drives within a radius of some 15 km from home. The middle account (Watson 2021) dealt with the period when we were both infected by Covid up to the time we finished our obligatory quarantine after I'd returned home from being hospitalised. Which brings us to the present conclusion, when we could once more go outside the bounds of our garden and were able to travel for longer distances due to relaxation of the quarantine restraints in much of our region.

One important series of related outings has been omitted. Starting at the same time in October as the first ones covered herein and as close to our community as those, we made ever longer trips towards the base of the pass over to Argentina 45 km away, which we eventually reached. During that period we photographed so many wildflowers as we went that they would have unbalanced and over-inflated the contents presented here, so we made the decision to publish those easterly explorations towards the Andes as a future separate article.

Home sweet home is still in full flower

(3rd October 2020 to 2nd January 2021)

Our garden is a constant source of joy that we cannot be deprived of by external impositions, and has been, as it continues to be, a revitalising, positive influence during these difficult and dangerous times. I make no apology therefore in starting off with another array of those of its inhabitants which delighted us and our several visitors during the three-and-a-half months covered in the following account.

Many folks in the medical world we didn't know beforehand and a couple we did were very concerned for me during and following my Covid internment. We've kept up with those last two and invited them to meals outside in the garden under the shade of trees. One is the ambulance driver who saw me at my worst when he drove me into hospital late on that fateful night. He's a retired naval officer and

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unpaid volunteer. His wife came with him and we maintain occasional contact still. They brought along delicious home-made shop pastries from their nearby small town and told us where to buy them. Another plus for us from Covid, you might say. Camilla, my recovery physiotherapist [fig.1] whom we did know beforehand and who helped to arrange Anita's miraculous visit to me in hospital, was a regular caller at the house on my behalf anyway, and dining with her once or twice was the least repayment we could offer. She no longer comes to exercise me as the hospitals here are overflowing with virus victims, and the poor girl is worn out and at the end of her tether. Worse still, her dear virus-smitten father has just been carted off to Santiago in an oxygen tent. This effect of stress and overwork is affecting many in the medical world, some of whom are suffering collapses from nervous and physical exhaustion and this causes one to be deeply worried if the situation gets worse, or even continues at its present level.



1) My charming post-Covid physiotherapist Camilla (her exercises are less charming!) relaxing with Anita over a meal in our garden after a session. (13 Oct 2020. JMW)

For the first fortnight after my return, I wasn't up to venturing out into the wide world anyway, so the garden and its many flowers at that time served as my very satisfying fresh air compensation pro tem. With my wheelchair as transport still, I began unambitiously not far from the house where the maximum concentration of our flowers and most of the choicest are found, including unnamed

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alstroemerias [figs.2, 3] in pots on the patio. Also on the patio, but in hanging baskets, are two totally distinct cacti that look to have no physical relationship with one another whatever. One is *Rhipsalis baccifera* [fig.4] with its tiny white flowers, mistletoe berry fruits and pendulous tubular green stems as slender as insulated wire. The other, well-known, flat leaved, showy *Schlumbergera gaertneri* [fig.5], is a real Latin mouthful which can be avoided by calling it the Christmas cactus. These remain outside all the year round but have to be covered in translucent foam plastic sheeting for protection in winter. The perpetually floriferous pelargoniums don't need more protection with us than Anita's narrow sheltered raised bed extending from directly under the kitchen window to the front corner of the house [fig.6]. The main pebble-surfaced track leading from the front entrance to the garden beyond passes directly in front of the patio and on one side or the other at that point are various colour forms of *Osteospermum fruticosum* [fig.7] and a large pot of *Bulbine bulbosa* [fig.8]. Flourishing Australian *Moraea*-reminiscent *Dietes grandiflora* [fig.9] rises alongside above the carpet of low ground cover in the shade of our nearest mature orange tree immediately opposite. We're captivated by the consecutive appearance over months of its short-lived irid flowers and gradual welcome increase by self-seeding.



2) Red *Alstroemeria* cultivar. (28 Oct 2020. JMW)

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3) Deep burgundy *Alstroemeria* cultivar. (28 Oct 2020. JMW)



4) *Rhipsalis baccifera*. (29 Oct 2020. JMW)

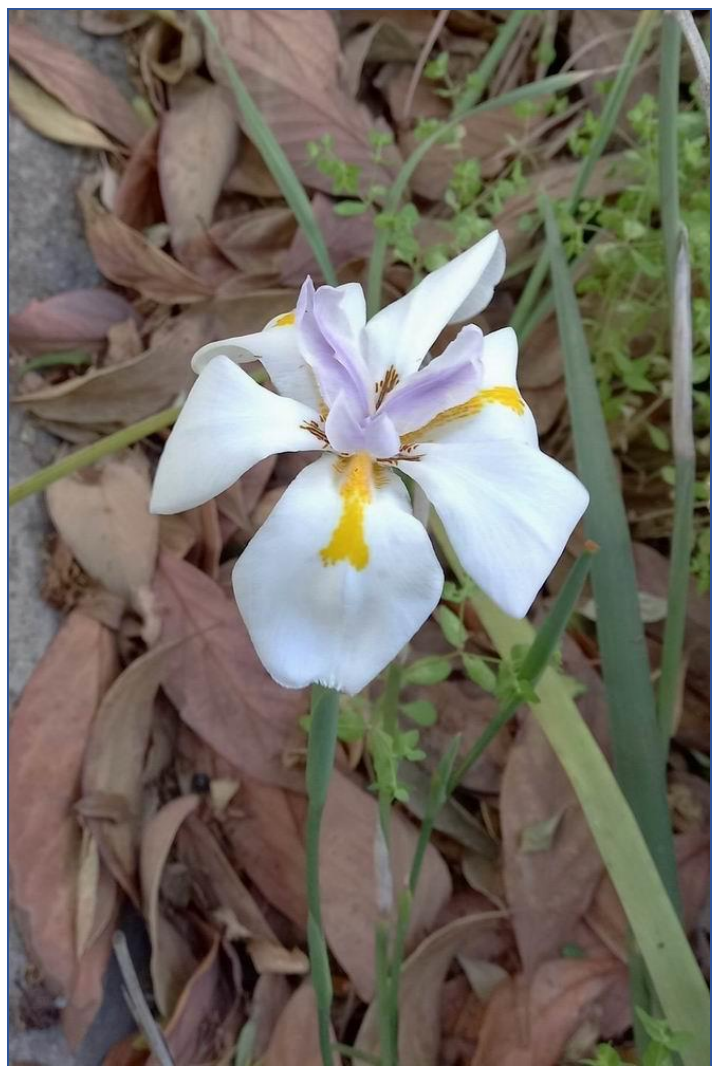


5) A month early is the "Christmas cactus" *Schlumbergera gaertneri*. (23 Nov 2020. ARF)

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6) *Pelargonium* cultivars. (13 Oct 2020. JMW) 7) *Osteospermum fruticosum*. (3 Oct 2010. JMW)



8) *Bulbine bulbosa*. (10 Oct 2020. JMW)

9) *Dietes grandiflora*. (15 Nov 2020. ARF)

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10) *Rhododendron* 'Tortoiseshell Orange'. (28 Oct 2020. JMW)

Moving a little further away, but not much, we reach our only surviving rhododendron, the attractive pale orange 'Tortoiseshell' [fig.10], its long straggly bare branches in the shade bent over by Anita so the flowers may be enjoyed in the sun by the narrow path alongside. We should be thankful that this one, our most precious, is the only of several to have survived central Chile's taxing Mediterranean climate, even in the best shade we can offer. Evergreen dwarf azaleas fare much better with us.



11) Asiatic lily cultivar. (23 Nov 2020. ARF)



12) *Centranthus ruber*. (10 Oct 2020. JMW)

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13) Love-in-a-mist, *Nigella damascena*. (4 Oct) 14) *Papaver somniferum* (15 Oct both 2020 by JMW)

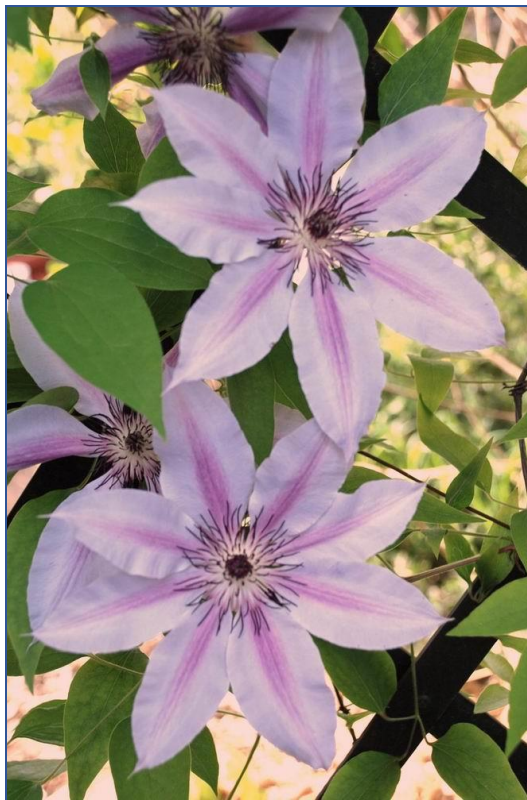
This 'pseudo-woodland' patch' near the house is carpeted here and there by lily of the valley and a rather too rampant variegated ivy, which needs strict control. Appreciating the mixture of shade and sun by its border are a few different Asiatic lily cultivars [fig.11], *Centranthus ruber* [fig.12], which seeds itself discreetly about, as also does *Nigella damascena* [fig.13]. But the real eye-catcher beside the main garden track at this point is *Papaver somniferum* [fig.14], the opium poppy. It's recorded as an adventive escape from ten political regions the length of Chile, including the 'Robinson Crusoe' islands, and one can only presume this resulted from earlier 'recreational use'! It has, however, been supplanted (what more appropriate verb?) entirely by marijuana and cocaine, and these have resulted in a growing wave of violent crime which the authorities seem powerless to control. Innocent bystanders are often shot and wounded or killed by stray bullets from the gang warfare, including babies and children inside their own homes. Well, in my humble opinion if there are no customers there's no trade, but nobody mentions the hundreds of thousands of addicts here who must be financing 'the business', let alone doing anything about them. That distressingly dramatic note brings us to the end of the part of the garden within easy reach of the house.

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As my cautious excursions carried me further away, including to the walnut sector beyond the main cross-garden pergola, the wheelchair became more and more indispensable for moving about and resting, no less than for photographing ever more distant desiderata [fig.15].

Those include *Clematis flammula* and several cultivars of that genus [figs.16, 17] which adorn three of our pergolas. A few more distant photogenic shrubs and climbers needed longer focus to give a true impression of how they fit into the garden. During this period we registered *Abutilon* 'Red Emperor' [fig.18], one of our two *A. x hybridum* cultivars, and the vigorous Bignoniaceous *Podranea ricasoliana* [fig.19] atop trees at a far border of the property.

15) The wheelchair proving as effective for garden photography as ever. (5 Oct 2020. ARF)



16) *Clematis* 'Nelly Moser'. (19 Oct 2020. JMW)



17) *Clematis* cultivar. (16 Oct 2020. ARF)

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18) *Abutilon x hybridum* 'Red Emperor'. (14 Oct 2020. JMW)

Coming back down to earth again, before passing under the main pergola to the more extensive walnut sector beyond with its fewer garden ornamentals, we recorded a couple of choice tracksiders. The most evident was a long, dense border of golden *Chlidanthus fragrans* [fig.20], a tropical high Andean bulb which thrives in an exposed condition here without protection. Although it produces few flowers for the mass of foliage, they are showy enough to warrant that. By contrast the *Mesembrythemum* relative *Lampranthus spectabilis* [fig.21] smothers itself in a spectacle of blossoms but has to be grown in a pot and protected from temperatures near and below 0°C for safety's sake.

19) *Podranea ricasoliana*. (26 Oct 2020. JMW)



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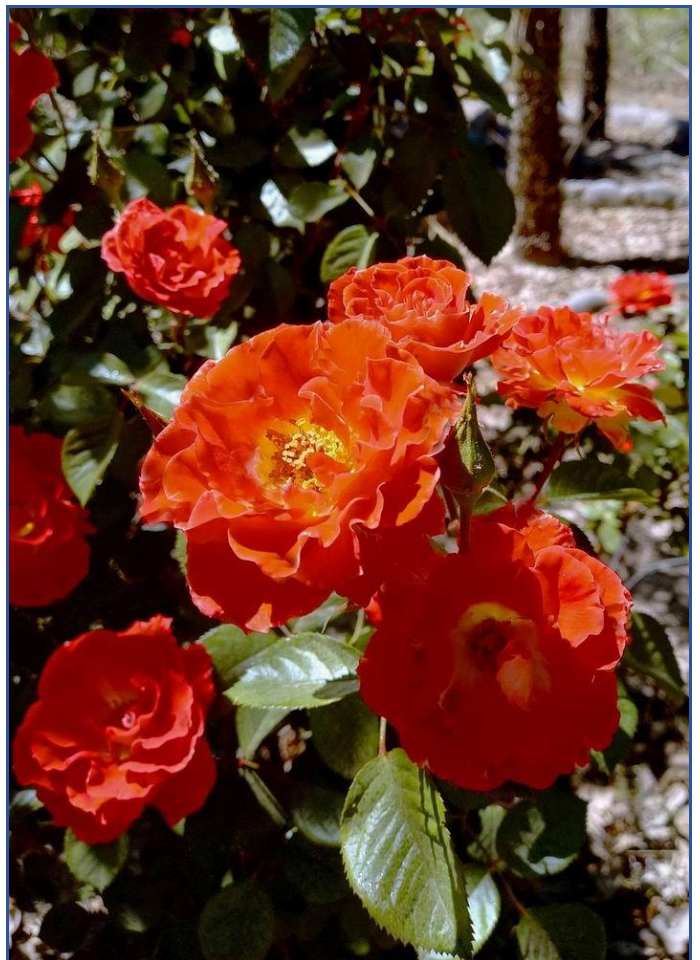
20) *Chlidanthus fragrans*. (7 Nov 2020. JMW)



21) *Lampranthus spectabilis*.
(15 Oct 2020. JMW)



22) *Rosa* 'Sugar Moon' (Hybrid Tea).
(20 Oct 2020. ARF)



23) *Rosa* 'Smoke Rings' (Polyantha).
(20 Oct 2020. ARF)

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24) *Rosa* 'Mountbatten' (Hybrid Tea). (20 Oct 2020. ARF)

In the walnut sector only the most resilient and highly visible can get by on the minimum amount of cleaning and weeding we're able to manage there nowadays. The great majority such as Anita's rose bed [figs.22-24] (not too difficult to maintain) are nostalgic reminders of my English family garden, perhaps none more so than the common herbaceous phlox [fig.25], one of my early childhood memories.

25) *Phlox paniculata* 'Light Pink Flame'. (2 Jan 2021. JMW)

We have a wonderful spread of the vigorous climbing morning glory *Ipomoea cairica* [fig.26] (seen in the wild in Argentina) right along the inside of our adobe street wall. Very difficult to establish in the first place due the frost vulnerability of its perennial bulbous roots before they reach a safe depth underground, once it gets going ... boy, does it get going! Although it dies right back in winter, its fresh growth scales the wall rapidly again in late spring and flowers non-stop from then on until the first frosts clobber it in mid-winter. It ornaments the tiled top of the wall for much of its length and draws admiring comments from passers-by. A few years back one stolon crept



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underneath to the street side. We provided a climbing net and nurtured it, with the result that it's rewarded us not only by flowering, but flowering in its sunnier site before the mother plant inside has even reached the wall top. Such are the joys of gardening.



26) *Ipomoea cairica* has crept under the wall from our garden via a stolon to decorate the street side.
(16 Nov 2020. ARF)

Owing to the fact that we must keep the irrigation channel from outside open as it brings essential garden water once a week, we cannot seal off the garden completely, leading to constant invasions of a pack of up to half-a-dozen or so street dogs via that trench when dry (we don't have any dogs or

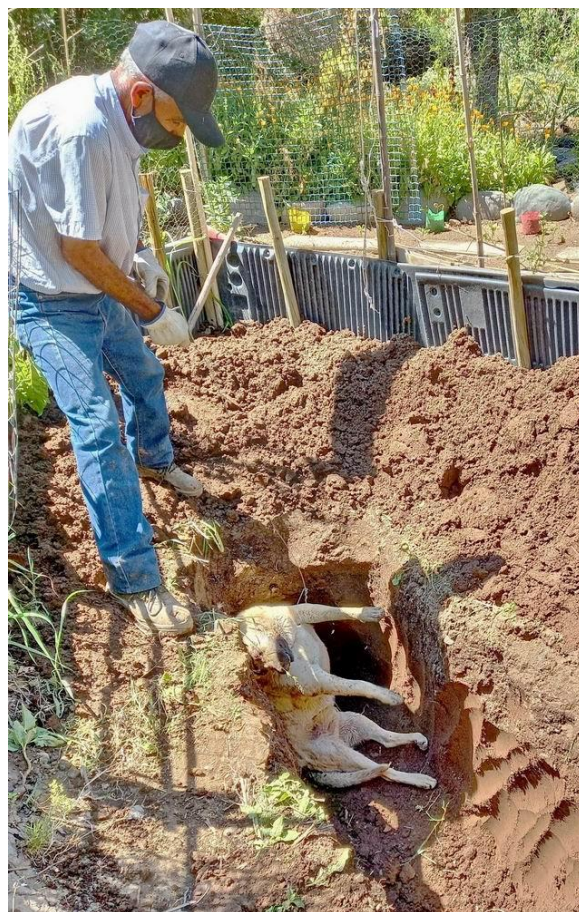
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cats ourselves as they would kill or frighten away our precious wildlife). Those unwanted invaders dig up Anita's freshly planted vegetables, roll and fight over the beds and, worst of all, leave their smelly 'calling cards' for the unwary to put a foot in. They take any food accidentally left outside on the tables and also footwear, which is carried to some obscure corner and left for later discovery, often chewed beyond repair. At least they used to do all that. Our farmer neighbour Jorge (translates as George) with the walnut orchard immediately beside our back wall came to plough and harrow it at the end of October. His son who lives nearby had a friendly little low-slung beagle which delighted in jumping onto the bonnet of Jorge's tractor. One day it decided to pay his orchard an unaccompanied visit and had the misfortune to coincide with the street dogs which butchered it unceremoniously. Blame him or not, that was more than enraged Jorge, normally a lover of all dogs, could stand, and he laid down poison. What neither he nor we anticipated was the dying dogs for some reason sneaking into some remote corner of our garden as their last resting place. We became aware of the presence of any by the smell of putrefying flesh, and when discovered the maggot-riddled corpse had to be covered temporarily until Benjamin, our garden help, next arrived to bury it. This elimination was so successful that we no longer suffer from their maddening despoiling and waste products of canine digestive systems. The last one to go [fig.27] elected to conk out in the open depression where Anita plants the more vigorous of her veggies, and only lay there until the next day, when fortunately, Benjamin was present [fig.28].



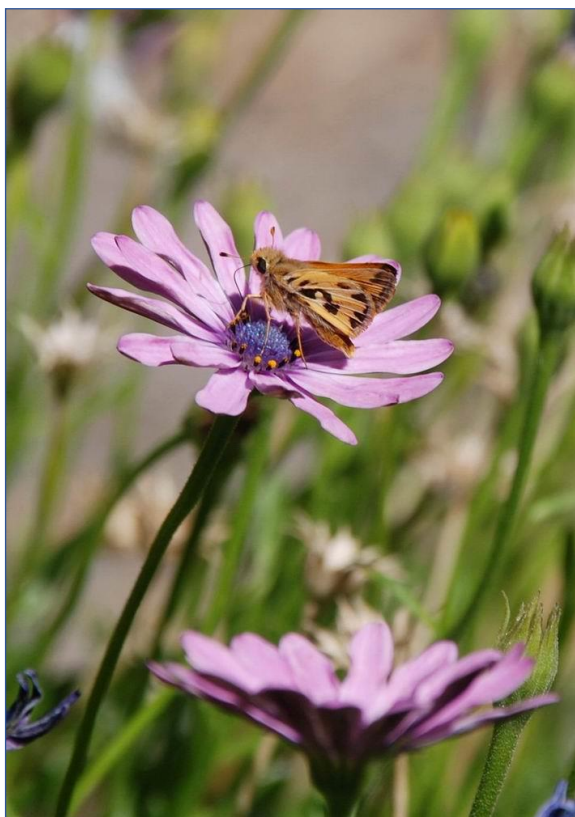
27) "Phew, I'm so exhausted I could die." And it did, right in our garden (where it was unwanted, dead or alive)! (25 Nov 2020. ARF)

28) Our faithful helper, Benjamin, who comes 3 times a month to our garden, digging its grave deep in the sunken vegetable plot. Good manure maybe. (25 Nov 2020. ARF)



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The rainy winter season, having arrived after a series of several drought years, fostered lush green growth everywhere: in gardens, on agricultural land and across the countryside. As a result, there's been a bumper count not only of wildflowers but also insects. Particularly from mid-October until the end of November we'd never seen the likes of such quantities and varieties of native insects before. Up to seven or eight southern veined white butterflies at a time could be seen in the garden or its immediate outside surrounds, with a clouded yellow now and then flashing across non-stop like an express train. Added to those were painted ladies, fritillaries that live on our garden violets, dancing little blues and skippers [fig.29]. Come dusk and the evening and night-time watch took over. Our patio would attract swarms of more bewilderingly different moth species than you could shake a stick at, and we had to shut the front door quickly to ensure none got trapped inside. We could at least identify some like the noctuids and plume moths to family level, if not to genus even. But there was no mistaking the largest and most magnificent of all, the hawkmoth *Hyles annei* [fig.30]. Anita noticed several of them hovering above our *Pandorea jasminoides* [fig.31] above the patio and dipping down to feed from it. She captured them well as a video, but unfortunately couldn't get a good still. Moths comprised the vast majority of insects drawn to our house lights, but not the only ones. An occasional interesting rarity such as a shiny emerald-green chafer [fig.32] would put in an appearance now and again.



29) A *Hylephila fasciolata*, southern pale skipper butterfly on *Osteospermum fruticosum*. (28 Oct 2020. JMW)



30) *Hyles annei*, a not uncommon large hawkmoth that appears in our garden for a while each year. (12 Nov 2020. ARF)



31) Our *Pandorea jasminoides* at dusk when visited by a splendid flight of several *Hyles annei* hawkmoths. (12 Nov 2020. ARF)

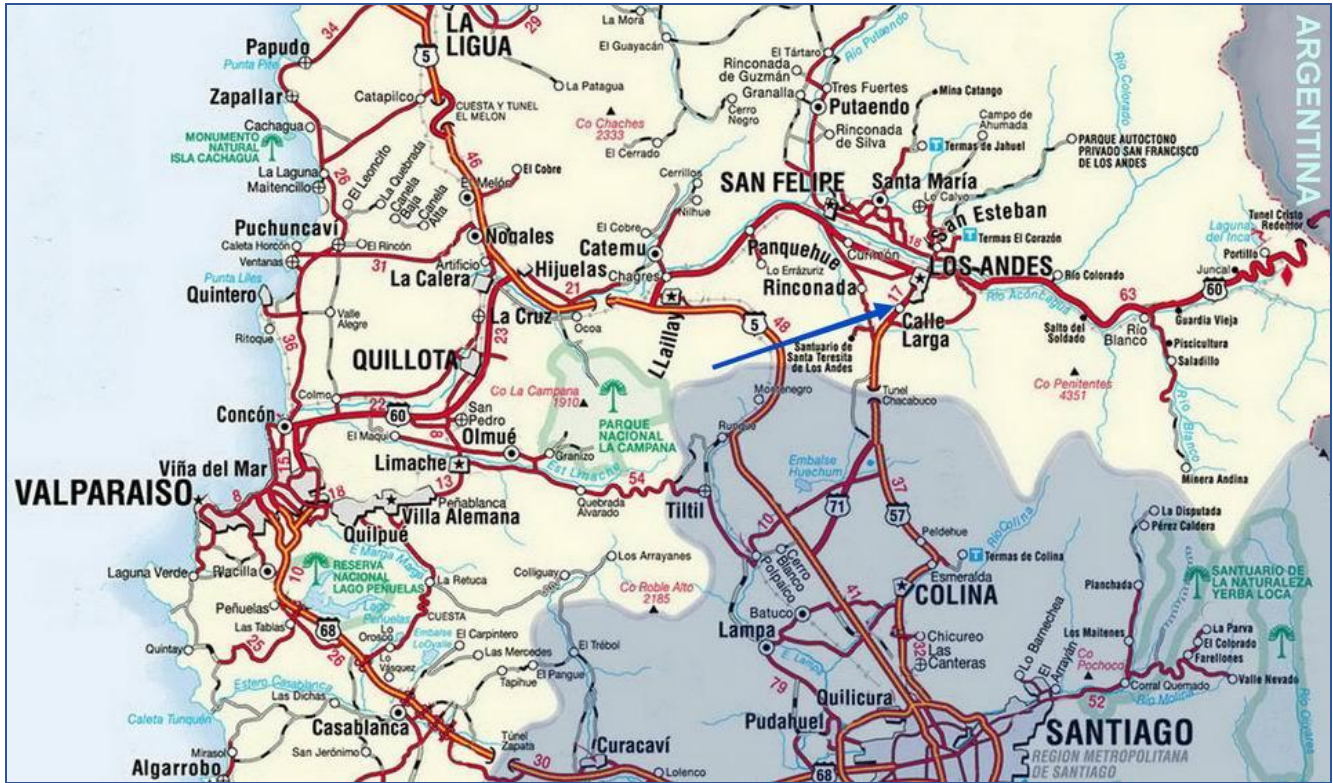


32) A southern chafer, *Brachysternus viridis*. With a beetle so attractive, what matter if its grubs do a little damage. We all have to eat! (17 Nov 2020. ARF)

33) Southern South America with Chile and its regions shown. Our Valparaiso Region is outlined and named in red.



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34) The position of our community in Valparaíso Region indicated by a blue arrow. (map by courtesy of Turistel)



35) The chronologically numbered order of our first 6 early wildflower encounters. The violet arrow indicates our community. (Map by courtesy of Turistel)

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Just beyond the garden gate

(17th October to 18th November 2020)

We didn't attempt anything too ambitious by way of our renewed wildflower sorties to begin with. Dipping toes in the water to test the temperature, as it were. The first five varied in distance from a few hundred metres up the road to as far as the narrow cross-country route we often take to Anita's Mum's place. That may be longer than directly through the centre of Los Andes but is so much more relaxing and rewarding. The general geography and individual locations are illustrated here [figs.33-35].

(1) Our first location was the nearby isolated cactus-clad 'Chinaman's Hill' a hundred metres or so high [figs.36-40]. We have already described it in Flores, Watson & Petterson (2020), and how Helga, who can climb to its summit, which we no longer can, found a trio of unexpected native plants not known from the district previously.

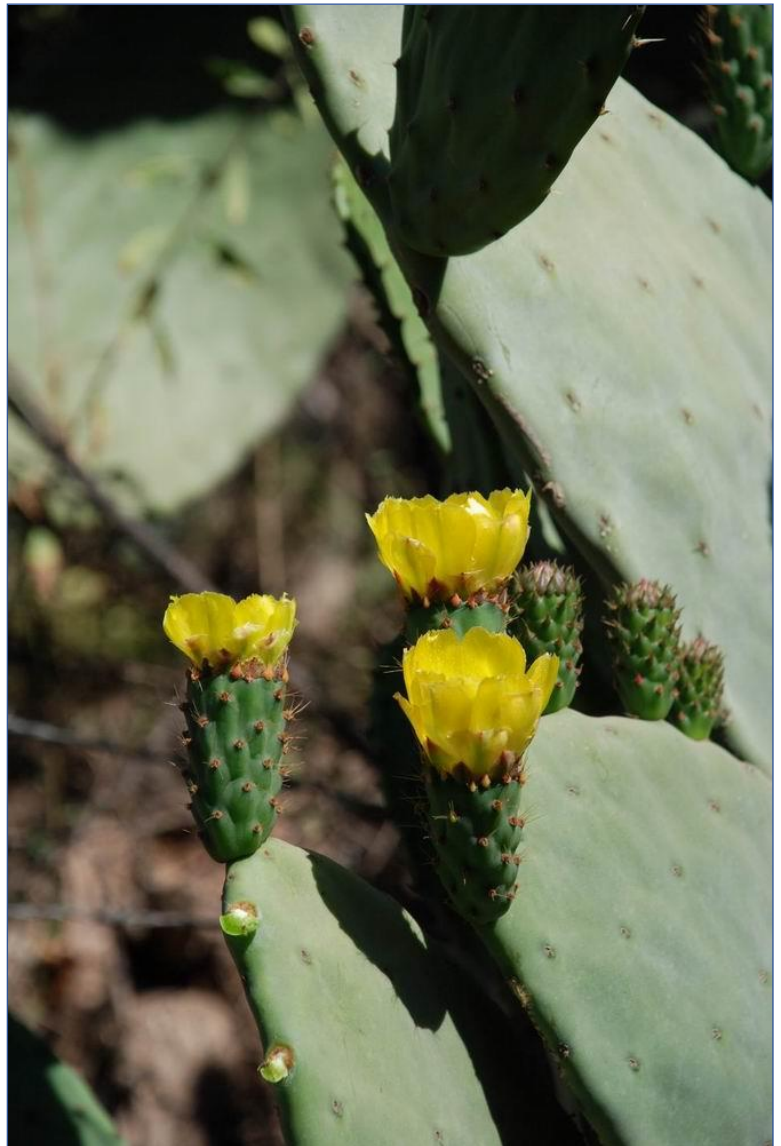
As opposed to during our earlier visits, the cacti were in full, glorious bloom [figs.37-39], although we had to be in the right position at the right time of day to catch the sunlight on the *Echinopsis chiloensis* corollas before they closed or shrivelled later in the afternoon. Our friend and former co-author Adriana Hoffmann, who alone or with others authored a number of field guides to the Chilean flora, produced one as a monograph on the country's cacti (Hoffmann 1989). This is a notoriously difficult task as they're riddled with synonyms, often by the dozen (the one illustrated here in figs. 52 & 53 has thirty, for example, and that's not the record for the family by any means!). What's worse, cactus growers and taxonomists often disagree, with each accepting the name he or she considers correct, sometimes several between them. There's an amusing Adriana anecdote on that theme concerning this common *Echinopsis* which inhabits much of central Chile. She knew it doesn't grow way down south in the cool temperate rain forest of offshore Chiloé Island and was indignant about the resultant misleading indication that it does in the original epithet*. Discovering it had been published later with the corrected form of *E. chilensis* in 1974, she adopted that name. Poor Adriana! She wasn't to know that the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature (ICBN), as it then was, forbids the changing of original names for almost any reason. Fortunately, she was able to correct it in the second edition with the help of her co-author (Hoffmann & Walter 2004). Such are the trials and tribulations of taxonomy. Hands up anyone who dabbles in the discipline and hasn't made a boob. Mine are staying firmly down!

*Possibly '*chiloensis*' was a misspelling or misunderstanding in the first place.

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36) Recovering. The wheelchair has been superseded by a frame, affectionately called a donkey here in Chile! (17 Oct 2020. ARF)



37) Adventive *Opuntia ficus-indica*. (17 Oct 2020. JMW)



38) *Echinopsis chiloensis*. (17 Oct 2020. JMW)

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39) *Echinopsis chiloensis* flower. (17 Oct 2020. ARF)



40) This is the quite rare *Tropaeolum looseri*. Its location very close to us is a valuable new record. (17 Oct 2020. JMW)

To return to the Chinaman's Hill; with those earlier achievements Helga hadn't finished her contributions to distribution records. This time as she scaled the hillside she ran across a real and important scarce endemic rarity, *Tropaeolum looseri* [fig.40]. This truly valuable new location made her trio from the hill up to a remarkable foursome. It's one more indication of how much still awaits botanical explorers in this country.

41) A haircut in times of Covid. (20 Oct 2020. ARF)

I won't exactly say my hair was so long by now that it was falling over my face (I wish I could!), but both Anita and I badly needed cropping to keep up appearances. So, between



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outings a few days later we phoned up our friendly neighbourhood hairdresser and duly underwent the procedure with both parties as protected as could be, although it was impossible for us clients to wear a mask when in the 'hot seat' [fig.41].



42) Adventive chicory, *Cichorium intybus*, a few hundred metres further up our road. (25 Oct 2020. ARF)



43) Chicory flowers. (25 Oct 2020. ARF)

(2) Chicory, *Cichorium intybus* [figs.42, 43], as an escape from cultivation is widespread hereabouts along our wayside verges and, from early on, we noticed it far and wide during our local drives. In fact, it appeared most of the way along our lane connecting us with the main road to Los Andes. But every time we prepared to photograph it, it had turned camera shy and closed, or the light wasn't right, or something. We seemed to be seeing it less and less and feared its flowering period was over. Not a bit of it. One day we went out early at the right time and there it was in its sky-blue glory, a short distance from the house. As a certain law, which I'll call Murphy's for delicacy's sake, tells us, once we'd got our photo it mocked us my turning up everywhere.

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(3) We experienced no such problems with what some call the Scottish Thistle, and others don't! Regardless of that, *Cirsium vulgare* [figs.44, 45], like me, an emigrant from the top end of the planet, put up a superb show along that minor route to Anita's Mum. Not only that, it also supplied us with a photo of a visiting southern veined white butterfly [fig.45].

(Ed.: Though there are some other thistles both native and introduced to Scotland, *Onopordum acanthium* is generally regarded as **The** Scottish Thistle. The thistle has been an important symbol of Scottish heraldry for over 500 years. It also represents one of the highest honours the country can give an individual. Founded by James III in 1687, the Most Ancient and Most Noble Order of the Thistle is an order of chivalry which is bestowed to those who have made an outstanding contribution to the life of Scotland and the greater United Kingdom. HM The Queen alone invests those in the Order of the Thistle which is second only to the Most Noble Order of the Garter in precedence. [*Onopordum acanthium* is also adventive here, but much rarer, being restricted to two regions only, Santiago and another in the south.])



44) Adventive *Cirsium vulgare*. (26 Oct 2020. ARF)

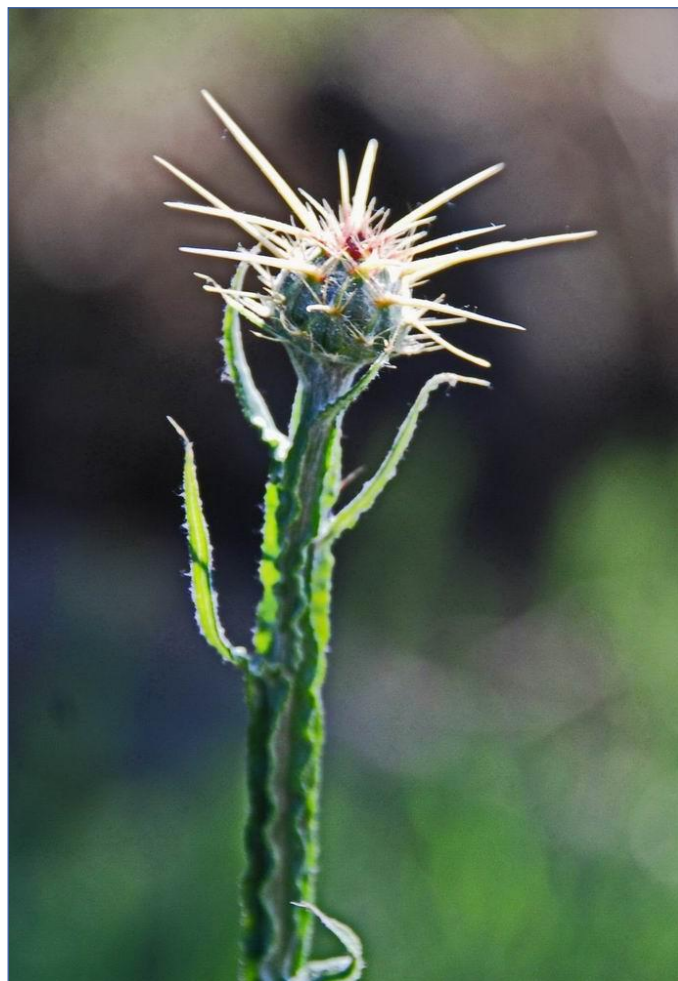


45) *Tatochila mercedis*, the southern veined white butterfly, visiting *Cirsium vulgare*. (26 Oct 2020. JMW)

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46) Adventive *Centaurea melitensis*. (26 Oct 2020. JMW)



47) *Centaurea melitensis* 'touch-me-not' bud. (26 Oct 2020. JMW)

(4) *Centaurea melitensis* [figs.46, 47], another of that introduced composite ilk, has put in more and more appearances around us since we first saw the solitary flower in the photograph at one spot. We like it so much we've collected seed to scatter along the roadside base of our front wall in the hope it may establish. It's a spiny beast, as we know to our cost, so passers-by will get what they've asked for if they try to pick it!

(5) About the same distance away in the opposite direction on another unpopulated hilly rise beside the local lane there we noticed *Loasa placei* [fig.48], our only record ever of the neatly elegant species. My curiosity was aroused by the name of the dedicatee in the specific epithet, but I've been unable to trace anything about anyone to do with botany of that name (a Place name, if you like). In fact, Wikipedia (2018) only lists nine well-known people called Place, the best known being Etta

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Place, the companion of Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, including down here in Patagonia. One of the others was a murderess. At least Lindley tells us in his 1825 protologue that seeds were presented to the RHS Chelsea Physic Garden in 1923 by a Mr Place, who presumably collected them in Chile, but that's as far as we can get.

48) *Loasa placei*, a uniquely erect endemic species.
(27 Oct 2020. JMW)

At this point at the very end of October, nearly a month after our Covid quarantine had ended, we felt sure we'd fully recovered to all intents and purposes. With the recent notable reduction of localised sanitary exclusions, our desire to reach the coast 125 km away again [fig.57]

while this *annus mirabilis* of exceptional floration lasted was insatiable. So, we loaded up the jeep with a day's eats and set off. Just over halfway along the main carriageway, before we'd even seen



anything in bloom worth stopping for, I began to feel queasy and we had to turn back. Obviously, the marginal after-effects of Covid were still kicking in. Try again later ... and we did.

Visits to clinics and hospitals that aren't absolutely necessary are avoided, as these places are among the worst for becoming infected due to the concentration of Covid sufferers there. But when I grazed myself badly in the garden I had to go in to get patched up [fig.49], primarily to avoid the wound becoming infected, which could have meant hospitalisation again. A stitch in time ... (fortunately it didn't need stitching!).

49) Not Covid this time. Me receiving 'masked' treatment at our local health service clinic for a minor graze. (15 Nov 2020. ARF)

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(6) Although the main highway to Santiago from where we access the rich flora of the Chacabuco Pass (Watson & Flores 2018) [figs.50, 56] was still sealed off by the sanitary cordon, as proven botanists we managed to get special police permission to make a brief visit to see whether there



might be any interesting plants we hadn't recorded during our frequent previous times there. As we began the ascent up the old pass road over the new tunnel, we passed a number of ubiquitous *Vachellia* (syn. *Acacia*) *caven* [fig.51] covered in masses of their small yellow fragrant powder puffs. But at the top eagle-eyed Anita spotted a real winner, tucked inconspicuously away at the base of a shrubby thicket beyond the road along with a clump of horsetails. It was the unusually coloured small cactus *Eriosyce curvispina* [figs.52, 53]. It made our day.

50) A slightly earlier vista towards Los Andes from the top of the old Chacabuco Pass. (5 Sep 2020. JMW)

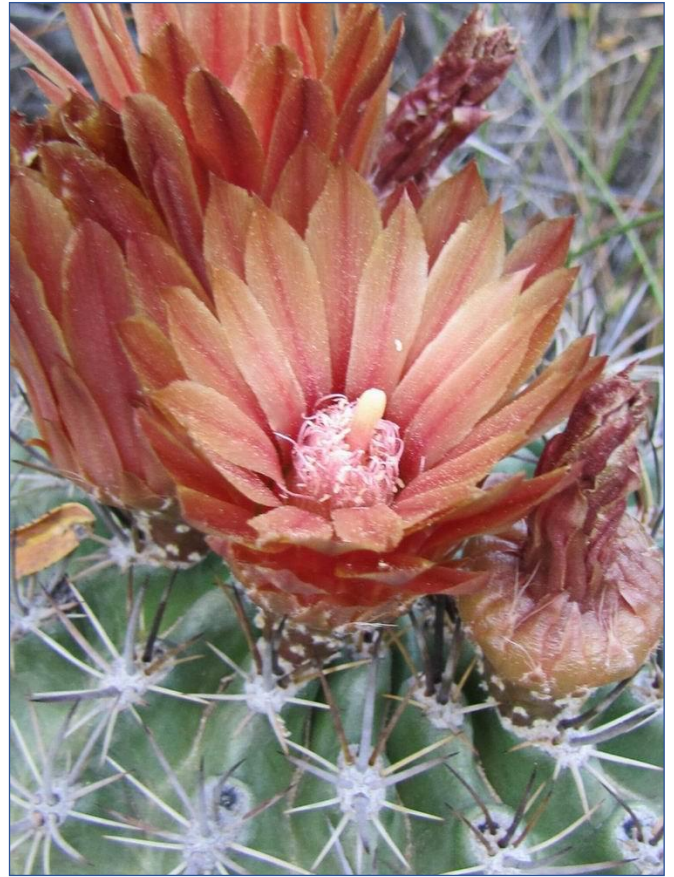


51) *Acacia caven* is the accepted name in Chile, but it is now recognised internationally as *Vachellia caven*, *Acacia* being restricted to Australian taxa. (18 Nov 2020. JMW)

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52) *Eriosyce curvispina*. (18 Nov 2020. JMW)



53) *Eriosyce curvispina*, close up. (18 Nov 2020. JMW)



54) Our friend Cotello and his family at Los Ranchillos looking surprisingly happy considering a wild puma has just killed some of their stock animals! (11 Apr 2014. JMW)

Our supposition that Los Ranchillos and the road there would be richly floriferous, including with its endemic rarities, was bitterly disappointed. The whole of the upper pass area had been smitten by an earlier fiercely hot spell which had turned the greenery to dried hay and choked off all later flowering bar a few such as the cacti. But at least we managed to visit our friend and host there, Cotello, and his family [fig.54] and enjoy the wild birds [fig.55] attracted by the grain he cast about for his domestic fowls.



55) The diuca finch, *Diuca diuca*, enjoys the left-overs of Cotello's bantams' chickenfeed. (5 Sep 2020. JMW)

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56) The main road to and from our community as seen from the middle of the Chacabuco Pass. (5 Sep 2020. JMW)

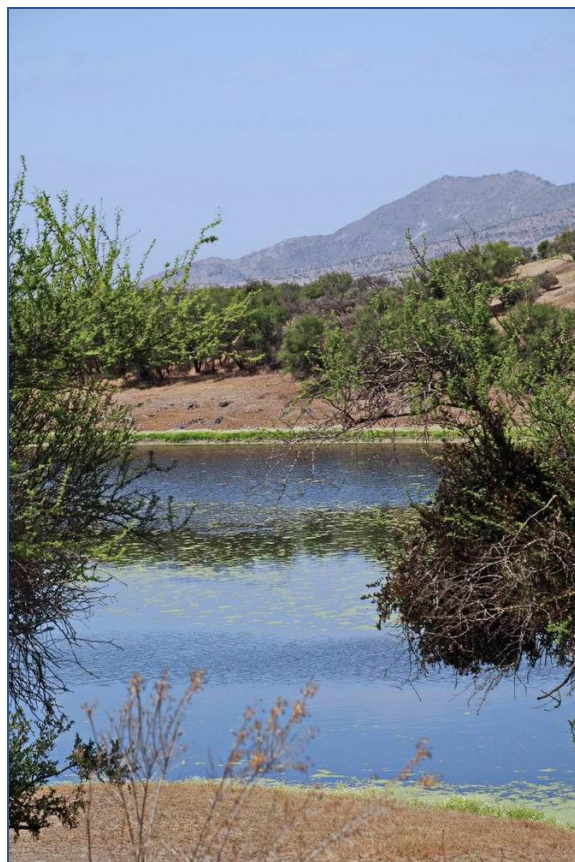


57) Our last and longest two floral journeys. Arrows indicate the coastal route we followed on the second. (Map by courtesy of Turistel)

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58) Adventive *Melia azedarach* flowering and fruiting simultaneously. (8 Nov 2020. JMW)



59) The Rungue reservoir 25 km to the southwest of our home. (8 Nov 2020. JMW)

Venturing a little further afield

(8th November 2020)

(7) After the coast debacle we had to set our sights lower and decided on Rungue which lies on the main north-south carriageway 30 km to our SW as the condor flies (an appropriate analogy, as we shall see). With its scattered clearings in the dry woodland, it contains a small but interesting Chilean endemic flora, above all *Tropaeolum azureum* and many variations of the natural hybrid *T. x tenirostre*, although it was far too late now for those anyway. But as much as anything we wanted to find out whether this first rainy season for some years had filled the dried-up reservoir there, which it had [fig.59]. In our first part of this trilogy, we showed the attractive clusters of hanging berries of *Melia azedarach* (biblical sounding epithet!) in a layby just up the main road from us. This time the trees were simultaneously in fruit and flower [fig.58] as we passed at the start of our journey to Rungue. The direct route takes us to the Chacabuco pass, then to Los Ranchillos and on through open countryside via a small country lane which gradually descends to meet Chile's main highway. From there it's only a little way south to Rungue village. Spring had indeed passed long since, but we lunched beside the reservoir [fig.60] and found our only wildflower, *Senecio chilensis* [fig. 61], thriving

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on a dumped pile of broken road surface rubble where someone had set up a metal tray to use for target practice [fig.62] ... but happily not while we were there!



60) Yours truly lunching under trees beside the reservoir.
(8 Nov 2020. ARF)



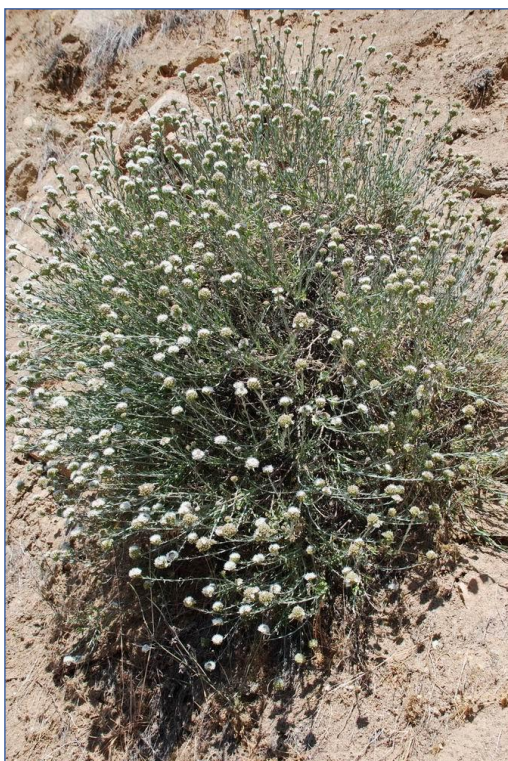
61) *Senecio chilensis*, one from the ever confusing and most abundant of the country's genera at 231 accepted species!
(8 Nov 2020. JMW)



62) The rubble pile at our lunch spot, home to the senecio and also chosen by someone for target practice. (8 Nov 2020. JMW)

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We decided to carry on a bit further along a snaking 13 km cross-country run to the small community of Tilttil. It incorporates an irresistible kiosk market where we buy home-made bread containing chopped olives and other such home-made delicacies, both savoury and sweet. Several interesting plants began to put in an appearance by the wayside, most of which we'd already seen and photographed, but including one outstanding novelty for us, the dwarf subshrublet *Malesherbia fasciculata* [figs.63, 64]. We'd only ever encountered it once before as a distinct variety way up north by the coast. In fact, we didn't realise for a good while that they're both the same species, as ours here, the type, has a fuzz of protruding stamens, while they are sessile in var. *glandulosa* (Rodríguez & Marticorena 2019). Such are the intricacies of plant taxonomy! The flowers attracted flying insects of many kinds, and one proved to be a surprise bonus, providing us with our one and only photo ever of another South American skipper butterfly *Heliopyrgus americanus* [fig.65] (Peña & Ugarte 1997).



63) *Malesherbia fasciculata*. (8 Nov 2020. JMW)



64) *Malesherbia fasciculata*, close up. (8 Nov 2020. JMW)

The short, unmade drive-through of our destination with its rows of kiosks on either side provided all we wanted and more. Afterwards we crossed the goods train railway line to the other side of Tilttil and looked around there for the first time. A long, well-executed wall mural of local occupations, of which part is illustrated here [fig.66], delighted us. We also got permission from two figures at work by the roadside to take their photos [figs.67, 68].

It was a memorable visit, but in more ways than one, as we suffered an extremely worrying situation with the jeep. It had already been causing us trouble on the approach by the difficulty to near

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impossibility of engaging the lower and reverse gears, obliging us to stop only for unmissables such as the *Malesherbia*. This reached a pitch at Tilttil, when we had to get local folks to push start us with second gear connected. To our relief we at least got going, but were faced with the entire return journey. It seemed to have improved after a while and we even stopped to photograph the turkey vultures soaring gracefully in circles over the vast tip where rubbish from a wide area around is buried [fig.69] just before taking the cross-country road back [fig.70]. Anita needed to visit her Mum on the outskirts of Los Andes, and the jeep seemed reliable enough now to allow us to do so first rather than making a direct bee-line for home. We parked in her cul-de-sac, and when we tried to start the gears simply wouldn't engage, no matter what, even with a neighbour pushing. We phoned up our local mech, who ferried us home, towed the jeep back to his place and fixed it a couple of days later. We shudder to think of our fate had that happened at Tilttil!

65) *Heliopyrgus americanus*, a checkered skipper, on *Malesherbia fasciculata* .(8 Nov 2020. JMW)



66) Tilttil, the apogee of our penultimate sortie. The sort of street art (not graffiti!) that delights us. (8 Nov 2020. ARF)



67) A road worker at Tiltill. (8 Nov 2020. ARF)

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68) If you need help in your garden, here's the man for the job at Tiltill. (8 Nov 2020. JMW)

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69) You can tell from afar the position of the rubbish area on the main carriageway 20 km SW of our home by the circling vultures above it! (8 Nov 2020. JMW)



70) The road home from Tiltil and Rungue. (8 Nov 2020. JMW)

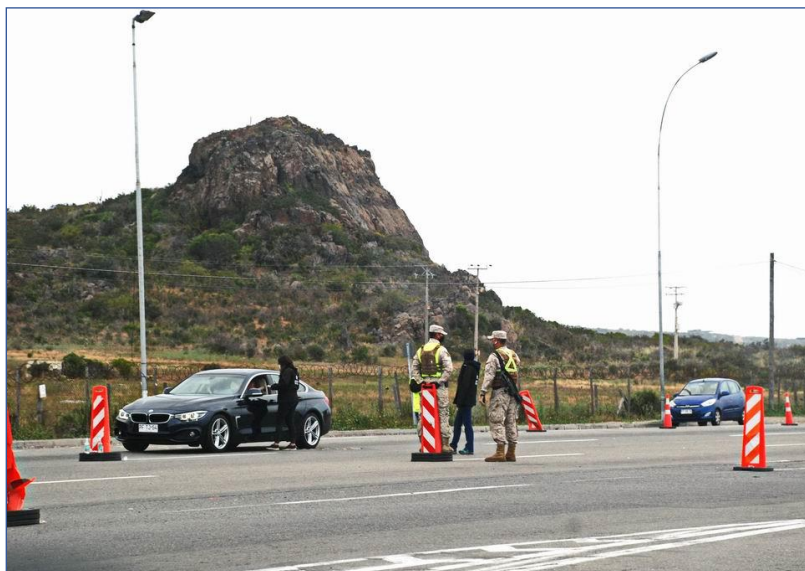
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There's only one more incident to report from during this time. As noted above, I've omitted the frequent number of journeys towards, and finally to, the base of the Andes and the overbearing number of plants seen underway. On the last one we attempted to drive up the steep, curving final pass road to the top where it levels off at almost 3000 m, but halfway up we both suffered a difficulty of breathing associated with Covid and had to turn back. Obviously, it takes a good while to recover completely from the virus, even when infected as relatively lightly as we were.

Behold, the sea!

(9 November 2020)

Twelve days after our first aborted attempt we decided to give the coast another shot. Reports of its flora there had us drooling and we wanted to see it at any reasonable cost. However, we made new plans which took possible emergency contingencies into account, including another immediate turn around if I felt bad. They involved the journey being broken up into relatively easy stages over three days with rests by the coast for the first two nights. This time we invited Helga along again, who not only delights in our botanical forays, but also shares the driving duty with Anita. When we told her of the three-day scheme with overnight stops at rented cabins she was horrified. What if the staff hadn't disinfected the rooms carefully after previous clients, and those had been infected by the virus? However small the risk, it was still too great to take for something inessential. Reluctantly we had to agree with her, and an alternative was cooked up which still incorporated my 'just in case' regression option. We had to admit the strong possibility of a repeat of the earlier disappointing experience, but would try to do the entire journey both ways in one day, that's to say about 190 km out and the same back. In retrospect it was mad idea fraught with potential disaster, but we were too blinded by our craving to see the Pacific littoral flora to make rational decisions.



71) To get to Los Vilos on the coast, our desired destination, we had to pass a sanitary cordon underway. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)

Although there were no lockdowns along our route, only sanitary checks [fig.71] we'd been warned we couldn't enter Los Vilos, which was quarantined, without permission. Luckily Helga's daughter has influence 'in high places', and got us the

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required documents, not that there wouldn't be more than enough to satisfy us if those failed. We stopped underway for a meal break and rest at a large petrol station with a restaurant. There was considerable relief soon after when we passed the spot where I'd conked out before, but was still feeling as chirpy as when we started out 'in the middle of the night' this time. Not too much further on we crossed the not unduly high coastal range at El Melón. The new tunnel beneath is very expedient and well worth the toll, but despite needing to stop as little as possible at this stage we decided to reserve it for the return and take the road over the top to record the flora there as a 'fail safe', being the first we would encounter, and also stop for another snack. Thus our hoped-for desiderata for the day began to materialize, and pointed to the bounty that lay ahead. *Schizanthus pinnatus* [fig.72] may be the commonest wild 'poor man's orchid', but so what? It was generously clothing the roadside slopes here and there as we ascended. Most of what we saw and photographed didn't match the same species down by the coast ahead. But what species was that curious, red-stemmed *Oxalis* which we'd never met before and was clinging to a sheer, exposed earth wall on the curvy way down the other side? It's taken a good while to run to earth (pardon the unintended pun), but rejoices under the epithet of *O. strictula* [fig.73], From what I can gather it normally has very large leaves and both they and the stem are green, so ours must be an impoverished 'environmental special'.

And so down to the coast just over 30 km further away now [fig.74]. Once there the flora just went on and on for us in quantity and variety all the remaining 40 km to Los Vilos, which we entered via our permits without problems. Escaped introductions, natives and endemics, all were represented. Where to begin? Perhaps the carpet of colour presented by Californian poppies and Benghali vetches [fig.75]. I often wonder what Chilean springtime waysides were like before all these introductions arrived. Rich in species but not nearly as showy, I fancy.

So much was now crowding in and demanding our attention that at times we seemed to be bumping up our photographic records non-stop without getting anywhere towards Los Vilos! As if that mattered. We were here to see lots of flowers whether or not we completed our intended journey. One, *Calceolaria corymbosa* [figs.76, 77] along the top of a rise a little way back from the coast was a familiar old friend there, but we were most satisfied to get our first digital images of it.

The sea itself and adjacent littoral inland sector to just beyond the line of hills that border it was bathed in damp Pacific sea fog, known locally as 'camanchaca' [fig.78]. From past visits we know this can easily last all day, with no more than occasional hazy glimpses of sun, if that. This is an extremely important climatic phenomenon as it's responsible for the delights we were experiencing. It not only fosters plant growth but maintains floration for far longer than if it were exposed to hot, dry sun, such as we ran into over the final short way north of Los Vilos that we added to our itinerary.

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72) Common *Schizanthus pinnatus*. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



73) This is the only time we've seen *Oxalis strictula*.
(10 Nov 2020. JMW)



74) Yes, we have cormorants in Chile too. Here, greeting our arrival at the coast, the Brazilian or black cormorant, *Phalacrocorax brasilianus*.
(10 Nov 2020. JMW)

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75) Introduced *Vicia benghalensis* and *Eschscholzia californica* making a spectacular wayside bedding display. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



76) Our accompanying neighbour Helga admiring *Calceolaria corymbosa* at eye level. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)

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77) *Calceolaria corymbosa*. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



78) Daily Pacific coastal fog, camanchaca, is the local climate which sustains and prolongs flowering there. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)

Below, 79) Mixed coastal roadside display including *Alstroemeria pulchra* and *Leucocoryne ixioides*. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



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80) The surprising dwarf *Lupinus microcarpus*. (10 Nov 2020.

JMW)



81) *Oenothera acaulis* enjoys a wide elevation range from the coast here to the Andes. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



82) *Oenothera acaulis*, close up. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



83) *Alstroemeria pulchra* "looking down from the balcony". (10 Nov 2020. JMW)

The wayside 'mixed border' effect was continued by the endemic native flora as well [fig.79]. A delightful little surprise we'd never come across before and didn't even know existed was next to appear on the scene, namely the neat dwarf *Lupinus microcarpus* [fig.80]. Sadly, it's annual, but would be no less welcome in cultivation for that. We needed no introduction though to a familiar old

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friend, the endemic evening primrose, *Oenothera acaulis* [figs.81, 82], which we first encountered at 1900 m in the Andes of Santiago during our first 1971/72 visit. This common and appealing perennial grows in eight political regions from Coquimbo, its location here, southwards. We have never ever seen *Alstroemeria pulchra* [fig.83] anything remotely like so prolific, whether in distribution, abundance or floration as on this trip! Pretty as was *Schizanthus pinnatus* [fig.72], our first recorded species on this trip, it couldn't hold a candle to the distinctly rarer *S. litoralis* [fig.84] which is never found too far from the coast.



84) The striking *Schizanthus litoralis*. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



85) Helga and Anita wandering away from the jeep and discovering nolanas. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)

By now we were within sight of Los Vilos. We passed through town, set on its peninsula, and down to the sea at the tip, where the terrain was much flatter and it was easier to wander around away from the jeep. Easier for Anita and Helga [fig.85] that is, who don't suffer from my balance problems! Their circuit paid off, as they found two species of the same Solanaceous genus, if utterly different. Tiny-flowered, succulent rock-carpeting coastal *Nolana crassulifolia* [fig.86] was one, a matchless example of form evolved to fit habitat. The contrasting *Nolana paradoxa* [fig.87] with its eye-catching blue 'morning glory' flowers was the other: it can also be found a bit further inland.

We couldn't resist going a bit further north to visit one of our all-time favourite alstroemerias, *A. hookeri* subsp. *maculata* [fig.88], a perfectly proportioned little chap. It was on top form, as we could show to Helga, who was as thrilled with it as we are.

Just beyond Los Vilos a side road leads off inland over a semi-wooded pass on the coastal hills. We decided to look at what might be going (or growing!) there. But as soon as we headed inland the mist ended abruptly, to be replaced by strong and pleasant sunshine. As a downside of that, everywhere was sere and flowerless at ground level, so we stopped at a leafy lay-by on the pass for afternoon tea [fig.89], and then turned back for home, which we eventually reached at just after 1 a.m. But meanwhile that layby yielded just one last species, and a worthy one at that, the endemic shrub

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Lobelia polyphylla [fig.90] (or Polyfilla if you want a bit of DIY childish silliness). Not that you'd ever associate it on sight with the familiar blue annual garden species of that genus. As a positive closing note I can report with great satisfaction that I suffered no negative effects whatever all day, and arrived home as sprightly as when we started (some might say that was because I didn't have to drive like the other two!).



86) *Nolana crassulifolia*, one of the smallest flowered of its genus. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



87) *Nolana paradoxa*. Believe it or not, nolanas belong to the potato family, and are not related to the bindweed (10 Nov 2020. JMW)

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88) The seven dwarfs looking for Snow White. *Alstroemeria hookeri* subsp. *maculata*. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)



89) Helga and myself having a tea break a bit inland at the farthest end of our journey. (10 Nov 2020. ARF)



90) *Lobelia polyphylla*, our final record that day. (10 Nov 2020. JMW)

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91) Our new species, known for now as *Oxalis* "terra-mortuis".
(8 Dec 2020. JMW)
[Soon to be named *Oxalis ranchillos*.]

92) One of our many *Liolaemus tenuis* garden lizards, here a gaudily clad male. (26 Jan 2021. ARF)



93) *Ipomoea purpurea*, a welcome self-introduction to our garden. (27 Jan 2021. ARF)

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It got better and better

(8th December 2020 to 7th February 2021, with a 12th April PS)

Since that outing to the coast, we've made one quick morning's drive up to the Chacabuco Pass and on to Los Ranchillos to follow up an accurate report of a different site there for our soon to be named *Oxalis ranchillos* [fig.91]. Other than that, all our journeys have been local and mostly more or less necessary, such as shopping and medical, with two for the latter at the neighbouring San Felipe hospital. The rest of our time has been spent eating outside in the garden during the hotter or warmer part of the day and enjoying its fauna such as our endearing little lizards [fig.92], a big orange-brown wasp [fig.95] and our native blue, skipper, veined white, clouded yellow and painted lady butterflies; also the avifauna, now augmented by our migrant hummingbirds. The late flowering garden inhabitants [figs.93-97] continue unabated. Most surprising are two, which we first photographed five months ago, still performing for all their worth as I write, [fig.98]!



94) *Dierama pulcherrima* "fishing rods". (27 Jan 2021. ARF)



95) *Sphex latreillei*, a large spider-hunting wasp on one of our *Euphorbia marginate* plants. (18 Jan 2021. ARF)

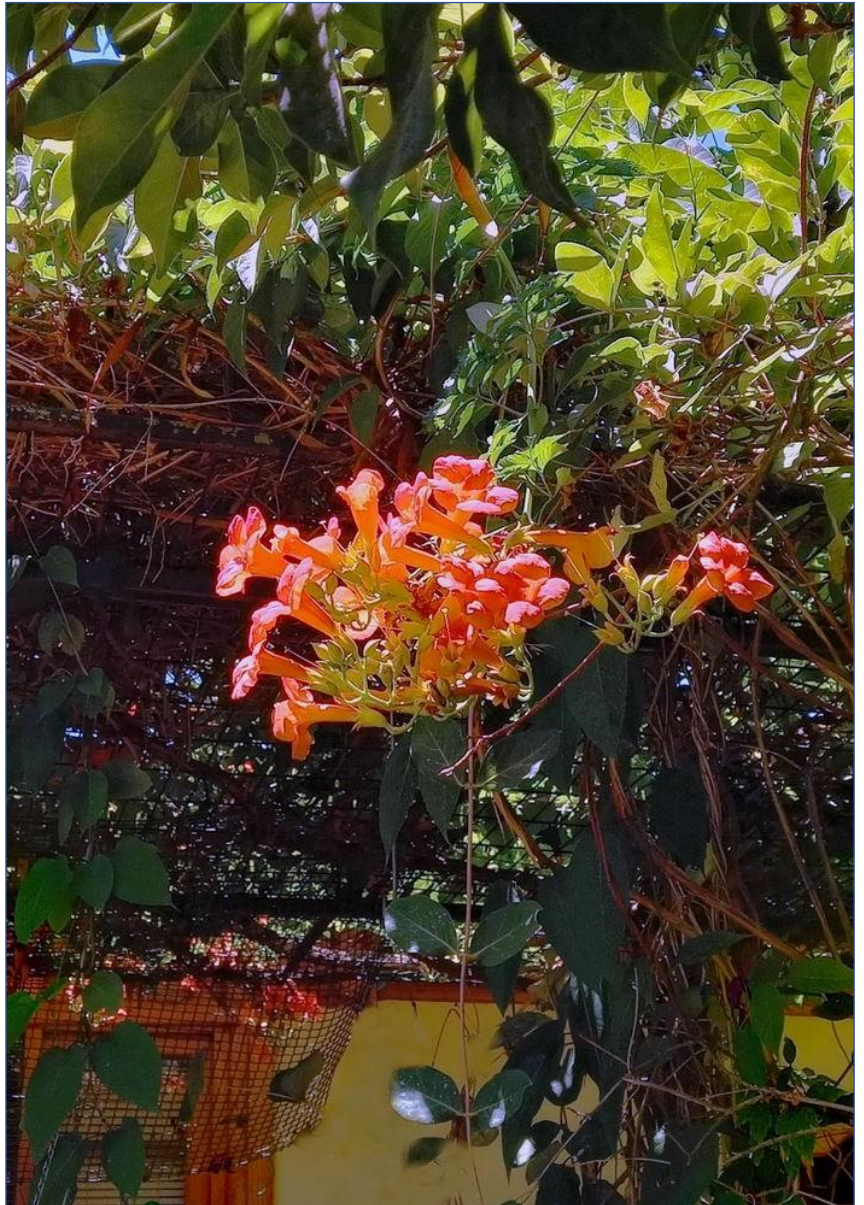
When not merely enjoying and photographing all those we've continued with our never-ending work [fig.99], attended to such necessary chores as we can around the house and garden, or sallied forth to Los Andes. That too has provided its memorable

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moments, including a late street meal at our favourite sushi restaurant where we met and chatted to some friendly folks at the next table who kindly added to our photos [figs.100-102].



96) *Cyrtanthus elatus*. Happily our frosts are not strong or prolonged enough to stop it growing outside. (7 Feb 2021. JMW)



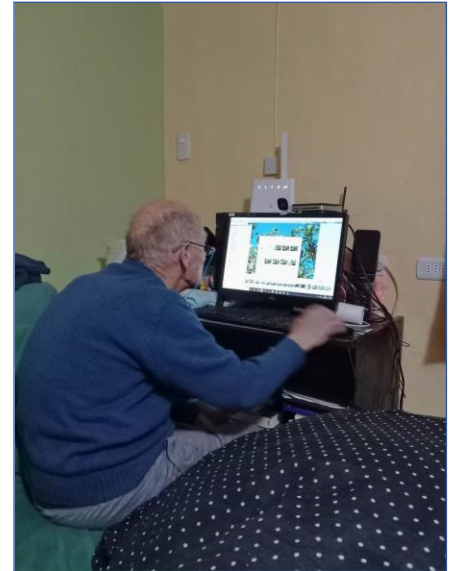
97) *Campsis grandiflora* on the pergola over our house patio. (2 Jan 2020. ARF)



98) Still going strong. Five months after photos 5 and 20 here, a vase of the same *Dietes* and burgundy *alstroemeria* on our dining room table! (12 Apr 23 2021. JMW)

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99) Happily back at work again while comfortably esconced on the bed, a further therapeutical aid to recovery. (26 Oct 2020. ARF)



100) With the restrictions eased slightly in Los Andes we were able to enjoy a meal in the street there at 2 m or so from the nearest table. (25 Nov 2020. ARF)

101) What could be more pleasant than enjoying a Japanese meal together outside, despite the bandaging for a temporary attack of oedema. (25 Nov 2020. Photo by a fellow diner)



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102) And here I am, mask removed and expert with the chop sticks, tucking into the delicious sushis. (25 Nov 2020. ARF)



103) Maybe I can't walk much nowadays, or get a vehicle road licence here, but at least I can drive this supermarket buggy! (13 Jan 2021. ARF)

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104) ... including doing my bit by sharing shopping tasks. (13 Jan 2021. ARF)

My life was also enriched unexpectedly during a visit to our large (as its name suggests) 'Jumbo' supermarket. I can move around easily there using the shopping trolley as a sort of wheeled walking frame, but there were many people around at the time and it was decided to be safer for me if I waited in the jeep. I hadn't been there too long when Anita and her sister returned and asked me to follow them into the super, as they had a surprise. At the entrance

an assistant appeared in a electric wheeled shopping buggy, got off and told me to get on. It didn't take long to get the hang of the controls on the handlebars, and I had a great time zooming up and down the aisles, grabbing any edibles or drinks that took my fancy and performing intricate manoeuvres to avoid others, or backing out if the way was blocked. Best of all, I could even help the girls with the shopping, above all the heavy bottles of pure water [figs.103-104]. I can't wait to have another go, and only wish there was something similar for plant hunting!

So why is this last subheading 'It got better and better' rather than 'It gets better and better'? The chosen tense is deliberate. As I write (mid-April) Chile has been suffering a new wave of Covid infections, and with most older people such as myself vaccinated twice by now, it's mainly hitting the pre-retirement group of all ages, having just dropped as mainly between forty and the mid-fifties to the below forties. This has been greatly exacerbated by the spread of new strains evolved by the virus. Our Valparaiso Region has been one of the harder hit, and as a result of that most of it, including our community, is now under lockdown quarantine. Permission for shopping must be obtained from the police and is limited to two hours twice a week. Otherwise only medical and such emergencies are catered for. Those who can and want to are free to exercise or walk dogs and children outside between six and nine in the morning only. We prefer our warm, comfortable bed,

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thank you! Once again then we're confined within the fortunate consolations of the garden and its flowers plus views across the open countryside to the mountains beyond and our endless and varied work at the p.c. Beyond that we can only dream nostalgically on. [fig. 105] while waiting and hoping for better times like everybody else.

J.M.W.



105) Southern Cross over the Villarica volcano, S Chile. Wishful thinking - if only we could get there again. (Photo courtesy of Tomáš Slovinský)

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--- The Fun of Growing ---

SOWING GENTIANA CLUSII AND SUBSEQUENT SELECTION OF ITS COLOURED FORMS - Text and photos: Jaroslav Baláž, Dolní Rožínka, Czechia.

I apologize in advance for the slightly longer title of this article, but I couldn't really think of anything more appropriate. But now on to the topic. I have been interested in *Gentiana* from the Megalanthe Section for a long time and I have carried out and in fact still carry out its propagation, especially the sowing of seeds of various coloured forms. When gentians from the Himalayas came to us in the 1990s, enthusiasm for new species did not end. I remember my friend Holubec's lecture and the sighs over the projected images. Over time, however, it has become clear that our conditions for some Asian species in our gardens are so different that it is quite difficult to keep them in the garden for a long time. At least for me, they usually behaved like short-lived plants, and even though they bloomed, I didn't usually get any seeds. Although I must admit that I still try a few species today, but only marginally and for fun. This was one of the main reasons why my interest in European *Gentiana* grew, as individuals with different flower colours can sometimes be found in their localities. The



colour forms of *Gentiana angustifolia* are commonly known, and I have also seen variously coloured individuals *Gentiana acaulis* (syn. *G. kochiana*) at Lake Garda in Italy. Probably the most common colour variations occur in *Gentiana clusii*, and many of them have already been described.

Left: *Gentiana clusii*, in classic blue form, below, one of Baláž' forms



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Gentiana clusii from Upper Bavaria is the best for selections from seedlings.

I began to wonder if it would not be possible to expand the more colourful range of flowers in at least some species. It is known that the literature mentions unusual colour forms of this species, which I consider quite unlikely, but that can only be my opinion. This applies mainly to yellow-flowered forms, although from the sowing of the form 'Alba' some plants in the buds have a yellow colour, which after flowering partially passes into the inflorescences.



A few years ago, I had already written something about European Gentians from the stemless group in our magazine (see Skalničky 3/2011). I also published an article of *Gentiana clusii*, which I selected from the sowing and which was quite similar to the clone 'Tamino' ('Tamino' is circled in this illustration from Halda's book.) To this day, I grow it in my garden mainly because of its unusual colour of flowers. In another article in the magazine (Skalničky spring 2013) I mention two other colour forms of gentian, *Gentiana*

clusii 'Rosea' and 'Violacea', which, like many others, served me to pollinate other colour forms and their subsequent selection. There is also a mention of the distribution of *Gentiana clusii* in its natural habitats, which stretches from the Pyrenees, through the Alps to the Carpathians. In such a large area, there is a fairly large assumption of finding colour variations that could be used for mutual pollination with forms grown in culture. It is interesting that some forms of sowings obtained in this

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way retain their original colour. As an example, I can cite the form of 'Violacea', which has been stabilized by giving offspring today more or less identical to the parents.

Gentiana clusii
'Violacea' –
below, colour
forms of *G. clusii*
raised by
Jaroslav Baláž,
including one
with promising
red tones.



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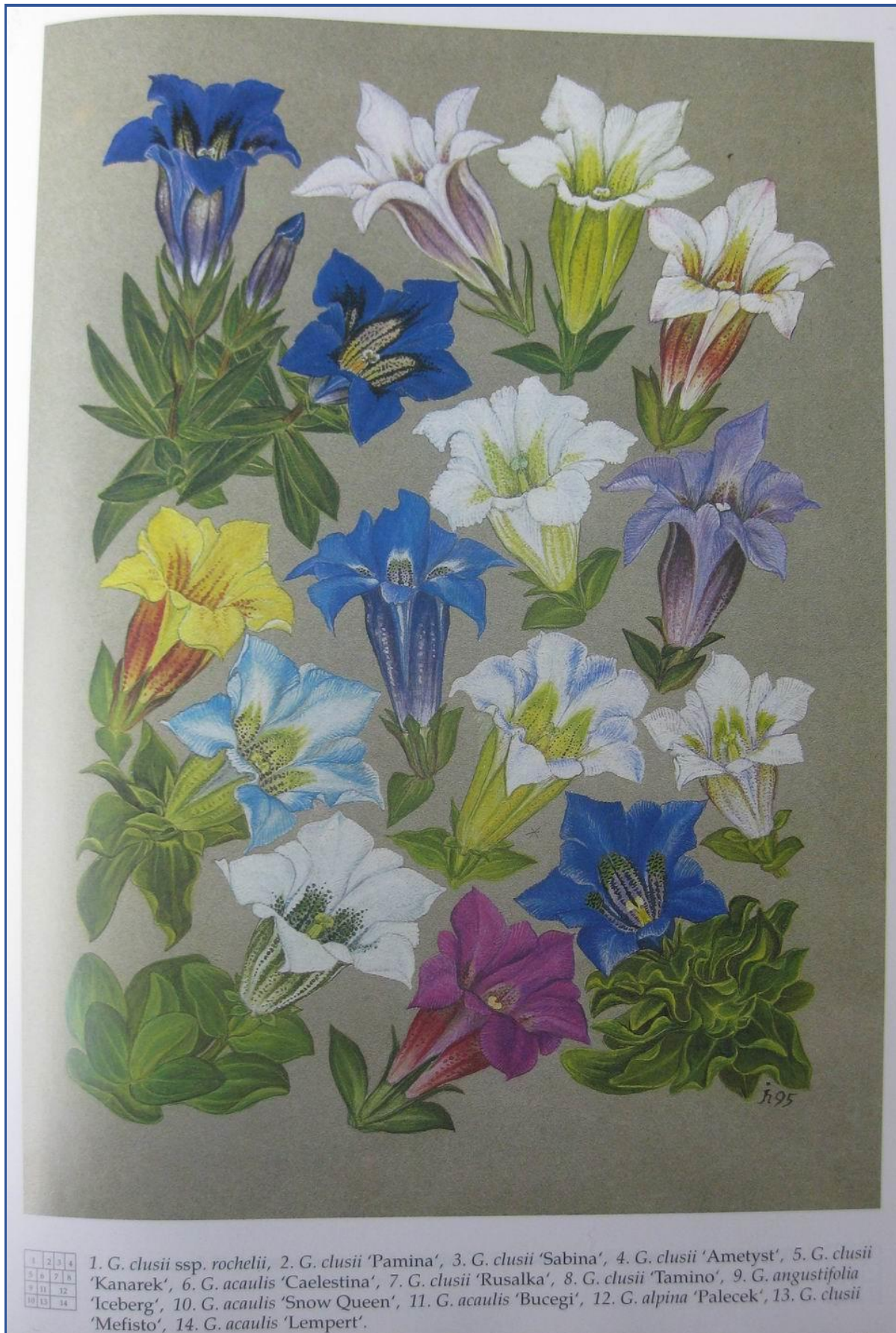


A very dark seedling of *G. clusii* from Jaroslav Baláž.

The same can be said of *G. clusii* 'Alba', and there is some hope in the form with reddish flowers. The advantage of this method is the possibility to obtain new colour forms, which do not occur in natural localities, due to their mutual remoteness. However, it must be taken into account that it takes up to three years from sowing to flowering, which is quite time consuming. Another problem occurs in the propagation of selected clones. Subsequent sowing does not succeed in most cases, and from vegetative propagation, when it is already successful, the yield is very low. Nevertheless, I think it's worth the effort and the selection of flowering plants is a joy that is worth it. In conclusion, I would like to say that the purpose of this article is not to describe new colour variations, but rather the possibility of expanding the colour range of this undoubtedly attractive species.

And I can wish everyone a green thumb while experimenting !

J.B.



Page of illustrations by Jarmila Haldová of *G. clusii* colour forms in the book 'The Genus Gentiana' by Josef J. Halda (ISBN 80-901846-6-9).