

International Rock Gardener

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Welcome to the sixteenth year of the International Rock Gardener. It is hard to believe that this online magazine, freely available to all online, was begun in 2010 – how time flies. In that time, on account of a lack of submissions only one issue has been missed, so be warned that if you enjoy reading the IRG and are keen to have many subjects covered, then why not submit an article yourself? Write to editor@internationalrockgardener.net.

In this issue, the renowned English plantsman, Robert Rolfe, gives a flavour of the wonderful Royal Horticultural Society garden of Harlow Carr in Harrogate, Yorkshire. Robert concentrates on spring and summer in this article but, as he says, he hopes “that this account will encourage others visit Harlow Carr where, even if the weather misbehaves, they can anticipate a horticultural tour de force.”

Gerrit and Ibelje Eijkelenboom continue their travels with part two of Orchids of southern France, the orchids in the month of May. These two travel widely with their cameras to document the orchids they see, and generously give advice on how others might see them too.

Cover image: *Sanguinaria canadensis* 'Multiplex' – photo Robert Rolfe.



Iep (Ibeltje) Eijkelenboom taking pictures in a vast meadow on the Col de Valouse.

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--- Garden to Visit ---

RHS Harlow Carr's Streamside and Woodland displays in spring and summer: Robert Rolfe (text and photos)



Harlow Carr: Woodland and bank to the right, looking uphill towards the main buildings.

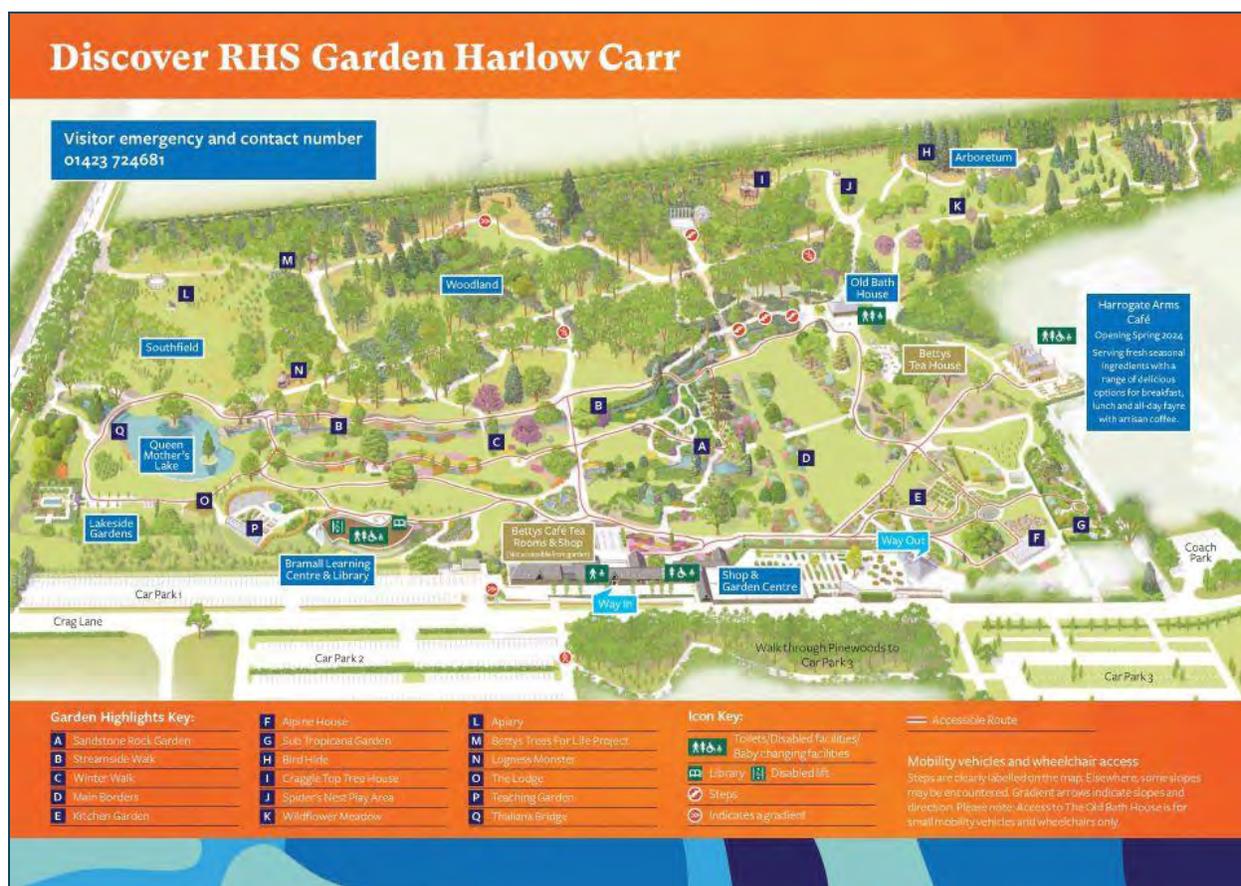
Introduction

The Northern Horticultural Society (NHS) was founded in 1946 with the objective of 'promoting and developing the science, art and practice of horticulture with special reference to the conditions pertaining to the North of England'. When, two years later, it leased from Harrogate Borough Council around 26 acres (10.5 ha) of mixed woodland, pasture and arable land, principally for use as a trial ground, it began with what a later chairman, Donald Ineson, described as 'neglected woodlands and unattractive pasture'. Opened to the public in 1950, [Harlow Carr Botanical Gardens](#) have more than doubled in size over the ensuing 75 years, with extensive – and as I write ongoing – redevelopment after the NHS merged with the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) in 2001.

The spelling was altered from 'Car' to 'Carr', an Old Norse word meaning 'an area of fen with scrub (especially willow)'. As can easily be deduced from this, drainage of the land has presented difficulties from the outset and while various strategies have been deployed, Nature is not easily tamed. In November 2022, for example, torrential rain led to extensive flooding of the valley bottom, delaying the opening of the 'Glow' event since the lights positioned to

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illuminate the gardens after nightfall were substantially submerged. To counteract such inundations, a series of measures have been put in place, including large, stabilising sandstone boulders along the banks, bioswales (ditches populated with tenacious plants), rain gardens (strategic depressions that absorb surface water) and rills. In winter and early spring, the traditional practise of willow spiling has been carried out, involving thick, unrooted but live willow rods which are driven vertically into the ground wherever erosion is worst. These are the struts between which thinner, pliable whips are woven to form a basket-style wall, further strengthened when the main rods sprout in the spring and sediment steadily accumulates.



[Map of Harlow Carr Gardens from RHS site.](#)

Coverage

Harlow Carr's outstanding feature, The Streamside (its definite article often dropped), is a much altered and relandscaped tributary of the 56-mile-long River Nidd. Defining the lowest areas, it separates the woodland overlooking its western banks from the main borders, the sandstone rock garden and other components and groupings spread across the slope that constitute the main vista as you survey the gardens from the Crag Lane entrance.

I'm confining my attention to Streamside, Woodland and an assortment of rock work groupings, some of the latter recently added, but of whatever vintage typically associated with

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ponds and linked by rills. My account spans six months, from late March through to early September, when *Cyclamen hederifolium*, a modest scattering of hybrid colchicums and the bright red berries of *Arum italicum* 'Marmoratum' usher in autumn. The images, taken over the past five years, convey some of the spring and summer floral highlights.

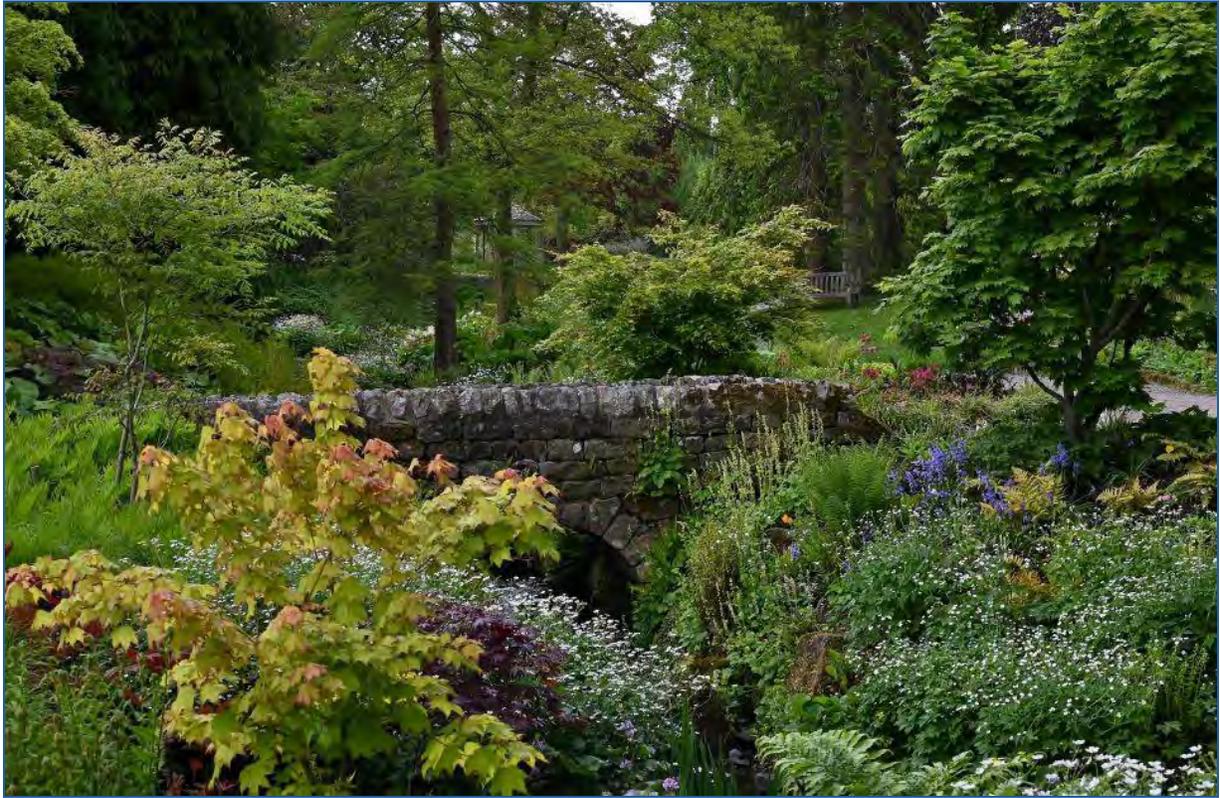


Arum italicum subsp. *italicum* 'Marmoratum' and *Cyclamen hederifolium* in the autumn.



Streamside in
mid-April

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Streamsideside view in mid-May



Streamsideside, early June

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Plan of attack

Invariably my route follows the same initial course, before I strike out elsewhere. Once past the entrance, turn right and walk across to the alpine house. From there head downhill to the Old Bath House, in doing so skirting what used to be a series of informal beds, at their best in spring, now replaced by a sizeable, unified planting allied with the Harrogate Arms refurbishment scheme.



The Harrogate Arms site in early May 2023



The Harrogate Arms in June 2024

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At the bottom lies what amounts to a horticultural amphitheatre: an extensive rock bank around five metres high. Fairly narrow, informal steps either side allow you to reach the top – and the adjoining woodland – in just over a minute if you don't stop to admire the peripheral plantings, or aren't obliged to wait for others approaching from above. My preference is instead to turn right at the foot of the main steps, following the base of the bank gradually upwards until it merges with the woodland plateau. Turning left there and following the bark-surfaced main path, progress westwards, either staying under the trees or else dropping down to Streamside and skirting the water course through to the edge of Southfield, ten to fifteen minutes distant. This open expanse marks the end of the woodland and the start of the rivulet, preceded by the Queen Mother Lake, from which it flows. It's then a matter of backtracking along the other side of stream and quartering the adjacent main gardens.

Location

Situated west-south-west of Harrogate town centre, just under two miles distant, RHS Harlow Carr is an hour's drive from the Yorkshire Dales. I first visited in the mid-1970s, by when much of the old, redundant woodland had been cleared. I've not been there before late March, my seasonal start-point for this article. Harrogate in winter and earliest spring can be bleak: choose your day carefully. Compared with some other RHS gardens it is well served by public transport, from a town centre bus stop just 100 yards right from the train station. If you haven't travelled by car and prefer to use your legs, it's a pleasant, mainly downhill walk back there.

Should you be especially fortunate – as I was in mid-June 2021 – you might witness the impromptu spectacle of the [Red Arrows aerobatic display team](#) hurtling by, seemingly at rooftop level, as a curtain-closer.

Red Arrows photo ex Internet.





Erythronium dens-canis



Pulmonaria 'Blue Ensign'

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The start of spring

Striking up the display in March, *Erythronium dens-canis* is the incontestable highlight of the more easterly woodland, a harbinger of a generous sampling of that genus thereabouts through to early May. Obscured only a few weeks later, this has settled in happily, attended by hepaticas (which still need time to bulk up and self-sow) and that most vibrant of pulmonarias, *P.* 'Blue Ensign', Alan Leslie's discovery at another RHS garden, Wisley.

Near the Old Bath House, the old limestone rock garden has been dismantled. But when my first photographs were taken, early spring bulbs such as *Tulipa turkestanica* and *T. biflora* were succeeded by lavish *Pulsatilla* clumps, and shortly afterwards *Gentiana acaulis* 'Max Frei' (labelled as such but its status is uncertain), nevertheless small of leaf, short of stem, and as intensely blue as could be wished. Overshadowed by a mature *Cedrus deodora* 'Golden Horizon', its removal was timely. For me it's the best of the genus at Harlow Carr until late August (see under the subheading 'August to September'), when this account concludes. There's presently a trial area of trumpet gentians near the alpine house, below which the new rock garden has been developed since February 2023 using limestone donated in the 1970s by Parcevall Hall. This was once the North Yorkshire residence of Sir William Milner (1893-1960), a founder member – and Director – of the Northern Horticultural Society from 1955 until his death, who did much to foster the establishment of Harlow Carr.



Tulipa turkestanica

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Tulipa biflora



Gentiana acaulis 'Max Frei'

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Part of the new limestone rock garden, May 2023



Narcissus 'Jetfire'

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Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*)

Returning to earliest spring, a productive meander takes you along Streamside, passing stands of dwarf daffodils such as *Narcissus* 'February Gold' and *N.* 'Jetfire' (both replicated in several areas to the south) and a small contingent of spring's first harbinger, Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*). A short amble up the sloping lawn brings you to the more or less parallel, sinuous Winter Walk, at this time of the year graced by greenish-white *Helleborus x hybridus* intermingled with the purple foliage of *Lunaria annua* 'Chedglow' and a phalanx of (through to early April) bare stemmed, beetroot red *Cornus alba* 'Kesselringii', which – unlike most other cultivars – is better pruned back to its base hard every *other* year, not annually, by mid-April.



Helleborus x hybridus,
Lunaria annua 'Chedglow'
and *Cornus*.

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Elsewhere you will come upon yellow through to orange and bright red permutations such as 'Aurea', 'Sibirica' and 'Elegantissima', the last of these later and with variegated foliage, others with autumnal berries. Close allies such as *Cornus sanguinea* 'Anny's Winter Orange' and *C. s.* 'Bud's Yellow', both around 1.5m, are also first rate and worth interplanting, although a single cultivar, low hedge belt is most often seen.

Hereabouts is a fine specimen of Robin White's *Daphne* 'Spring Beauty', over 2m high to date. Hardier than at first suspected, I suppose that its positioning, in a spot where cold air drains into the lower valley and the shoots receive a summer ripening, must help. It starts to bloom with real enthusiasm in February, continuing through to spring proper, when the near prostrate *D. blagayana* can also be located by those with sharp eyes, the clean white inflorescences surrounded by free-seeding, brilliant blue *Scilla bifolia*. Best kept in check, however; its foliage could easily overwhelm the daphne.



Late March, *Daphne* 'Spring Beauty' and *Cornus*.

Late March through to mid-June

You could visit every week during this period and confidently expect an ever-changing floral change of guard. In general performances overlap, a few at their peak just a day or two and a matter of good fortune if you catch witness them. Just as well that some plants are more resilient, their floral contribution lasting a month or more, as with *Helleborus x hybridus*, which remains handsome long after its stamens have dehisced. There have been radical redesigns

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within the recent past: new plantings took place along Streamside in early 2012; the upper garden has been extended with new rockwork and pools; the Main Borders were reconfigured in 2005, the floriferous beds tapering downslope into attenuated points rather than being squared-off, serving to accentuate the flow. This account simply instances certain elements from recent years, many subject to change and further improvement.



Pulmonaria 'Opal', Anemone blanda 'White Splendour', Narcissus pseudonarcissus etc.

Within a matter of days, given a spell of warmth, the Woodland is transformed into a multi-hued patchwork, the principal elements anemones (initially *Anemone blanda* 'White Splendour', soon afterwards *A. nemorosa* and bright yellow splashes of *A. ranunculoides* 'Pleniflora'), *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*, palest lilac *Pulmonaria* 'Opal', *Scilla* (*Chionodoxa*) 'Pink Giant' and primroses (below) mixed with oxlips and occasionally cowslips. Subtle interjections of greenish *Sanicula* (*Hacquetia*) *epipactis*, *Helleborus argutifolius* and double *H. x hybridus* add interest plus – where the

hellebores are concerned – height.

Below, on the rock banks, *H.*

hybridus is present once more, this

time single-flowered and plumb

black, with the drumsticks of

Primula denticulata everywhere,

and trceries of a too seldom

planted crucifer, white *Cardamine*

trifolia, running through the

stonework interstices.



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Primula vulgaris coppice.



Primula elatior

Primula veris.



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Sanicula (Hacquetia) epipactis

Primula denticulata

Below: Woodland ampitheatre bank,
mid-April.



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Erythronium revolutum

'Knightshayes'

Erythroniums

Under a fortnight after

Erythronium dens-canis bows out, the dotted, dappled leaves camouflaging its presence as other plants burst into growth and provide further disguise all around, the mainstays of the genus, horticulturally speaking,

come to prominence. *E. revolutum* 'Knightshayes' is seeding around liberally in one spot, the moderately differing purplish-pink offspring inclining me to overlook the subdivision 'Knightshayes Pink' and instead formalise all expressions under a Group identity.



Erythronium revolutum 'Knightshayes'



Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl'

None of those that follow have shown an inclination to follow suite at Harlow Carr, for all that the star turn, *E. californicum* 'White Beauty', has elsewhere parented more hybrids than is commonly realised. One of them, Ian Young's 'Craigton Cover Girl', is a chance cross involving *E. revolutum*, dating from the 1990s. The latter species is also a conspicuous element of two Irish cultivars that require a determined search. In rural County Down, at Ballyrogan Nurseries, Gary Dunlop bred 'Ballyrogan Inferno', whose party trick is to intensify its flower colour dramatically over the course of a week or more. I was in frequent contact with him through to 2021 and understand that a comprehensive rescue plan is underway to save

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this and many other first-rate plants there that he amassed. Further south, in Clonsilla, on the outskirts of Dublin, Sir David Shackleton built up a fabled, distinguished collection of plants at Beech Park. It is this styling (not the elided "Beechpark") that I prefer to denote a crystalline, pale pink seedling present so far as just one clump, ditto Gary Dunlop's diva.



Erythronium 'Ballyrogan Inferno'

Erythronium 'Beech Park' in the foreground amongst *Primula denticulata*.



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Erythronium californicum 'White Beauty'



Erythronium californicum 'White Beauty' with an interloper.

'White Beauty', one of the Woodland's stand-out performances, is at its best towards the middle of April. Within the past six years there has been a sizeable increase, with further plantings well away from the several mainstays, one in a raised position, sheltered by an *Acer*, with the glowing, felted leaves of pre-flowering *Silene coronaria* 'Alba' and a surround of

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muscaris. Note the minor irritant of a single, stray 'Pagoda' in one of the main groupings: I wish someone would remove it. This, more vigorous still, is present en masse a ten-minute walk away at the south-eastern extreme of the woodland, in a bed atop a retaining millstone grit wall, near where a feature popular with school children, the Logness Monster slide, is one of several attractions that entices future generations of gardeners.



Erythronium 'Pagoda' with a visiting school party in the background.



Erythronium 'Sundisc'

Several other *E. tuolumnense* hybrids are present in small numbers, another Dutch raising, 'Sundisc', the showiest, for when afforded space, its bronzed leaves and cascades of yellow flowers make a fine spectacle. This

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extends the season through to earliest May, following on from which the largest-flowered *Erythronium* of all present, 'Harvington Snowgoose' (an *E. oregonum* hybrid) is also the latest-flowering, through to the middle of that month in some years. (It has appeared at the RHS Chelsea Show without requiring cold store treatment.)



Erythronium 'Harvington Snowgoose' with *Trillium cuneatum* in the foreground.

Other North Americans

Blooming at the same time, and in association, trilliums are complementary, subtler elements. Their establishment is a longer-term prospect still, for the abundances seen in (for example)

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favoured Scottish and Irish gardens especially have taken many, many years to bring about. Fledgling populations of *Trillium grandiflorum* and others will take a long time to make a true impact. Meanwhile, *T. chloropetalum* (bronze-yellow to pink in those present) and *T. c. var. giganteum* (purplish pink) are the chief representatives, with smaller stands of eastern (Tennessee to North Carolina), black-eyed *T. simile*, and – from the same general area, through to Kentucky – greenish-yellow *T. luteum*. All suffer from mollusc depredation, an increasing problem in several gardens, worsened by the damp spring of 2024. I cannot agree with the live and let live approach currently advocated and align my response with Alan Titchmarsh's pragmatic, widely and recently reported reaction. If pest control is ruled out, expect the corollary: live and let die. Truthfully, how many seasoned gardeners do you know who allow slugs, snails and weevils free rein?



Trillium chloropetalum var. *giganteum* and *Erythronium* 'White Beauty'.



Trillium chloropetalum var. *giganteum*.

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Trillium chloropetalum



Trillium simile

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Trillium luteum



Sanguinaria canadensis 'Multiplex'

Hereabouts are scatterings of other predominantly eastern USA natives *Anemonella thalictroides*, *Sanguinaria canadensis* in its most widely grown double form 'Multiplex', and *Uvularia grandiflora*, that most unexpected Colchicaceae affiliate that confers immediate kudos wherever it is deployed. Along the bark-strewn path margins, where fern fronds are unfurling in late April (Harlow Carr holds a National

Collection of *Polypodium*), you can anticipate the dark lockets of *Dicentra formosa* 'Bacchanal' (AGM 2002). This is a ruby red representative of a species that occurs from Vancouver south to central California, seen in other shades of pink through to white, 'Langtrees' the most widely grown of the albinos. On its heels comes *Tiarella* 'Spring Symphony', a Terra Nova (Oregon) raising now just over a quarter of a century old that incorporates *T. cordifolia* (and perhaps *T. wherryi*) in its make-up. Present in foaming whitish drifts, it associates seamlessly with native and non-native plants (British *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and *Allium ursinum* are apposite in combination).

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Dicentra formosa 'Bacchanal'



Tiarella 'Spring Symphony' and *Trillium luteum*.



Hyacinthoides non-scripta

Lower down, on the lower flanks of the Old Bath House rock ramparts, *Cornus canadensis* performs a similarly harmonising role, infiltrating other plantings but never overwhelming them, its dark centred, four-petalled white flowers at their best towards the end of May and prefiguring woody cousins such as *C. florida*, of which more in due course. Sometimes given as All-American, from the subarctic to New Mexico, this smallest of dogwoods also has eccentric, disjunct presences in Myanmar, China (just once – Changbai Shan, Jilin), after that Far Eastern Russia, Sakhalin, Korea and Japan.

Terrestrial orchids

Geographic specific epithets such as *canadensis* sometimes acknowledge only part of a plant's overall distribution. It's also the case that when familiar with a species from just one country (to wit, *Epipactis palustris* in the British Isles), there is a tendency – guilty as charged – to overlook its wider occurrences. I knew the Marsh Helleborine was widespread in mainland Europe but had no inkling, until I checked, that it is also recorded from Central Asia, Siberia and northern Xinjiang. This is the latest-flowering orchid on the Woodland outskirts, ramifying through the occasionally irrigated and therefore reliably moist flanks, blooming towards the end of June through to early July.



Epipactis palustris

More terrestrial orchids....

The family's main extravaganza at Harlow Carr involves the genus *Cypripedium*, half a dozen examples of which are at their best in the second half of May. Astonishing to reflect that most artificial hybrids have arisen within the past 40 years. Those mentioned are often of part-North American descent, many cross-bred with Himalayan and Chinese relatives. The clumps are top-dressed with leaf-mould and a generous surfacing of pine needles, their labels not always evident. I didn't delve too deeply: better this than an accusatory tap on the shoulder from an alert member of staff. The sites chosen, within a few feet of the footpaths, are raised to knee height and importantly offer dappled shade. The microclimate is relatively cool, another significant consideration. If the shoots are triggered into growth too early in April, there is the threat of a late frost overnight leading to obliteration. And if at maturity they receive unrelenting full sun, expect them to turn worryingly pale or worse still blacken. Verdant leaves bespeak good cultivation a light scattering of a slow-release fertiliser (e.g. Osmocote Pro) will foster this happy state of affairs.

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Cypripedium parviflorum var. *pubescens*.

C. parviflorum var. *pubescens* and smaller-slipped, *C. calceolus*-mimicking Hank Small gx come first in the running order, followed by Gabriela gx (*kentuckiense* x *fasciolatum*), in some lists appearing as Kentucky Maxi. Undeniably eye-catching when as abundantly flowered as depicted here, this said I find the cream or white, narrowish pouches too lanterned-jawed (the inheritance of western Chinese *C. fasciolatum*), much preferring another *C. kentuckiense* cross of similar vintage, Philipp gx, whose other parent, *C. macranthos*, confers rotundity and an agreeable, heavy infusion of pink.



Cypripedium
Hank Small gx

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At first sold as Kentucky Pink, it is a little taller, at a minimum 50cm, effectively positioned where it is backlit, for an hour or two imparting a rose-tinted spectacle. Later-flowering Ulla Silkens gx (Chinese *flavum* x North American *reginae*) was bred in Sweden – numerous other hybrids have German and Netherlandish origins. As instanced here, often with two flowers per stem, it is pervasively white, with a dark eye and a broad pouch lightly speckled within. If you want something similar, buy in bloom, for other seed-raised versions will differ.



Cypripedium
Gabriela gx



Cypripedium Philipp gx ('Kentucky Pink' in some lists)



Cypripedium Ulla Silkens gx

Rhododendrons and candelabra primulas

Having touched on plants from China, it is striking that more than half the world's species of *Rhododendron* (c. 570) are native to that country, and a greater still proportion (300 out of 500) for *Primula*. Both genera have a strong representation in the gardens.

A few of Harlow Carr's rhododendrons date from the 1960s, and many more have been added under the auspices of the Rhododendron Propagation Project. Ranging in size from dwarf 'Sarled' to lofty *Rhododendron calophyllum* (this can reach 12m tall), they begin flowering early in the New Year, 'Christmas Cheer' (a palest pink *caucasicum* hybrid eventually 4 x 4m) the first of all, though seldom if ever around the date its name indicates. The zenith is reached towards the end of May, when the woodland walks are garlanded by the genus, both in the understory and overhead.

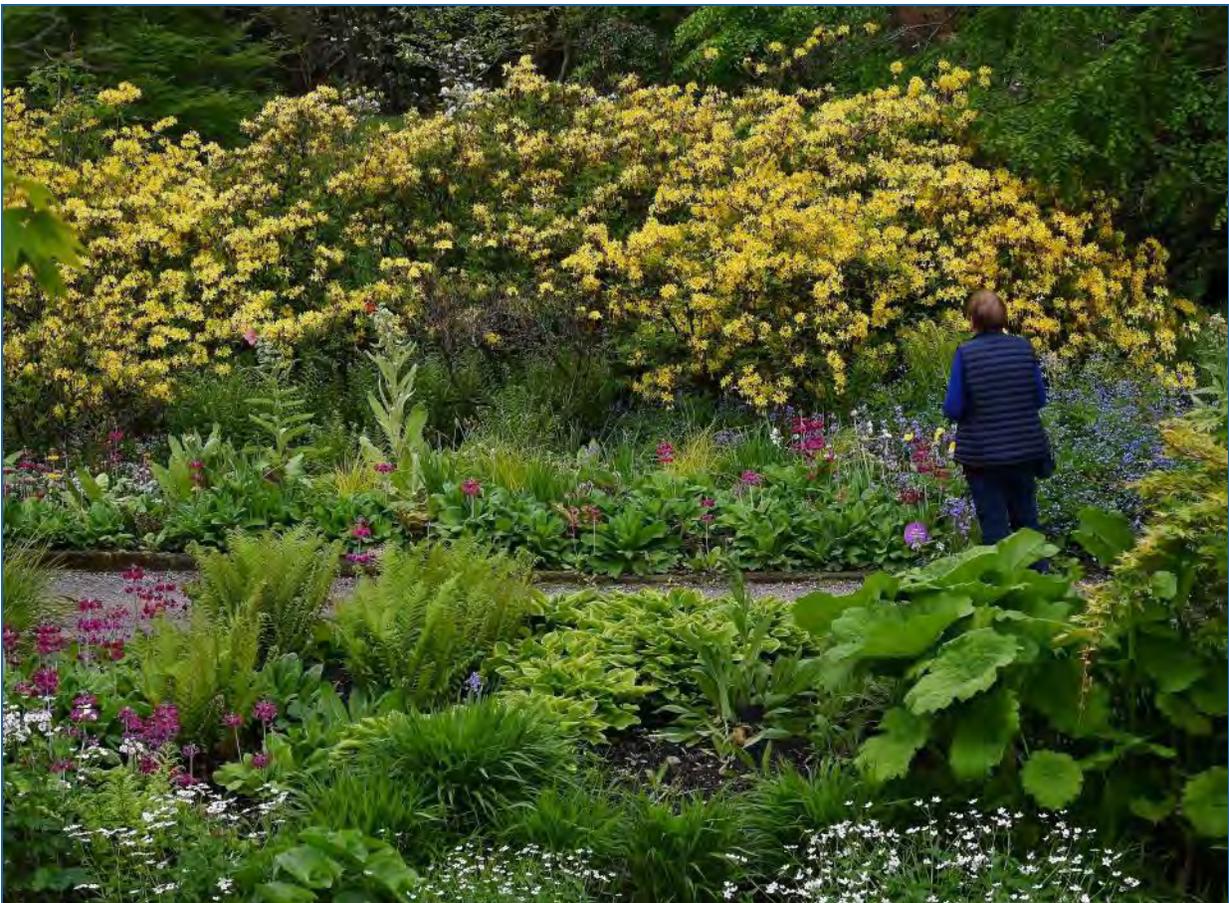
By Streamside *R. luteum* blazes bright yellow, but follow your nose and you might come upon some of the Ghent deciduous azalea hybrids that have this in their parentage. These go back to the early nineteenth century and incorporate late flowering North American species, notably the highly fragrant *R. occidentale*, first sent to by William Lobb to Veitch Nurseries in 1850.

The hybrids, blooming late enough to avoid any frost-damage in most years, have flowers as beautifully marked as an *Alstroemeria* but with a strong, honeysuckle perfume unlike any of that genus. *R.* 'Irene Koster', bred in the Netherlands c. 1895 by Koster & Sons, is an AGM recipient. Others were reared, earlier on, in Belgium, later in the British Isles, after that North America, New Zealand and Germany.

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Rhododendron 'Irene Koster'



Rhododendron luteum – and others.

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Meconopsis 'P.C. Abildgaard' and *Rhododendron viscosum* var. *glaucum*.

Also North American, *R. viscosum* AGM (found from Maine as far south as Florida and Texas) reached London in the 1730s: some accounts report it was first sent overseas in 1680. The foliage, a plain foil when the scented white flowers are present, through to late June, takes on good autumn colour come October. Its summer performance coincides with the main *Meconopsis* efflorescence.

Various of these can be seen along Streamside but the one that appears reliably year after year is *M.* 'P.C. Abildgaard', (right) a quintessential Himalayan Blue Poppy.



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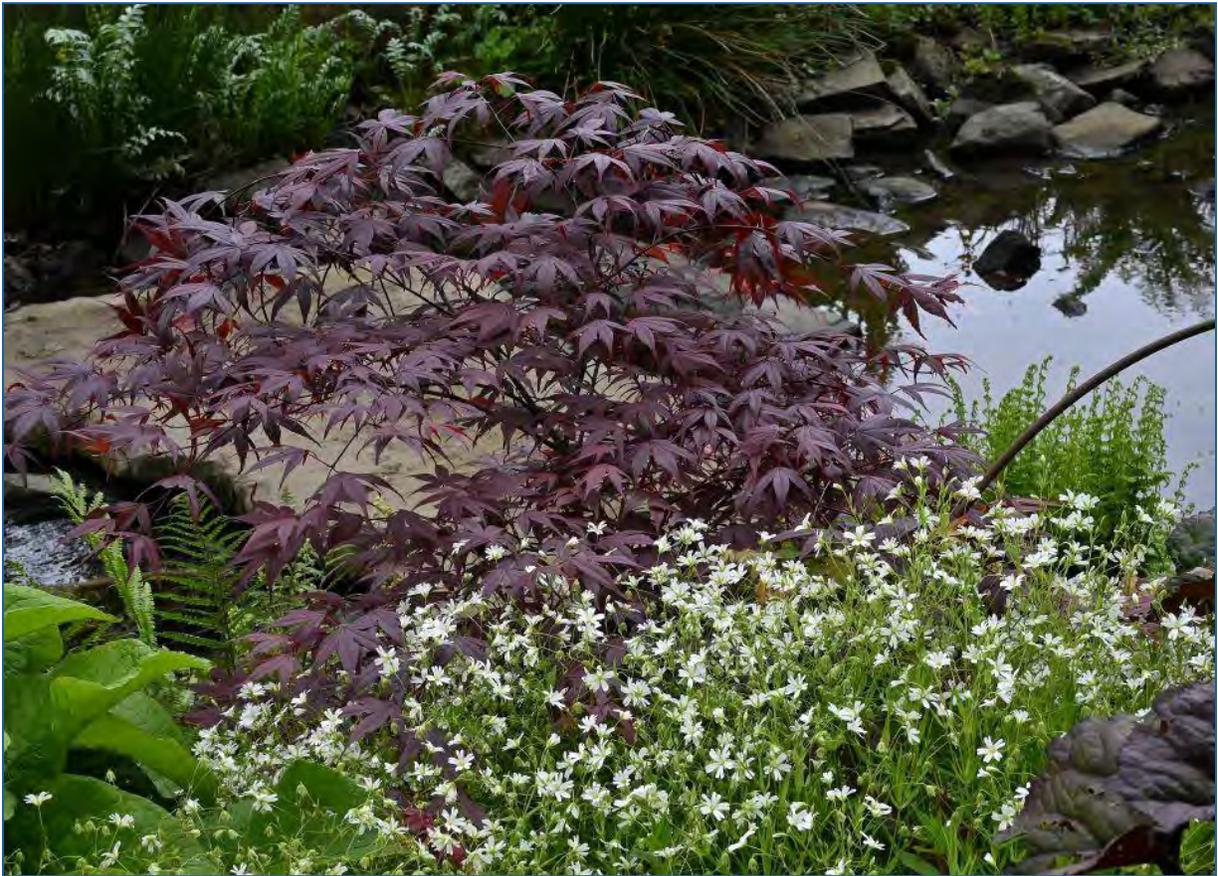


Candelabra primulas and a solitary *Meconopsis*.



Persicaria bistorta 'Superbum' and *Viburnum plicatum*, mid-May.

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Acer palmatum and native *Stellaria holostea*, in mid-May, Streamside.



Streamside
part
reconstruction
May 2023.

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Redevelopment with *Narcissus* and *Fritillaria meleagris* survivors bottom left, May 2023.



Stone mason at work, Streamside, April 2024.

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Iris, Primulas and *Hemerocallis*, mid-June.



Primula vialii

The end of May and early June is also the time to witness the *Primula* Harlow Car (the one 'r' in Car is deliberate) multicoloured hybrids in full flow. These have long been a crowd-pleasing element of Streamside and the reconstruction work and replantings that have taken place midway along in 2023-2024 will doubtless extend their territories. Other less robust, similarly early summer-flowering primulas such as *P. vialii*, *P. flaccida* and *P. alpicola* wax and wane, requiring a determined hunt further afield, in the adjacent Sandstone Rock Garden as a starting point, whereas the candelabra

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cocktails advertise themselves from afar. A few whites and creams but mainly mauve, numerous shades of pink, orange, vermilion and yellow, they have arisen dating from Geoffrey Smith's custodianship (1954-1974), the miscegenations incorporating *P. cockburniana*, *P. pulverulenta*, *P. bulleyana*, *P. beesiana*, *P. burmanica*, *P. chungensis* and *P. prolifera*. Present as replanted clumps and in sizeable, self-sown drifts, they undeniable constitute one of the garden's chief spectacles.



Cornus florida f. *rubra* and candelabra primulas.

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Early July

In high summer, the obvious focus turns to the upper garden's herbaceous borders, kitchen garden and trial beds. Yet there is much else to reward the inquisitive visitor in the Woodland, along Streamside, and elsewhere. *Cypripediums* bowed out by late May but in parts of the rock bank *Epipactis palustris* (see also above) registers a quiet presence at the start of July. Several forms are in cultivation – if not, as a rule, in commerce – their stature ranging from (as here) 15cm to four times that height: Kath Dryden distributed one such ('just loves humus', she noted) that – if memory serves – was salvaged from an Essex chalk pit subject to 'redevelopment'. The odd spike of *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* aside, and further back in the woodland, *E. gigantea*, in truth in most forms a dull, sometimes invasive North American, I've not detected any other terrestrial orchids this late on.



Eryngium bourgatii 'Picos Blue'

Some plants you will find by chance, for they are tucked away and present in small numbers or even as single specimens. But *Eryngium bourgatii* 'Picos Blue' forms a sizeable splash in the Sandstone Rock Garden, its presence initially advertised by the ornamental, dissected foliage, then throughout July and beyond – it's an 'everlasting' – by the sturdy blue stems and thistle-themed flower heads. At around 45cm tall, towards the upper height limit, given in *Flora Iberica* as 6-50cm, you will learn there of a further 15 species native to Spain... and in the case of *E. bourgatii* more widely distributed from the French Pyrenees down to Morocco, often among hills or in mountainous regions at up to 2,300m. It has been around over a quarter of a century

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and I've fond memories of the substantial planting in the upper garden at Barn Cottage, home of its introducer, the late Ronald Mackenzie.

Lilium martagon

Scattered around in a few adjacent, semi-shaded spots (it skulks top right of the *Eryngium* image), *Lilium martagon* appreciates the deep, well-drained but fertile soil, some best of breed spikes towering to well over a metre (*Flora Europaea* gives a maximum height of 1.8m and an upper headcount of 40 – more usually ten – with which higher count the finest of these complied last July). Apparently from a uniform mid-pink stock, there were no darker forms, exemplified by var. *cattaniae*, no albinos (var. *album* is readily raised from seed and would be a useful addition) ... and thankfully no signs of vine weevil. Look closely to detect a branched cat's cradle of pea sticks, without whose support the impressively top-heavy stems would have toppled. Overlooking them are several well-established *Hoheria sexstylosa* 'Snow White', at their best in mid-June, the flowers dropping in their thousands by now.



Cornus florida f. *rubra*, July 2023.

Think back to March, when I mentioned *Cornus alba* cultivars, grown principally for the vibrancy of their naked stems. By mid-May – but enduring through to the start of July – *C. florida* f. *rubra*

from eastern and southern states of the USA is pre-eminent, the display predicated on flowers composed of showy bract, most abundant after a previous warm summer.

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Some forms of *C. florida* have leaves that turn red (or yellow, as with 'Autumn Gold') later in the year. A position near the woodland margin is preferred, for relentless high summer sun is disliked, in part due to a relatively shallow-rooting tendency.

In 1964, Elwin Orton of Rutgers University began a hybridisation programme between *C. kousa* (native to Japan, Korea and central China) and American *C. florida*; these have been described as *C. x rutgersiensis* and are well worth considering, if you have the space.



Cornus kousa var. *chinensis*, June 2024.

By now the Streamside candelabra primulas are over, but a replacement display continues, less exuberantly, with an array of astilbes, interwoven with hostas and ferns. *Astilbe x arendsii* 'Zuster Theresa' stands out, finding the reliably moist, neutral soil to its liking, as does an

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agreeably startling August successor, *Lobelia x speciosa* 'Starship Blue', which has in common a need to be divided (early spring for preference) every two or three years.



Astilbe x arendsii 'Zuster Theresa'



Astilbe miscellany (Saxifragacea)



Lobelia x speciosa 'Starship Blue'

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August to early September



Hydrangea aspera 'Anthony Bullivant'

Cross back over Streamside and investigate the westerly reaches of the Woodland: here *Hydrangea aspera* 'Anthony Bullivant' excels. Its namesake, later on a hunt ball-organising colonel through to his death in 1993, was owner of Stourton House, Wiltshire. I recall his wife Elizabeth, a stalwart of the RHS London Shows in the 1980s and beyond, an invariably successful supporter of the summer Ornamental Plant Competition cut flower classes, ruling the roost until one year an interloper took all the laurels. She was gracious but – I gather – inwardly seethed. Crikey! She reunited with her husband in October 2017. Other cultivars, often with Japanese cultivar names, reach around 2m in height (but the species can form a tree 10m tall), the petals purplish, sometimes, as here, with bicoloured flowers. The original measured 6m across by 3.5m in height. A neutral soil is preferred, so too dappled shade facilitating ripening of the wood without wilting of the flowers. First described (1825) from Nepal, *H. aspera* is also found in Sikkim, Taiwan, Vietnam and nine provinces of western China, up to a respectable 4,000m, should you query its inclusion here. Those seeking stock of unimpeachable wild provenance would do well to peruse the catalogue of [Crûg Farm Plants](#). *Digitalis ferruginea* I particularly associate with Turkey, having once seen it there en masse, in June, flowering in pine woodland also liberally beautified with an intermingling by the hundreds of *Limodorum abortivum*, an orchid whose violet-pink spikes soar to 80cm, still some way short

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of this foxglove, which can attain half as much again. Distributed from Italy to the Caucasus – ignore accounts that curtail its eastern spread to the Balkans – this sombre species has a towering grace that adds interest at a time of the year atypical for the genus, since it can endure through to autumn. The altitudinal range is considerable, from sea level to 2,700m, its lifespan also differing considerably, from biennial to three or four years. As with most *Digitalis*, seed is set in profusion.

*Digitalis
ferruginea*



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A different family (Bignoniaceae, not Plantaginaceae) but *Catalpa bignonioides* has flowers somewhat foxglove-like in shape, albeit displayed in panicles and from a mighty tree, here close to the Limestone Rock Garden and also in August. Since a September 2023 visit, I read that 300 trees have been added to the garden, a third close to the refurbished Harrogate Arms, where it is hoped that the *Catalpa* will establish in containers and afford shading, instead of the more usual parasols.



Catalpa bignonioides

In late summer the Woodland is a much more subdued affair when compared with its vernal extravaganza, yet still repays a visit, for some to savour the extensive fern plantings, for others to seek shade on a hot day.

I draw attention to a couple of its minor occupants that add floral interest at this time. Spring's North American *Anemonella thalictroides* is succeeded by another monotypic Ranunculaceae member, Japanese *Anemonopsis macrophylla*. What an elegant plant, its leaves *Astilbe*-like, the flowers spurless and nodding, *Semiaquilegia* fashion, delineated by the dark stems. Only a few years ago widely stocked, including albino 'White Swan' and a double form – I prefer the lilac version with a darker, purplish centre – presently few UK nurseries hold stocks. In *Flora Magnifica*, Don Elick observes that on Honshu, it 'lives on the warmer Pacific side, in very

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deep forests... It prefers comparative seclusion, not crowding companions, but is big enough [stems 40-80cm long] to fend for itself, and must do when it has ferns for neighbours.



Catalpa bignonioides in fruit, June 2024.

Another change of guard is witnessed in a further path side planting. April/early May flowering *Dicentra formosa*, present at Harlow Carr in the ruby red, AGM clone 'Bacchanal' (this having superseded the paler flowered *Dicentra formosa* 'Bountiful', also to 30cm tall) is usually dormant by midsummer.

A liberal mulch helps maintain moist soil conditions, without which it underperforms. A sprinkling of a granular fertiliser such as Growmore in late winter is also advantageous. After that, the area is occupied by a quite obviously different yet onetime fellow member of the genus, the reassigned *Dactylicapnos macrocapnos*, (syn. *Dicentra macrocapnos* Prain) from Uttar Pradesh through to Nepal. Adept at scrambling up any adjacent shrub, to around 2m in some accounts, the authoritative '*Bleeding Hearts, Corydalis, and Their Relatives*' (Timber Press, 2008, M. Tebbitt, M. Lidén & H. Zetterlund, p. 54), advises: 'annual stem growth of 10 metres or more [is]... not unheard of', the dangling clusters of melon yellow lockets produced through to October unless a hard frost curtails production.

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Having seen it well-established in an exposed garden in rural north Derbyshire, I am puzzled by concerns occasionally expressed over its hardiness.

In some gardens, by mid-August *Gentiana asclepiadea* has started to bloom. Not in 2023, in Yorkshire anyway when it was necessary to return in the first week of September to catch this at its peak. Several fine clumps, long established on the amphitheatre beyond the Old Bath House, demonstrated the garden worthiness of this reliable species, content if left to its own devices from year to year, other than removing old, spent top growth. I've omitted much else but hope that this account will encourage others visit Harlow Carr where, even if the weather misbehaves, they can anticipate a horticultural tour de force. R.R.



Gentiana asclepiadea

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--- Orchids of France ---

Orchids of southern France: part two, the orchids in the month of May.

Text and Photos: Gerrit and Ibelje Eijkelenboom.

This section, continued from [IRG 175](#), deals with orchids and other species in the departments of Drôme and Var in May. We visited these departments as follows: 1) from May 12 to 15th 2024 in the northern Drôme. 2) from May 15th to 22nd in the Var. 3) from May 22nd to May 24th, the southern Drôme.

1. Northern Drôme:

We had rented an accommodation north of the town of Romans-sur-Isere, described as a 'Studio cosy climatisee a la Campagne.' A beautifully situated country house for guests, 2 separate cottages. From there, it is half an hour's drive to the orchid sites, at the foot of the steeply rising mountains of the Vercors National Park. The orchid sites are near the villages of Rochefort-Samson and Barbieres. These are very well known to orchid lovers for the density of the orchid populations.

From Rochefort-Samson, drive towards Les Ducs and then to Les Combes. Everywhere you will see vast meadows, where you can find masses of orchids. You can also drive via Barbieres to the Col du Tourniol and on to the Col de la Bataille, stopping along the way. You will then pass the Barbieres campsite, which also has chalets for rent.

To Rochefort-Samson: 12 May 2024.

Ophrys virescens: The first orchid, which we found was also a very welcome one. It is a little brother of *Ophrys araneola*, which flowers a month earlier and can be seen in Part 1. They are very similar, but *O. virescens* is slightly larger and is one of the first to flower in the season.



*Ophrys
virescens*

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Orchis simia: This is the Monkey Orchid. This orchid blooms from top to bottom. The inflorescence is densely flowering. From under the hood, formed by the three sepals, the lip protrudes forward. The lip is shaped like a human (monkey). The purple tips of the lobes curl forward. It looks like a dancing monkey.

Orchis simia



Orchis (Androrchis) provincialis: All parts of the plant are yellow with red dots. The spur is long and curls upwards.

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Orchis purpurea:

They are robust plants with about 200 large flowers in the spike. The flowers are white with purple or red spots, tufts. The lip is deeply incised.

Orchis purpurea



Orchis anthropophora: The picture shows a specimen with red flowers. These can also be yellow.



Neottia ovata: This is an all-green plant, which can be up to 80 cm tall. The green lip makes an abrupt kink and is divided in two at the tip. Its green colour makes it easy to overlook. Sometimes it is better recognised by its large oval-round leaves, which give it its name.

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Ophrys insectifera:
This is a rather difficult species to find. It is so small that it can be overlooked. The inflorescence is loose-flowered. The flowers are on long stems and far apart. The flower is very pretty, as can be seen in the picture. It lives up to its

name, as it actually looks like an insect. This is the northernmost Ophrys. It can be found as far north as central Scandinavia

Orchis militaris:

Robust plants with 10-40 flowers. The helmet is clearly visible and lighter in colour than the lip. This makes it recognisable from a great distance. The lip resembles a male, in this case a soldier, with arms and



legs, which are not curved as in *Orchis simia*. The middle lobe has numerous small red tufts.

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Neotinea ustulata: Ustulata means 'burnt', because of the dark colour of the hood, especially of the upper flowers. Each separate flower is deeply incised and three-lobed. On the lip, which is whitish in colour, there are purple dots and spots.



Ophrys aurelia: This is the first of the three saddle orchids. We found all three in one field. They usually are together. The sepals are pink, with a green vein. The middle sepals are long and stick straight up or curved forward. The lip has a distinct saddle shape and is especially broad at the tip, the tip. The speculum is located on the lower half of the lip. The appendix is rather large and sits in a deep notch.

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Ophrys drumana: means 'From the Drôme'. This is the smallest of the three saddle orchids. The lip is shorter than the middle sepals, as can be clearly seen in the photo. The lip is entire, or clearly 3-lobed. The optical appearance of the lip is oblong and narrow. The lip is rather flat and hardly has the saddle shape. The speculum is large, central, in the shape of a shield, often with ocelli, and with branching upwards. The stigmatic cavity is round.

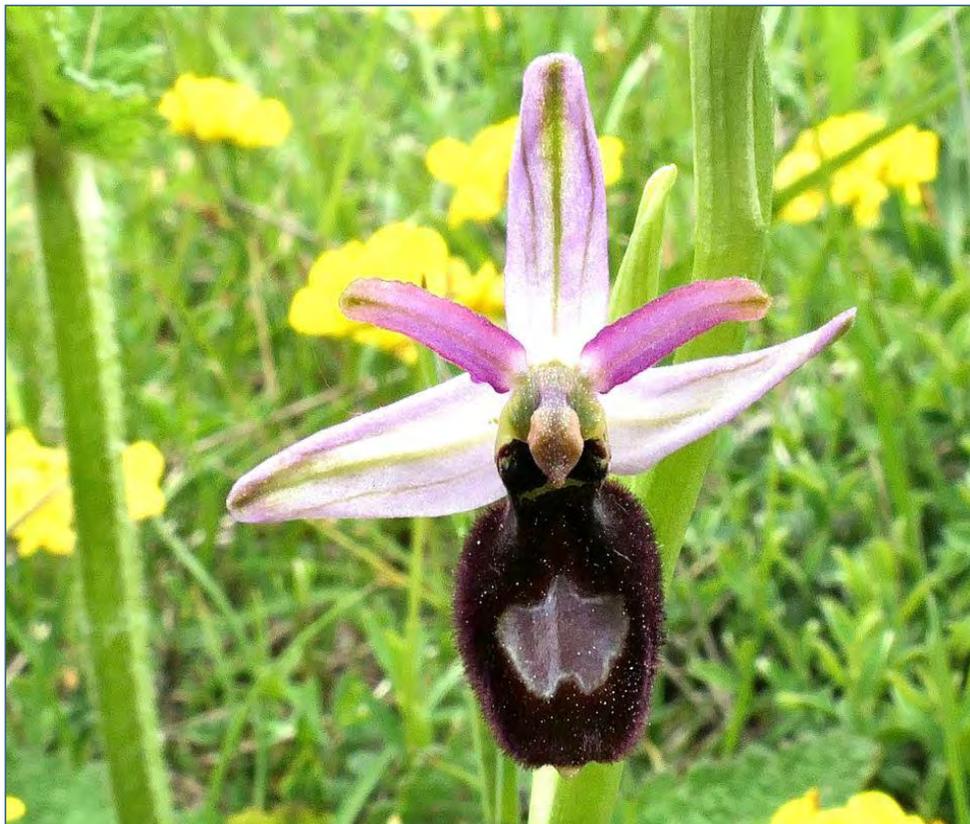


Ophrys drumana

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Ophrys saratoi: This is the last of the three saddle orchids, all growing closely together. The



sepal are pink to lilac in colour, the petals red. The lip is not always saddle-shaped, 30% of this orchid have a flat lip. The others, the familiar saddle shape. The main characteristic of *Ophrys saratoi* is that the lip is widest at the base (i.e. top). The speculum is large in the shape of a shield.

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Ophrys fuciflora: The lip is entire, trapezoid, velvety, red-brown to black-purple with 2 swellings. An incomplete band of hair runs along the edges of the lip, white at the shoulders and densely hairy above the appendix. The edges of the lip curl back up. The speculum is extensive, often with branches and ocelli.

To the Col du Tourniol, 13 May



Herorchis morio: The main feature is the green colour of the veins in the sepals. This can be clearly seen inside and outside.

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Anacamptis pyramidalis is perhaps the most common species in France.

Ophrys querciphila: The sepals are pink. The petals are the same colour. The lip is 3-lobed, the lateral lobes conical. The middle lobe is slightly scolopaxoid (sepioid). The view from the front is somewhat square. The lip has a submarginal band of pale hairs. The speculum is extended over the lip with ocelli.



Ophrys querciphila

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Cephalanthera longifolia has obliquely upright leaves. The largest, sword-shaped ones are at the bottom, becoming shorter towards the top. The upper ones are bracteate. The snow-white flowers have orange-yellow tips. These are the ridges on the lip.



Cephalanthera longifolia



Gentiana angustifolia. Apart from orchids, other interesting species bloom, of course. This Gentian has shorter pointed leaves, which distinguishes it from *Gentiana acaulis*.

Thanks to Herman Mylemans from Belgium for his determination.

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Gentiana verna was also found there. A beautiful species, with delightful blue flowers.



Narcissus poeticus is found in meadows on treeless slopes in the mountains.

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Astragalus monspessulanus: I suspect this is what this species is called. It is a low species with green leaves. Many conspecifics have silver-grey leaves.



Androrchis mascula is shown off on a slope near the Col du Tourniol.

14 May. Again to Rochefort-Samson. Drive towards Chemin des Pignes. At very last junction, turn left and after 100m you can still park. Then walk a few hundred metres and you will see

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the sign to Les Combes. There is a wire across the path, but everyone ignores it. You walk downhill and you see all kinds of grass-covered hills, a treasure lake filled with rare orchids. We found new orchids on that day, which we had overlooked the first time.

Ophrys demangei: The sepals are dark pink, the petals the same colour. The lip is square, but rounded, whole or obscurely three-lobed. The edges of the lip hang down and then come up slightly (reflex), yellow. The lip has two swellings. Often, not always, there is a band of grey hairs. Above the appendix is a tuft of hair. The speculum is shaped like an X with ocelli.



Ophrys demangei

Ophrys gresivaudanica: This species has rather small flowers. The sepals are pink to thunder purple. The middle sepals are often curved over the Gynostegium. The lip is rounded square, wholly or indistinctly three-lobed, with two conical swellings. The edges of the lip are yellow. The speculum is convoluted with ocelli with yellow margins. The appendix is toothed.



Ophrys gresivaudanica



Ophrys gresivaudanica

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2: Var department

The Var is located in south-eastern France. We know it better as the Côte d'Azur.

On the way to our residence, we visited a site of *Ophrys splendida*.

This is an unknown and rare species, endemic to Provence, Bouches du Rhône, Var and Alpes Maritimes. It is a rather low species, up to 35 cm high with quite small flowers. The main characteristic of this species are its petals. They are broad, elliptical and long. The centre is white, pink or yellowish. The edges are strongly corrugated, broad or coloured green-yellow, orange or red. They are like candy canes. The lip is whole and oval, with a submarginal band of hair, brown, ochre or grey.



Ophrys splendida

We had rented a cottage in the Plain of the Maures. This is a lowland plain near Vidauban.

The plain is an interesting and beautiful area for nature lovers.



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The soil consists of silica, a virtually impermeable rock. Water runs off superficially and forms a network of temporary pools and streams from September to June. As a result, the area has a great diversity of biotopes and species diversity, including orchids, but also birds. We saw *Coracias garrulus* ([the European Roller](#)) there, for example.



A place to visit is the Roman bridge.

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Serapias neglecta: Picture P000931 From here you can easily explore the surrounding area. The first orchid is *Serapias neglecta*. It is 10 to 30 cm tall, so it is a low species that is easily overlooked (neglecta) The flowers are comparatively very large. A beautiful species.



Serapias cordigera: Another fairly low species with large red to dark red heart-shaped flowers. Again a very beautiful *Serapias*.

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Serapias lingua:

Normally this is a well-known species, but I've never seen a yellow form before.

Serapias lingua



Serapias parviflora. This is the fourth *Serapias* in just a small area. Easier to identify than many other *Serapias* species. The lip curves back against the stem and is usually brown. You see a specimen with a yellow lip, because I liked that. This is not very unusual, by the way. This species more often has a disorder in the anthocyanin supply.

Serapias parviflora



Centaurium maritimum bloomed massively in this area during our visit.



Orchis fragrans, red variety:

Orchis (Anacamptis, Anteriorchis) fragrans: This species is easy to recognise. However, there are several varieties. On the pictures you see first the most common one, with a red or reddish perianth and the second one with white perianth and light-coloured flowers, extremely small.

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Orchis fragrans, white variety

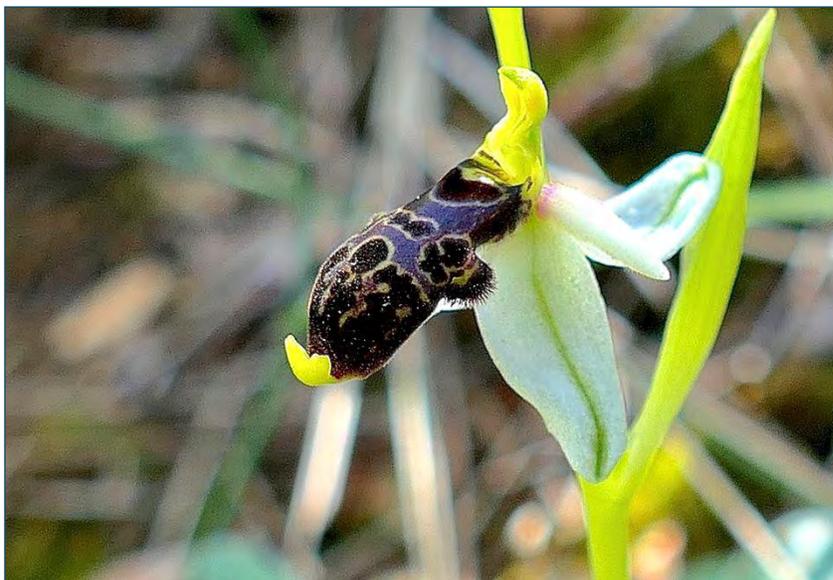
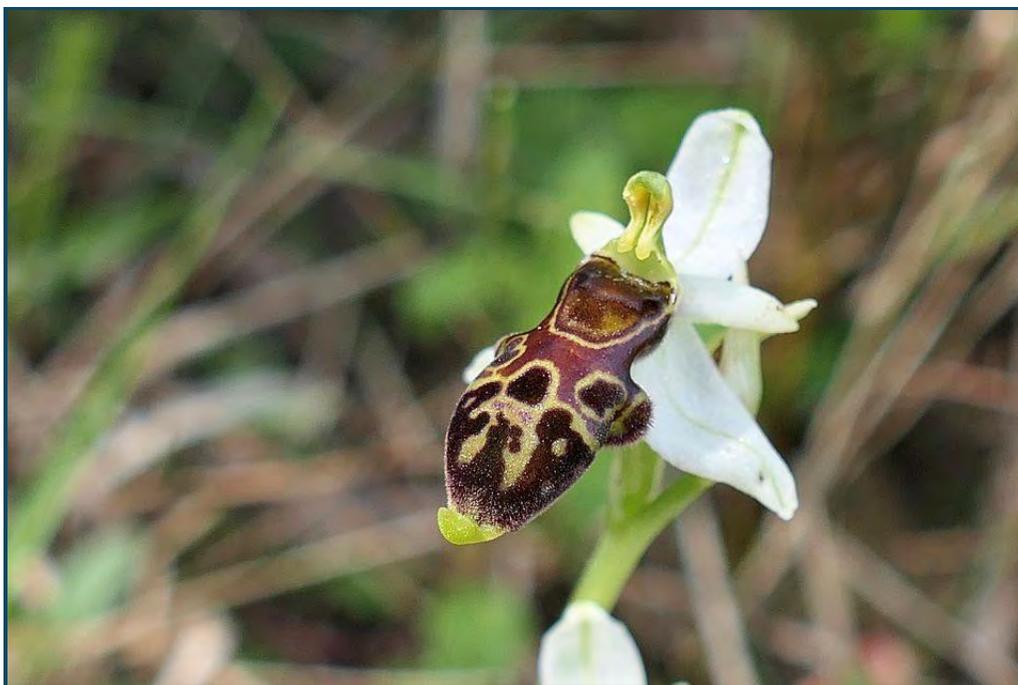
Paludorchis laxiflora: On the side of the road, we suddenly saw purple flowers. It turned out to be *Orchis laxiflora*, now called *Paludorchis*. And of course it stood with 70 others in a very wet biotope. There should be water there all year round. This orchid is struggling everywhere in Europe. Its natural biotope is unacceptable to humans where water just flows through the land. The plant can't cope without that.



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On 17 May 2024, we went in search of two rare orchids.

Ophrys philippi: This is a remarkable orchid. It was first described by M. Philippi, a French botanist. It is an orchid with a unique appearance. But also unique because of the story of its disappearance in 1912 and then its rediscovery in 2000. The orchid is extremely rare and so far survives in a few places in the hills north of Toulon. And there is still debate among botanists and taxonomists about its correct provenance. At the site where we found it, there were only 3 specimens. It was a fairly steep slope overgrown with sparse grass at about 45 degrees where there were small goat paths. At the bottom ran a forest road and about 20 metres higher a forest began. It took quite a long time before we realised where to look. There were no more than 3 specimens and even after a long search, we didn't find any more.



Ophrys philippi

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Also at this site were some plants *Linum campanulatum*.



Ophrys montis-aviarii

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Ophrys montis-aviarii: Delforge writes a single line about this orchid in 2021: 'Some small isolated populations at Carqueranne, totalling about 200 individuals.' We found only 7 (healthy) plants at the above location.

I describe this species here. Very large flowers, larger than those of *Ophrys fuciflora*. The lip is rounded square, only slightly trapezoid, while in *O. fuciflora* the trapezoid shape is the norm. A fully broad marginal band of greyish-white hairs, in *fuciflora* often only part of the lip. The speculum is extensive, with branches to the side and top, around the swellings. Branches are surrounded by a broad yellow band. There are one or more ocelli. The basal field is of a different colour: orange, brown-orange or tan.

On 18 May 2024, we visited the abbey of Le Thoronet, located amid forests and mountains, after which we searched for orchids in the surrounding area.

On an embankment at the side of the road grew numerous *Ophrys corbariensis*. It is a scolopaxoid species. The sepals are pink to purple. The lip is 3-lobed. The lateral lobes are prominent, rather large and pointed, often divergent. The speculum is shaped like an X, usually on the upper half of the lip, with sometimes two isolated dots on the lower half. The main feature is the lighter red, to rust-brown colour of the basal field. In any case, different in colour from the rest of the lip.



*Ophrys
corbariensis*

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Cephalanthera rubra: This beautiful species is not exactly rare in the Var, but is present in its stations with only a few specimens. The ridges are on the lip are notable.



Cephalanthera rubra

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Cephalanthera rubra

Ophrys santonica: We found a nice group of this species in the same place as *Ophrys corbariensis*. They immediately stood out because of their low dimensions. So they are small plants and small flowers. The lip is short. Also decisive is the full band of hair around the lip, pale grey. The dorsal sepals bend over the column. (gymnastegium) The lip is 3-lobed and has a scolopaxoid shape. Commonly, the lower margin is yellow. This species is difficult to distinguish from *Ophrys vetula*.





Ophrys santonica

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Ophrys apifera: The well-known bee orchid is making a march northwards. Apparently, this Mediterranean orchid is benefiting from global warming. In the Netherlands, it has already become a common orchid in many places rather than a rarity.

This species is self-pollinating. After opening the flower, pollinia immediately descend and land on the stigma. There is little time left for insects to take advantage.



Ophrys apifera



Nigella arvensis: I added this annual because I find it such a photogenic flower.

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19 May 2024: Trip to the Bauduen reservoir. The first stop was a search area between Ampus and Tourtour. It was a large field along a forest edge. This location was dry at first, but later it became wetter and wetter. So, it was ideal for orchids.

We found several specimens of *Ophrys splendida*. Then *Ophrys apifera*.

Dactylorhiza majalis. The plant stood with its rosette in very moist soil. It has spotted leaves, which are broad at the bottom. The plant has a compact, stocky habit. The compact inflorescence is purple.



Dactylorhiza majalis

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Dactylorhiza elata: This species produces robust plants with unstained narrow leaves, growing vertically upwards along the stem. The inflorescence is long but not very densely flowering with bractae that are easily visible. The flowers are pink to lilac. On the lip, there is a pattern of darker lines and loops.



Dactylorhiza elata

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Ophrys druentica: This species has robust plants with medium to large flowers. The sepals are whitish to purple. The lip is entire to indistinctly 3-lobed. The colour of the trapezoid lip is brownish-purple. It has a hairy margin, rather long and dense, whitish to reddish on the upper half. Downwards, the hairiness becomes darker. The markings on the speculum are yellow or white edged and consist of several ocelli.

Remarkably - and I have never seen this before - the basal field is sometimes divided in two by a branch of the speculum.



Ophrys druentica

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Ophrys druentica



Ophrys scolopax. This is a widespread species, occurring in France, Spain and south-west Italy.

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3. Department of Drôme southern region: 22 May 2024.

We continue our journey to the south of the department of Drôme, the south side of the Vercors national park. Our place of stay was the town of Die. We had booked with the organisation VVF Die. The bungalow park is old, the bungalows are small and noisy. It suffices for a few days. From here, the most important sites are easily accessible.

But first we leave the motorway at Montelimar-sud. to visit the important site at Montboucher-sur-Jabron for *Ophrys montiliensis*. This orchid takes its name from the nearby town of Montelimar. The Jabron and especially Roubion rivers are of great interest because of the occurrence of rare orchids.

It is a Natura 2000 site. Natura 2000 is a European network of protected natural areas. It is to preserve habitat and biodiversity. All EU member states plus UK have designated areas in their countries, which need extra protection.

Ophrys montiliensis is a medium-sized species 20-55 cm with medium-sized flowers. The sepals are pink to purple. The petals are slightly darker than the sepals. The lip is entire and fucifloroid and distinctly 3-lobed. 30% of the specimens are scolopaxoid. (See photo 2) The lip has a complete marginal band of short hair. The speculum covers much of the lip but is rather simple. The

basal field is usually slightly lighter, slightly redder than the rest of the lip. The stigmatic cavity is wide and easily visible, as are the pseudo-eyes. The cropping season is late, late May, June,



early July. At our 'finding spot' on 22 May, nothing else could be found but this species, which made life easy!

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Ophrys montiliensis

Col de Valouse. From the previous site, it's another hour's drive to the Col de Valouse. On the way we found the majestic *Himantoglossum hircinum* in the roadside.



Himantoglossum hircinum



On the col de Valouse, and in the immediate surroundings, you see meadows of grass. At first you think: "I don't see any orchids", but they are hidden among the already tall grass (22 May).

We found these orchids there: *Ophrys demangei*, *Ophrys corbariensis*, *Ophrys druentica*, *Ophrys gresivaudanica*, *Ophrys quercophila*. I have described these species with illustrations above.



A peculiar specimen of *Ophrys druentica*.



On the next day, 23 May 2024, we made a trip to the mountains of the Vercors. Our destination was the Col de Bachus, via the Col de la Croix D172. On the western side of this col are many *Ophrys demangei*.

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Limodorum abortivum: This is a species, which you don't have to look for, but which you just come across unexpectedly. The blue colour of the flowers is striking. By the way: By no means always do the flowers look pretty. The plant is often in the dark and under trees or shrubs, and then the flowers wilt before they open. In part 3 of this series on the orchids of southern France, I will return to this in detail.



Limodorum abortivum

Near a spring with running water, a large group of carnivorous plants could be seen.

Pinguicula grandiflora. The pale green leaves are so viscous that small insects that have landed stick to them and are then digested by the plant's juices.



Pinguicula grandiflora

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You then come to the D70, which leads to the Col de Bacchus. On the way, we saw an unusual form of *Orchis purpurea*, the hypochrome form.



Close to the col, you can see vast meadows.

Neotinea tridentata: Driving towards the col de Bacchus, you will see grassy fields to the left and right, inviting exploration.

Neotinea (Orchis) tridentata is everywhere. It bears small slightly flattened flowers. The three sepals and two petals form a helmet or hood. The 3 pointed ends stick upwards, hence the name 'Three-toed Orchis'. Confusion with *Neotinea lactea* is possible, but bear in mind that the lip of this orchid is milky and flowers considerably earlier.

Neotinea tridentata

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Androrchis mascula occurs frequently in the same habitat as *tridentata*. The photo shows a different form from the nominal form.

On the col we found further species, which have been discussed earlier: *Ophrys saratoi*, *Ophrys aurelia*, *Neotinea ustulata*.



On our last day, 24 May 2014, we made a trip to the Col de Menee. This col is 1457 metres high, which made it too cold for the orchids. Halfway up the climb, near the village of Les Nonieres, there is a side road to the Vallon de Combeau. This road passes through a beautiful gorge and eventually comes to a dead-end. There is parking there and numerous marked walks.



The first find is *Androrchis spitzelii*. The height of the plant is 20-40 cm. It stood with many peers along the road verge and on an embankment. A plant with unstained leaves. The inflorescence is cylindrical and is rather densely flowering. The sepals are beautifully coloured with dots.

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It is a rare species but is widespread. From the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea to Algeria.
From Majorca to Anatolia.



Androrchis spitzelii



Gymnadenia conopsea, a
widespread species as far away
as China and very well known.

---International Rock Gardener---

Androrchis pallens: These are plants which grow up to 40 cm tall, with large rosettes with unspotted leaves. The inflorescence is densely flowered up to 30 flowers per spike. The flowers are bright yellow, with no marking or markings on the sepals and petals. It has a thick spur. This species is rare and is found from the Pyrenees to the Crimea.

Bumblebees confuse this species with the nectar-rich *Lathyrus vernus*. *Orchis pallens* can often be found in the vicinity of this Lathyrus. The orchid itself has little food to offer bumblebees. In this way, the bumblebees visit the orchid, which thus benefits from its appearance. This is a form of mimicry.



Orchis pallens in the midst of *Gentiana angustifolia*.



Orchis pallens

Androrchis ovalis: this species is closely related to *Herorchis mascula*. The main characteristic of this species is the underside of the stem and leaf of the rosette. These are washed red-brown with red stripes and small dots. It has large flowers with long sepals and petals with pointed ends, pointed upward. The lip has almost no dots, as in *Androrchis mascula*. The spur is thick and resembles a club.

The distribution of *Orchis ovalis* is central Europe, from the Balkans to the Vercors. There are many reports of this orchid replacing *Androrchis mascula*. In those places *Androrchis ovalis* has become the dominant species. This phenomenon is called intergradation.

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Androrchis ovalis



Androrchis ovalis foliage, showing red markings.

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Dactylorhiza sambucina: The road through the Vallon de Combeau ends at a parking lot. The meadows in this area are full of *Dactylorhiza sambucina* in various colours from purple to red to yellow, with all sorts of nuances in between. They are not tall plants (up to 30cm), but stocky in shape and densely flowering. Red spots can be seen on the lip.



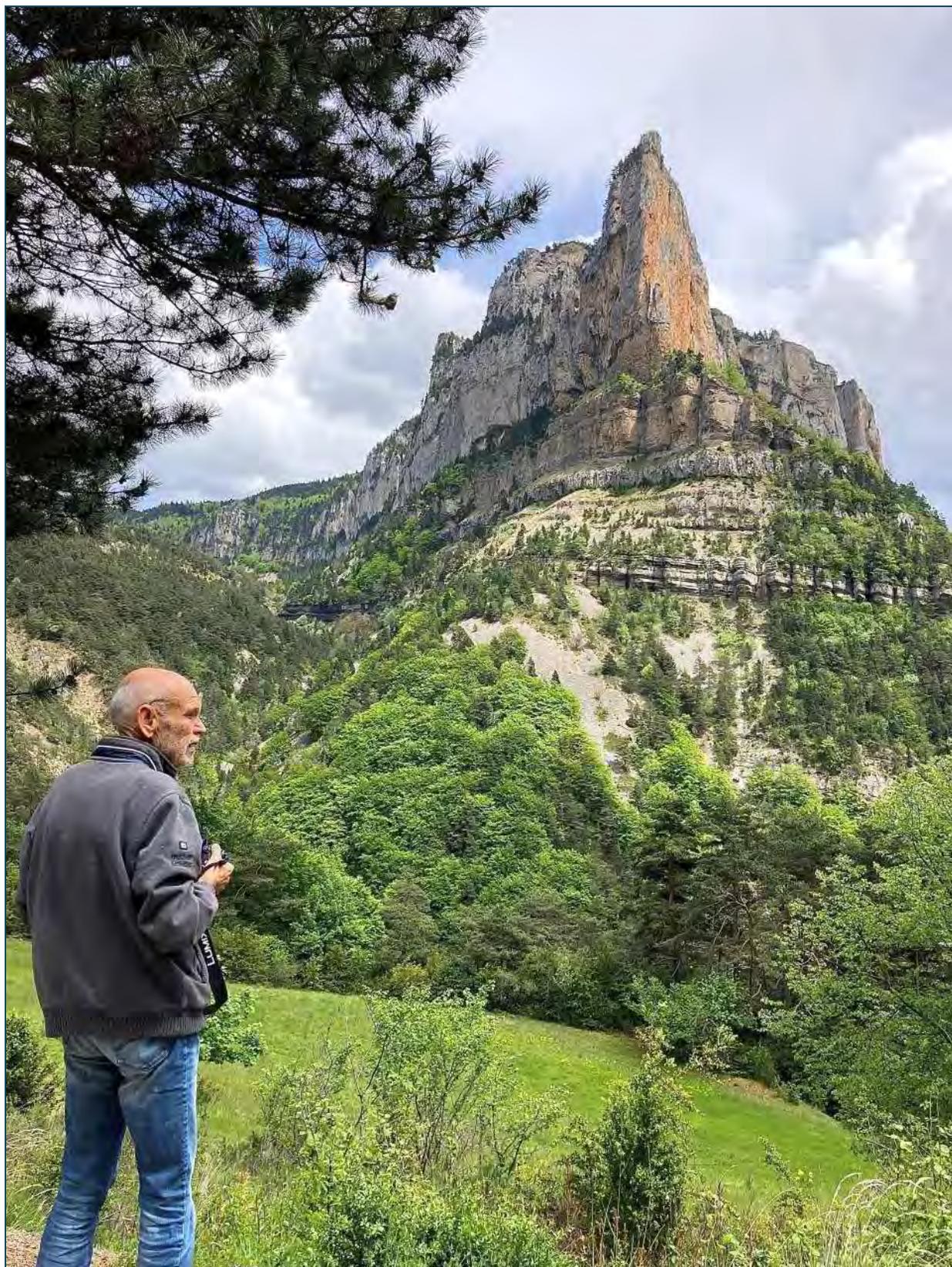
Top: *Dactylorhiza sambucina* red form, below: *Dactylorhiza sambucina* yellow form.

---International Rock Gardener---

All pictures by Gerrit and Ibeltje Eijkelenboom.

Books: Pierre Delforge – Orchidees de France, de Suisse et du Benelux.

Websites: www.orchidsofbritainandeurope.co.uk www.elisajeanluc.fr



The last picture shows the author looking out over the Vallon de Combeau.