

International Rock Gardener

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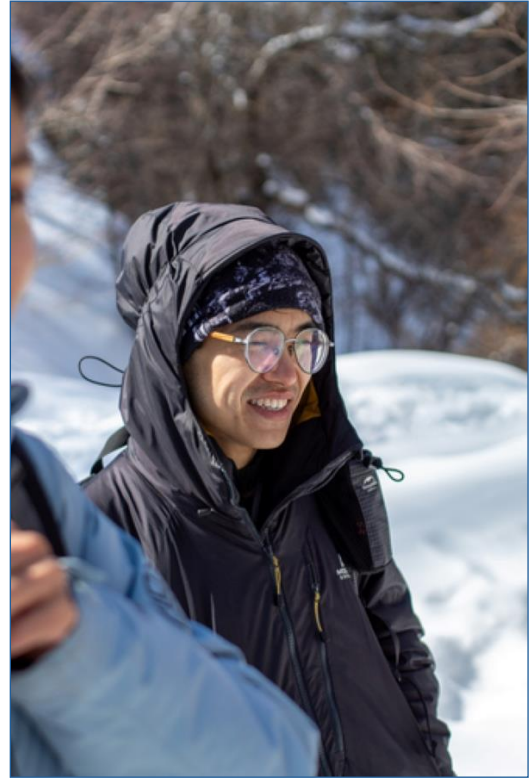
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We are delighted to introduce a new contributor from Kazakhstan, Adilmurat Nagashpekov (Адилмұрат Нағашпеков) who sends a photo essay of some plants he has seen on his mountain outings. It is always a pleasure to find a young person who is interested in learning more about the world around them, and sharing that experience with others.

Adilmurat writes :

“ My name is Adilmurat, and I am an adventurer from Kazakhstan. I climb mountains in Kazakhstan, hike and trek a lot, and sometimes guide people or lead and live with scouts. I really love mountains. When I first began visiting them, I was always asking, "What is this plant?" and "What is that one?" I started taking plant identification more seriously during a multi-day hike with scouts last year. I took photographs, used several tools to help with identification, and began uploading observations to iNaturalist. These notes are not meant as a scientific survey, but as field notes from someone who is learning by walking, photographing, and asking questions. As a true



mountain lover, I usually avoid the most common and popular hikes and places here, and quite often I end up in very distant, unpopular, and rarely visited areas. Because of this, I try to take as many plant photographs as possible. I know it may be unlikely that another nature lover will come here soon and do the same. Even after taking photographs, I do not always manage to upload them all (I try my best), because it takes a lot of time. When the hiking season started, I spent all my weekends in the mountains. It was challenging to make this photo essay because I simply could not choose one plant over another. They are all unique and beautiful. You may notice that many of the photographs were taken on 16 May. I chose them because they were the freshest observations and because I could finally sit down and write the essay; otherwise I would probably continue procrastinating while looking for "the best of the best." On that day I made an ascent to Peak Дальний and photographed flowers along the way. In total, I made 31 observations and uploaded them all to iNaturalist. Together, they show the current spring state of the mountains: the first early blooming plants that announce the beginning of summer.”

Cover image: *Hegemone lilacina*, photographed in Chungurchak gorge, Kyrgyzstan, at 3000m+, flowering just after snowmelt - photo by Adilmurat Nagashpekov.

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--- Photo Essay ---

My name is Adilmurat Nagashpekov. I am based in Kazakhstan and regularly hike in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, especially in the Tian Shan region.

During my hikes I document wildflowers and alpine plants in habitat. I am an amateur field observer rather than a professional botanist, but I record general locality, altitude, habitat context, and use iNaturalist for identification support and correction.

My profile: <https://www.inaturalist.org/people/adilmurat>.

This photo essay contains four locations that I have visited recently. The first is Prohodnoe Gorge. The lower part of the gorge, up to Polyana Terra, is quite popular among hikers here, but higher up the number of people decreases significantly. Polyana Terra itself is 2609 metres in altitude. As it is only May, at the beginning of the season, it is not crowded at all. The temperature is pleasant and comfortable, and it already feels like summer. As the altitude rises, the height of the plants decreases. At 3000m+ elevations and near the peak itself, the slopes are southern, so the snow has almost completely gone and the first signs of the season are visible.

The second place is Ushnokyr's plateau. It is a completely different place: not popular, quite distant from the city, and lower in altitude. Because I was there in April, most of the plants had not bloomed yet or were only beginning. The flora is completely different there. The most astonishing thing I remember is the tulip meadows. It was quite incredible to see such huge meadows full of tulips in the mountains.

The third place is from the beginning of May, when I was rafting on the Ili River, in the Kazakhstani steppes. The flora there is completely different too. Even in early May, temperatures can easily rise to 25-30 degrees. I was there for five days, and the number of observations I made was significantly lower. However, they were all different and interesting plants that I had never seen here in the mountains.

The last location is Karatau region, where I walked at the end of March, quite close to Karatau's reserve. The flora is completely different there too. Because it was the end of March, I could not see the flowering of most endemic plants there. I saw different tulips (*Tulipa alberti*, *Tulipa kaufmanniana* and *Tulipa greigii*) and also saw Karatau's allium in its beginning form. I am currently writing an informational booklet about that place, because it is completely unknown even for many local people here.

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Tulipa orthopoda — 21 March 2026, Karatau region. One of the earliest tulips growing there.



Saussurea sp. — 12 July 2025, near Peak Kamenskiy, above 3000 m.

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Allium schoenoprasum — 8 July 2025, deep in Aksay Gorge. I think Allium is one of the key plants of the entire Kazakhstan mountains, well, we have many, but Alliums are, I'd say, the ones you start noticing the moment you begin your plant identification journey. And we have a lot of types here — sometimes it's quite hard to know what is what. And yes, they taste great too.

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Primula nivalis
— 16 May 2026,
inside
Prohodnoy
Gorge. A sign of
spring and
summer in the
mountains,
above 2500 m.

Tulipa tarda —
16 May 2026,
Inside
Prohodnoy
Gorge, above
2500 m. There
will be many
tulips in this
essay because I
think they are
signs of the
mountains too,
and we have
many types of
them.



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Callianthemum alatavicum — 16 May 2026, inside Prohodnoy Gorge, above 3000 m.
A flower that survives extreme conditions in the mountains.



Oxygraphis glacialis — 16 May 2026, inside Prohodnoy Gorge, above 3000 m.



Left: *Tulipa dasystemon* — 16 May 2026, inside Prohodnoy Gorge, above 2800 m.



Right: *Allium atosanguineum* — 16 May 2026, inside Prohodnoy Gorge, above 2600 m.

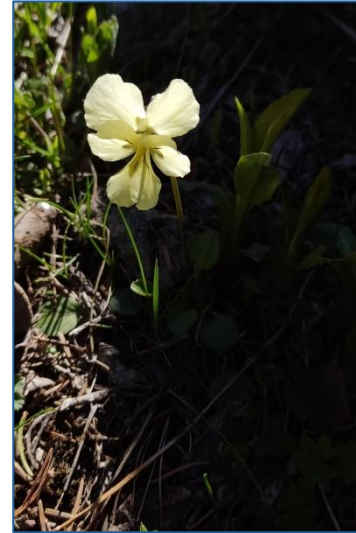
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Left: *Anemonastrum protractum*

— 16 May 2026, inside
Prohodnoy Gorge,
above 2600 m.

Right: *Viola altaica* — inside
Prohodnoy Gorge, above 2600 m.
There are many Violas here too,
and their colours differ, from white
to purple.



Left above: *Centaurea pulchella* — From the steppes near the Ili River. 8 May 2026.



Right above: *Pseudohandelia umbellifera* — From the steppes near the Ili River.

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When I first saw *Pseudohandelia umbellifera* I was shocked. The structure of its stem, this white, "felt"-like material — protects the plant from extreme heat and UV. But what shocked me even more was the similarity: plants growing above 3000 m tend to have the same kind of structure. Different elevations, same defence mechanism. 8 May 2026.



Left: *Tragopogon ruber* — From the steppes near the Ili River. 8 May 2026.



Right: *Ixiolirion tataricum* — 25 April 2026.
Near Ushkonyr Plateau, around 2200 m.

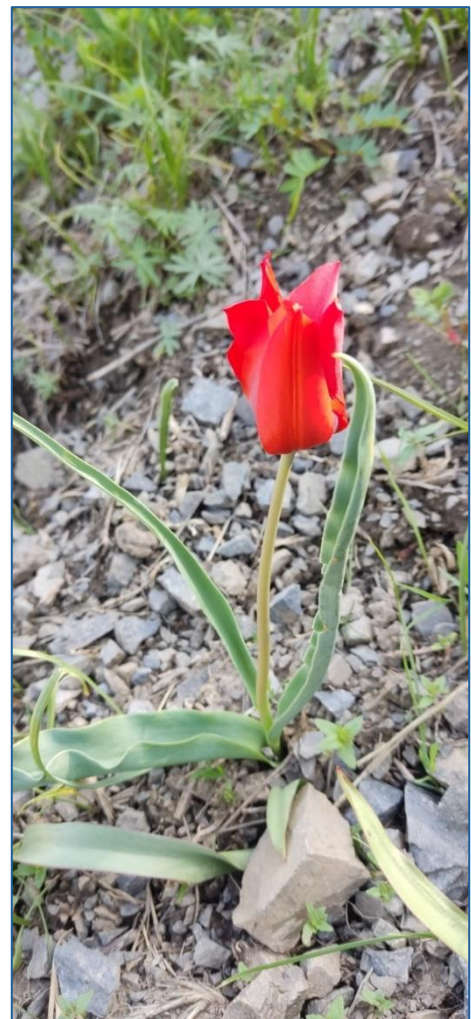
One thing I would like to mention is that even in our local mountains, Ile Alatau, every gorge is unique. Yes, 80-90 percent of the plants may be the same, but the remaining percent is quite visible, and it makes every place feel unique. Seasons matter greatly too. Each one or two-month period changes the landscape: some plants begin to bloom, others finish their cycle. This significantly changes the experience of the landscape and gives me motivation to visit the same places more.

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Identification is a great deal here. The community is very small, and the only way to get plants correctly identified is iNaturalist. Even there, some plants can remain unidentified. Because the community is small, on iNaturalist it can be enough for a second person to react to an observation for it to move from a simple observation to research grade. Despite being small, the community is quite active. Still, I would really like it to be bigger, and overall I would be very happy to share more about Kazakhstan.



Two views of *Tulipa ostrowskiana* — Near Ushkonyr Plateau, around 2200 m. 25 April 2026.

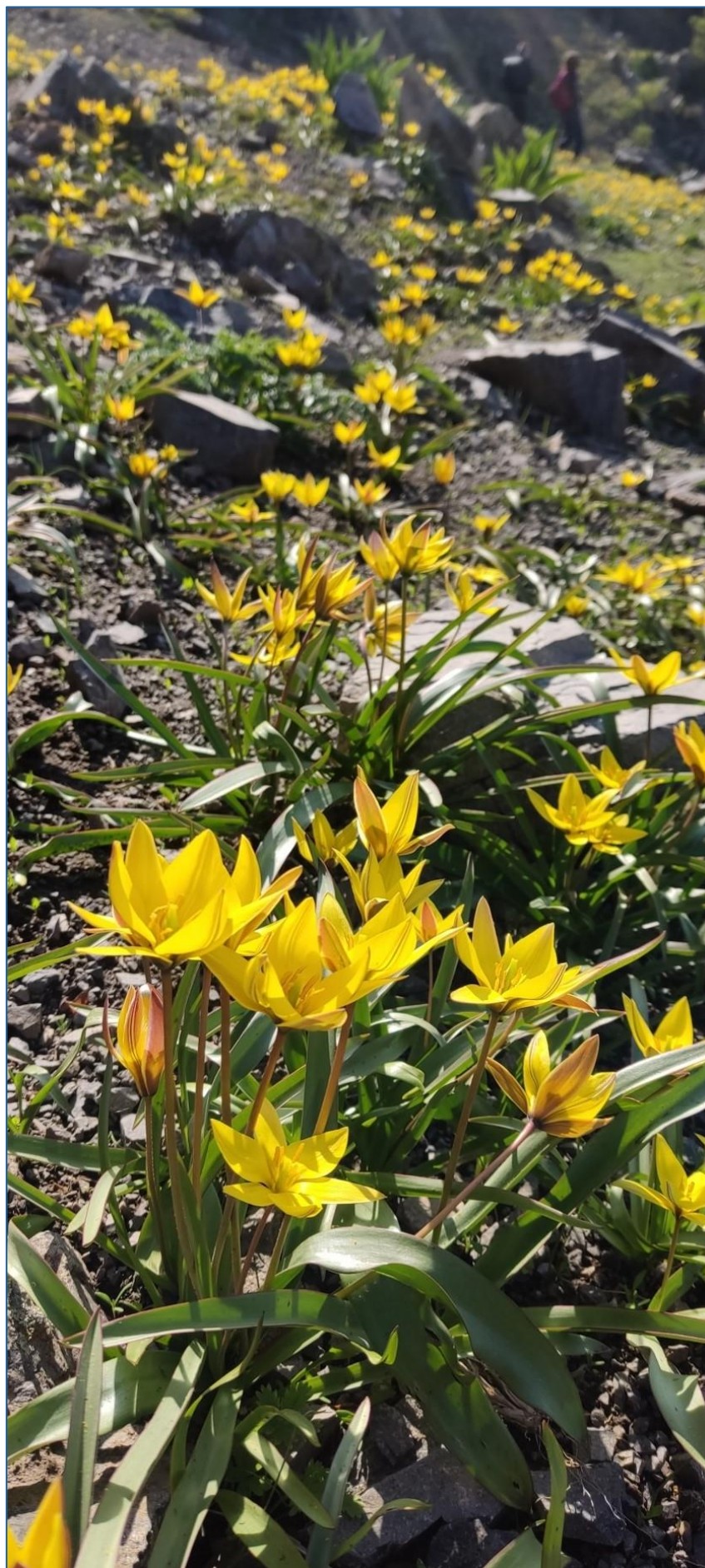


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Paeonia intermedia — Near Ushkonyr Plateau, around 2200 m. 25 April 2026.

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Tulipa kolpakowskiana — Meadows (clearings) near Ushkonyr Plateau, around 2200 m. 25 April 2026.

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Iris alberti — Near Ushkonyr Plateau, around 2200 m. 25 April 2026.

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Crocus alata — Karatau range, 1600 m. 24 March 2026.

And here is the challenge too. When I visited Kyrgyzstan and made observations, then uploaded them, nobody reacted. I had to tag or ask some of my current friends to identify plants. If a community is active, there may still be only a few people, and even they react mostly to common plants, while distant and rare ones can remain unidentified. That is why I did not include some of the Kyrgyzstan observations in this essay: I am not completely sure about the correct names. I am planning to go back to Kyrgyzstan, make as many photographs as possible, and quietly share about its nature too. *Hegemone lilacina* from Chungurchak (Chunkurchak) Gorge (below) is one exception, identified with confidence, and too beautiful not to share.



A.N.