

Autumn Flowers of The Peloponnese

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Introduction



Galanthus reginae-olga

The Peloponnese has a typical Mediterranean climate with mild, wet winters and hot dry summers. Spring really starts in the autumn with the coming of the rains; the first plants to flower are the many bulbs of the area. Our week was timed to see the best of the Mediterranean autumn wildflowers in some of the best areas in the Peloponnese, Tayetos, Parnonas and Mani. Tayetos, the highest mountain in the Peloponnese, features a fascinating flora. We planned to explore up to around 1,800m to enjoy the range of flowers and mix of evergreen and deciduous forests. Parnonas and the Mani peninsula both support a diverse range of flowers too.

We expected to see Colchicum, Cyclamen, Sternbergia, several species of Crocus, a Galanthus and possibly a Biarum as well.

The focus of the holiday was on finding and photographing the plants and enjoying the other natural history in this beautiful autumn landscape, as well as soaking up the local culture. We also visited a number of archaeological areas and The Mani Peninsula, to see the fortified towers.

Daily reports

Day 1: October 21st 2014, Arrival in Athens

Arrival at Athens Airport, where Yiannis had already collected our vehicle. We loaded up and set off towards Corinth. After a minor odyssey trying to find parking in the centre of Argos we settled in to our hotel and enjoyed a Greek meal in a nearby restaurant, then retired to the hotel to rest and prepare for some exploration in the morning.

Day 2: October 22nd 2014, Epidauros & Mycenae

We set off early from our hotel in Argos and headed for Epidauros to visit the ancient theatre. The banks in the site leading up to the theatre were covered in *Scilla autumnalis*, which had mostly finished flowering. We soon started seeing the first Cyclamen, *C. graecum*. We admired the theatre with its perfect acoustic and front-row seats with arm and back-rests. We found *Colutea arborescens*, immediately recognised by its inflated fruits and *Quercus coccifera* with characteristic leaves and acorns.



Cyclamen graecum © J. Westwood

We then drove on to Mycenae, perched on a hillside in a magnificent setting. We started to walk around the site but were soon distracted by the flowers. Good *Cyclamen graecum*, including one with very nicely marked leaves. Hiding behind a rock was *Arisarum vulgare*. After reaching the top we also spotted the bright yellow patches of *Sternbergia lutea*. Whilst waiting for Sally and John, Yiannis and Peter spotted a couple of Rock Nuthatches hunting amongst the rocks of the side. Butterflies were much in evidence around a large bush of *Inula viscosa* in flower. Eastern Bath White, Small Copper, Long-tailed Blue and Wall Brown were amongst the ones seen. We then drove the short distance to the tomb of Atreus, probably one of the most impressive Mycenae monuments in existence.



Our next drive took us towards the main Corinth-Tripoli motorway to drive down to Mystras. We stopped at several places by the road which proved very fruitful with masses of Crocuses, which proved to belong to two species *C. boryi* and *C. hadriaticus*. More massed *Sternbergia lutea* was seen on road banks. Eventually we reached our destination for the day, the picturesque village of Mystras on the foothills of the Tayetos Mountain.

Day 3: October 23st 2014, Mystras

Rain greeted us in the morning, which soon cleared, allowing us to drive the short distance to the Byzantine city of Mystras. Built on the site of the Tayetos it once housed up to 40,000 people. We entered via the north gate whilst Yiannis drove to the lower gate and joined us from below. A pair of Rock Nuthatches kept us watching as they moved about on the ruins. The beautiful autumn-flowering *Allium callimischon* was all over the site as well as *Sternbergia lutea*.



We descended through the site visiting the small churches until we finally arrived at the main church, finely decorated with wall paintings, where the last emperor of Byzantium was crowned, before his departure for Constantinople in 1543.

As the rain cleared we were rewarded by a magnificent rainbow over the city, a theme that was to repeat itself during the holiday. Peloponnese Wall Lizards were now sunning themselves on rocks by a path. As we exited the site we were rewarded by Southern White Admiral flying up and settling on a tree, allowing good views.

After our midday meal we made a short walk in the nearby gorge of Parori, where there

was more *Campanula versicolor* and *Crocus boryi* in flower. A couple of Black Redstarts were also flitting about on the rocks.

Day 4: October 29th 2014, The Tayetos

It was raining heavily as we set off to go higher up the Tayetos. Passing through Paleopanagia we started the climb up the mountain. Higher up, the habitat began to change with deciduous trees such *Platanus orientalis*, *Castanea sativa* and various *Acer*s taking over. Soon we were to find the little plants we had come to see, *Galanthus reginae-olgae*, growing with *Cyclamen hederifolium*. It was still raining heavily but a break allowed us to have a look at the plants.



Another species on our list was a Salamander that lives by the stream running through the habitat. A little searching by Yiannis found one enjoying the rain on a slope. It stayed long enough to be seen and photographed by everyone. The rain soon started again so we set off down the mountain, towards Gythio. Our attempts to stop again to have a look at some *Crocus* were unfortunately thwarted by the rain. So we arrived early in Gythio to have our lunch and to walk towards the little island covered in *Cyclamen graecum*. Our choice of restaurant proved very rewarding, with several authentic Greek dishes, and we were to return there for the rest of our holiday.

Day 5: October 25th 2014, Areopolis

We started the day with rain, which thankfully dried up later. We headed west today towards Areopolis for our day's excursion. We made our first stop near the village of Sotira and searched the countryside there. *Narcissus serotinus* was found by the roadside as well as plenty of *Crocus boryi*.



Our next stop was in a side road leading down to the village of Limeni. Here we found one of the most spectacular of the Peloponnese crocuses, *Crocus goulimy*, a tall crocus often reaching 15 cm in height in various shades of blue. A roadside stop revealed our third *Crocus* of the day, the elegant *Crocus niveus*.

We continued towards the sea, where we took the boat trip into the caves at Diros, which must rate as a wonder of the world. Coming out of the caves we found several plants



adapted to growing near the sea still in flower, such as *Inula crithmoides* and *Dianthus arboreus*, both with fleshy leaves.

On our return journey we explored an area with a different geology, more suitable to acid loving plants. Here we saw *Erica manipuliflora*, *Arbutus unedo*, *Bryonia cretica*, and a *Lonicera* sp.

Day 6: October 25th 2014, Mani

We headed west once more towards Areopolis and then due south towards the tip of the peninsula. We made a stop in some olive groves to search for plants, seeing lots of *Cyclamen graecum* but not much else. Soon we saw the little picturesque port of Gerolimenas and carried on towards Vathya, the most picturesque of the Mani villages. We stopped in the village to wonder at the famous tower-houses which were to dominate the landscape on our trip round Mani today.

As we were driving, Sally spotted a butterfly nectaring on the *Inula* by the road. It turned out to be a Plain Tiger, a butterfly we had hoped we might see and so were all very happy to stop and photograph it.

We continued our trip round the peninsula and took a detour towards Cape Tenaro, the southernmost tip of mainland Greece. En route Sally spotted some *Colchicum* growing on a little terrace and we got out to investigate. The anthers were yellow and we could not see any leaves, which narrowed down the possibilities. On further investigation we found some plants that had started to produce their leaves which strongly suggested that the plants were the endemic *C. parlatoris*. A praying mantis was also spotted nearby.

We continued down to the tip of the peninsula where we visited the temple of Poseidon and found more *C. parlatoris*. We then backtracked and climbed higher, stopping to investigate some Crocuses which proved to be a mixture of *C. boryi* and *C. niveus*. We stopped at the seaside village of Kotronas for our lunch and Peter spotted a Kingfisher, a long way away on the pier.



Day 7: November 1st 2014, Parnon

As we were waiting to leave the hotel in the morning Peter spotted another Kingfisher on some rocks in the port. Excellent views were had of this pretty bird. We then set off to the Parnon Mountains, on the east side of the Peloponnese peninsula. We took the coastal road from Gythion, passing over the Evrotas River and at Metamorphosis we turned towards the Parnon. The landscape is characterised by endless olive plantations, too well cultivated for the wild plants to survive. After Metamorphosis the landscape turns to garigue, metamorphosed limestone into which little pockets of soil support a population of shrubs and bulbs. The road climbed higher and we made our first stop. *Crocus niveus* was everywhere, as was a *Colchicum* which proved to be *C. cupani*.



We carried on higher up the mountain, the vegetation becoming sparser. At a stop at a little gully two new Crocuses revealed themselves. One had white anthers like *Crocus boryi*, but was not *C. boryi* as that has feathering outside the sepals. It must have therefore been *C. laevigatus*, relatively rare in the Peloponnese! The other Crocus had blue stripes on the petals and our key revealed it to be *Crocus cancellatus*.

We were over the top and down the other side, through Lampokambos, where there were fantastic displays of *Crocus goulimy*. We carried on and took a side road towards Kiparissi. Shortly afterwards *Sternbergia lutea* was spotted and we stopped to investigate. The nearby small terraces presented the most amazing display of *Sternbergia lutea* growing with hundreds of *Crocus goulimy*, *Cyclamen graecum* and *Crocus niveus*.



We climbed higher towards Kyparissi and stopped at a viewpoint to admire the beautiful scenery. Here we found *Campanula versicolor* which we had previously seen in the Parori gorge growing on the steep walls and by the roadside we found *Odontites linkii*, a *Scutellaria*, *Putoria calabrica*, all in flower. We began the return journey,

climbing higher once again.

Another roadside stop was made and another new Crocus found. This time with yellow anthers and a simple style, but clearly not *C. goulimy*. It must have therefore been *C. hadriaticus*.

Day 8: November 4th 2014, Departure

We set off early for our rendezvous with our flights from Athens. We were hoping for some botanising around the airport, unfortunately the traffic around Athens delayed our arrival and we had to go straight to check-in.



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Peloponnese checklist		Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7
Monocotyledons							
Amaryllidaceae							
Galanthus	regina-olgae			x		x	
Narcissus	serotinus				x		
	tazetta						
Sternbergia	lutea	x	x	x	x	x	x
Sternbergia	sicula						
Araceae							
Arisarum	vulgare	x	x				
Biarum	tenuifolium						
Iridaceae							
Crocus	biflorus ssp melantherus						
Crocus	boryi	x	x		x	x	
Crocus	cancellatus						x
Crocus	goulimyi				x		x
Crocus	hadriaticus ssp hadriaticus	x					x
Crocus	laevigatus						x
Crocus	niveus				x	x	x
Liliaceae							
Allium	callimischon		x		x		
	ritsii						
Colchicum	cupani	x					x
Colchicum	peloponnesiacum						
Colchicum	graecum						
Colchicum	pusillum						
Colchicum	parlatoris					x	
Colchicum	boissieri						
Colchicum	bivonae						
Colchicum	lingulatum						
Colchicum	psaridis				x		
Scilla	autumnalis	x					
Tamus	communis						
Urginea	maritima	x					
Orchidaceae							
Spiranthes	spiralis		x				
Dicotyledons							
Aceraceae							
Acer	monspessulatum	x			x		
	sempervirens						
Anacardiaceae							
Cotinus	cogygria						x
Pistacia	atlantica				x		
	lentiscus			x	x		x
	terebinthus						
Rhus	coriaria						
Asteraceae							
Bellis	sylvestris		x	x		x	x
Helminthotheca	echioides		x				

Inula	crithmoides			x			
	graveolens						
	viscosa	x		x		x	x
Reichardia	picroides	x					
Senecio	bicolor						
Taraxacum	hellenicum	x					
Campanulaceae							
Campanula	versicolor		x				x
Caryophyllaceae							
Dianthus	arboreus				x		
Cistaceae							
Cistus	creticus						
	parviflorus						x
	salviifolius						
Fumana	thymifolia	x					
Ericaceae							
Arbutus	unedo				x		x
	andrachne						x
Erica	manipuliflora			x	x	x	
	arborea						x
Euphorbiaceae							
Mercurialis	annua	x					
Euphorbia	acanthothamnus				x		x
	characias						
	dendroides				x		
	myrsinoides						
	oblongata						
	rigida						
Fabaceae							
Ceratonia	siliqua						x
Colutea	arborescens			x			
Medicago a	arborea				x		
Fagaceae							
Castanea	sativa			x			
Celtis	siliquastrum	x					
Quercus	coccifera	x			x		
	frainetto						
	infectoria			x		x	
	ithaburensis						
	ilex						
	macrolepis						
	pubescens						
Lamiaceae							
Calamintha	incana		x		x		
Micromeria			x				
Phlomis	fruticosa			x			
Salvia	verbenaca						
Scutellaria			x				x
Stachys	candida						
Thymus	capitatus				x		
Oleaceae							

Fraxinus	ornus						
Olea	europaea		x				
Pinaceae /Cupressaceae							
Abies	cephalonica			x			x
Juniperus	oxycedrus						x
Pinus	halepensis						
Pinus	nigra						
Platanaceae							
Platanus	orientalis	x	x	x			
Plumbaginaceae							
Plumbago	europaea		x				
Limonium				x		x	
Primulaceae							
Cyclamen	graecum	x	x	x	x	x	x
	hederifolium		x	x			
Rhamnaceae							
Rhamnus	alaternus						
Rosaceae							
Crataegus	azarolus						
	monogyna						
	orientalis						x
Pyrus	amygdaliformis						
Rosa	canina						
Sarcopoterium	spinosum					x	x
Rubiaceae							
Putoria	calabrica						x
Scrophulariaceae							
Verbascum	sinuatum						x
Scrophularia					x		
Odontites	linkii						x
Solanaceae							
Mandragora	autumnalis						
Solanum	nigrum		x				
Ulmaceae							
Ulmus	minor						
Valerianaceae							
Verbenaceae							
Valeriana	montana						
Vitex	agnus-castus	x					
Verbena	officinalis		x				
Zygophyllaceae							
Tribulus	terrestris						
Pteridophyta							
Ceterach	officinarum						
Herpetofauna							
Salamander				x			
Common Newt (Lissotriton vulgaris)							
Common Toad (Bufo bufo)							

Green Toad (Epidalea viridis)						
Common Tree Frog (Hyla arborea)						
Greek Marsh Frog (Pelophylax kurtmuelleri)						
Epirus Water Frog (Pelophylax epeiroticus)						
Balkan Stream Frog (Rana graeca)						
Hermann's Tortoise (Testudo hermanni)				x		
Marginated Tortoise (Testudo marginata)						
European Pond Terrapin (Emys orbicularis)						
Balkan Terrapin (Mauremys rivulata)						
African Chameleon (Chamaeleo africanus)						
Turkish Gecko (Hemidactylus turcicus)						
Kotschy's Gecko (Mediodactylus kotschy)						
Greek Algyroides (Algyroides moreoticus)						
Balkan Green Lizard (Lacerta trilineata)						
Greek Rock Lizard (Hellenolacerta graeca)						
Balkan Wall Lizard (Podarcis tauricus)						
Peloponnese Wall Lizard (Podarcis peloponnesiacus)			x			
Snake-eyed Skink (Ablepharus kitaibelii)						
Snake-eyed Skink (Ablepharus kitaibelii)						
Limbless Skink (Ophiomorus punctatissimus)						
Peloponnese Slow Worm (Anguis cephalonica)						
Glass Lizard (Pseudopus apodus)						
Balkan Whip Snake (Hierophis gemonensis)						
Dahl's Whip Snake (Platyceps najadum)						
Dice Snake (Natrix tessellata)						
Eastern Montpellier Snake (Malpolon insignitus)						
Cat Snake (Telescopus fallax)						
Nose-horned Viper (Vipera ammodytes)						

Butterflies

Day	2	3	4	5	6	7
Clouded yellow	x	x	x	x	x	x
Pale Clouded yellow	x					
Berger's Clouded yellow	x					
Small white	x					x
Large White						
Eastern Bath White	x				x	
Red Admiral	x		x	x	x	x
Southern White Admiral		x				
Meadow Brown			x	x	x	
Painted Lady	x	x			x	
Wall Brown	x	x		x	x	
Plain Tiger						
Small copper	x					
Brown Argus	x	x				

Long-tailed blue	x			x	x	
Common blue	x					
Speckled wood					x	
Skipper					x	
Hummingbird Hawk moth					x	

Birds

Grey wagtail	x	x	x	x	x	x
Long-tailed tit						
Black Redstart	x	x	x		x	
Buzzard	x		x	x		x
Coal tit						
Great tit	x				x	
Blue tit		x			x	
Chaffinch	x					
Robin	x	x	x	x		x
Jay	x	x		x		x
Magpie	x	x				x
House sparrow	x		x		x	
Blackbird						
Goldfinch	x			x		x
Greenfinch					x	
Sardinian warbler	x			x		x
Cetti's warbler				x		
Serine					x	
Blackcap						
Whinchat						
Blackbird	x					
Cirl Bunting	x					
Crested Lark				x		x
Starling	x					
Jackdaws				x		
Collared Dove	x		x	x	x	
Stonechat						x
Crested lark	x					
Hooded Crow	x	x		x		x
Raven				x	x	
Rock nuthatch	x	x				
Red-rump swallows			x		x	
Kingfisher						x
Little Egret						x