



The Dolomites

29th June - 6th July 2024

Led by Paul Harcourt Davies & Lois Ferguson



Greenwings Wildlife Holidays

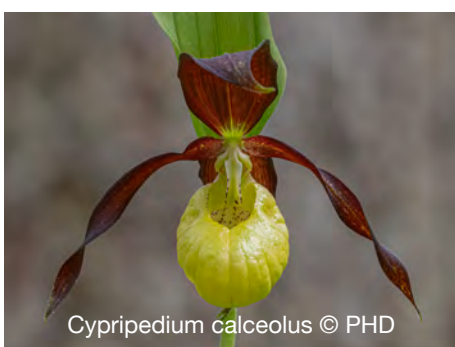
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Greenwings DOLOMITES - 29th June to 6th July 2024

With Paul Harcourt Davies & Lois Ferguson



Day 1

Because of changes in flight times, we arrived too late at our hotel for a pre-supper walk. The journey was slower than it should've been due to the fact that the power steering on our vehicle deteriorated.... Having ascertained there was no danger, just heavy steering, Lois tackled the bends and hills, but it was not easy. We made an arrangement to have things fixed as soon as possible. And made sure the next day would be a walking day so that the van could be checked out. Such things are an occupational hazard but Italians are always helpful when problems arise.

Day 2

The flowering season advances in the mountains and so Paul was very keen to get everybody to a woodland site for the Ladies Slipper. There had been much crossing of fingers that they would not have gone over... fortunately there was still some superb blooms under pine trees. Even for those who have seen this species they are something truly special. The Coralroot Orchids we had found the week before were past their best but we did find a few Lesser Twayblades in the mossy cushions.

Our walk back to the hotel was definitely more flowery than the week before with numerous spikes of both fragrant orchids, a few vanilla orchids and some spotted orchids as well as more spikes of Single-leaved Bog Orchid (*Malaxis monophyllos*) in the place we visited the week before. This whole region is remarkably flowery and, naturally, we took our time getting back so that those who wanted to take photographs or just enjoy the spectacle had plenty of time to do so. The inclement weather of the week before had delayed the haymaking and thus the local meadows were still in full flower, though a farmer we met said they would be cut within days.

Day 3

We walked to the nearby lift for the Col di Rodella which was as rich as the previous week with a few plants of Alpine Rock Jasmine (*Androsace alpina*) plus Alpine toadflax, Purple Saxifrage and Least Primula (*Primula minima*) plus many more. Following our descent we walked along the riverside path that follows the torrent where there are both pine and mixed woodlands with open spaces. Enormous boulders become alpine gardens colonised by saxifrages and ferns. Two of the Geraniums en route were in good flower (*G. sylvestris* and *G. phaeum*) along with Dark Aquilegia (*A. atrata*). This week the Wintergreens were more advanced and we found Medium (*Pyrola media*), Green-flowered (*P. chlorantha*) and Round-leaved (*P. rotundifolia*) plus the related Nodding Wintergreen (*Orthilia secunda*) plus numerous delightful One-flowered Wintergreens (*Monesis uniflora*) with flowers like tiny umbrellas. The rain just about held off for our picnic but the skies were darkening and so we made our way back to the hotel, having seen everything but not lingered indulgently. Meanwhile, the necessary part for our vehicle had arrived, been installed and Lois took a taxi to the dealer to pick it up for the next day... minimal disruption thanks to our variable itinerary.

Day 4

In the week since we were last at Alba, exploring the mountain pastures above, many of the Sulphur Pasque flowers were past



Arctostaphylos uva-ursi © PHD



Pulsatilla alpina ssp. apiifolia © PHD



Clematis alpina © PHD



Pinguicula alpina © PHD



Gentiana punctata © PHD



Eritrichium nanum © PHD

flowering but now there were their equally attractive feathery seed heads. There were no remnant patches of snow near the lift station but further up the wide valley those same Pasque flowers were in full flower along with some white Alpine Pasque flowers and numerous other species including Bog Violets, (*Viola palustris*) with Marsh Marigolds (*Caltha palustris*). Some rocky outcrops carried a plethora of small saxifrages and sempervivums. We took an open chairlift up to where there were acidic outcrops and found the pink bells of *Soldanella pusilla* and even more flowering plants of King of the Alps (*Eritrichium nanum*) tucked into rocky clefts with its brilliant blue flowers set against silver haired clumps of leaves. Many of the plants were completely inaccessible, dangerously so, but fortunately there were one or two near the path. They were also clumps of the pink Least Primula. We had left the picnic in a rucksack at the rifugio where we also bought drinks to accompany our lunch.

There was a great deal to occupy us in this flower rich area until we made our way back to the hotel and from there walked into the nearby meadows which were a riot of colour. In the Dolomites these are maintained in a traditional way, even if the mowing is now done by a scythe mower, though the traditional hand scythe is still used on steep slopes. After the plants dry and are collected for hay, there is regrowth and grazing animals manure the fields which encourages the next year's flowers. Species diversity is incredible and there are usually many insects as a result, butterflies in particular. However, in 2024 many parts of Italy had a wet spring followed by an extremely hot summer adversely affecting insect populations everywhere.

Day 5

Today was cloudy but not raining and we sent off towards the Marmolada, which was still shrouded in clouds. Some of the gravel areas we visited were extremely productive with numerous small plants of species often those washed down from higher altitudes.

We then took a sidetrack, which Paul had followed a number of years previously to where there was an abundance of Alpine species... with good populations of orchids... Lesser Butterfly (*Platanthera bifolia*), Vanilla (*Gymnadenia rhellicana*) and the Globe orchid (*Traunsteinera globosa*). There were an amazing number of Martagon lilies (*Lilium martagon*), many of them in bud but fortunately a few had started producing their spectacular Turks cap flowers. Here there was also a patch where the snow had recently melted with Spring Crocus to provide a chance for dramatic vistas against the Alpine peaks...

As part of our return journey, we also took a woodland path which, in the past has provided numerous species of butterfly but not this year... though they were plenty of flowers, including some surprise finds of the ladies slipper. Then at the end in a clearing, we found a good colony of the tiny Vanilla Orchids and also Coralroot Orchids in the woods.

Day 6

There were more visitors this week thanks to the breaking up of schools and an influx of families taking walking holidays in early July. We had to queue for longer than normal for the taxi buses operating the shuttle service to the Val Duron. It was as flower-rich as the previous week and the marmots were there, too. This time we took an alternative route down to Campitello di Fassa which proved rich in numerous flower species and a few more butterflies including chequered skipper...

Day 7

We chose to go to the San Pellegrino pass for our final day, where the cabin lifts on both sides of the valley were now open. We repeated our



Corallorhiza trifida © PHD



Neottia cordata © PHD

journey of the previous week up to some very productive Alpine Meadows on limestone soil. There were lovely displays of Cotton Grass (*Eriophorum sp.*), Sulphur Pasque Flower, and many Alpine Butterwort. We later took the lift to Col Margherita (2543m). This offers a very different landscape from anything else we visited with Stone strewn slopes of volcanic rock and astonishing panorama over the dolomites. The plants are different, thanks to the acidic nature of the rocks. Of note, was the Sticky Primrose (*Primula glutinosa*) with its lilac flowers. And we also found some Glacier Buttercups (*Ranunculus glacialis*), growing well-sheltered in rocky clefts with both white and some pink-tinged flowers.

We did our very best today to catch up on all of the things we had missed due to rain, re-visiting an impressive waterfall with river gravels flanking the torrent. Here, there were numerous Alpine species including Shrubby Milkwort (*Polygala chamaebuxus*) in its two colour form and a few, Edelweiss (*Leontopodium alpinum*) to conclude a long and extremely satisfying day.



Malaxis monophyllos © PHD



Primula viscosa © PHD



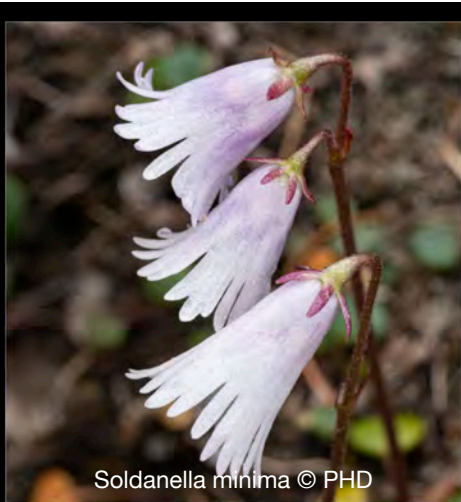
Gymnadenia conopsea
G. odoratissima © PHD



Pyrola chlorantha © PHD



Soldanella alpina © PHD



Soldanella minima © PHD



Soldanella pusilla © PHD



Soldanella pusilla © PHD



Soldanella alpina © PHD



Soldanella alpina & S. Minima © PHD