

BLUE HEAVEN

Asyneuma pulvinatum



Only the hardiest plants are capable of braving the heat of midsummer. Even the high mountains are bereft of colour except for a smattering of late aromatic herbs such as *Sideritis libanotica* and *Thymus sipyleus*. Domes of *Acantholimon ulicinum* are still studded with a few pink flowers and woolly-leaved *Hieracium pannosum* are just breaking bud. However, one of the most striking of all of Turkey's alpine chooses now to flower. *Asyneuma pulvinatum* is a rare endemic, found only on one mountain and even then only on one set of north-west facing cliffs. They are remarkably tied to this habitat, rarely occurring more than a ten or occasionally twenty metres 'inland' of this. This wonderful plant forms very tight cushions and various sizes can be seen studding the cliffs, most of them inaccessible and impossible to reach. But, here and there they grow on 'reachable' rocks. Vertigo is not an option photographing this plant. It is very much a Mediterranean *Dionysia*. Although I found a good plant to photograph I intend to return in a week or so since many more were just warming up and I'll have more choice of precipitous plants to choose from.

On my way back there were some superb *Echinops emiliae* with particularly large spherical heads, at least ten centimetres across.



Echinops emiliae



Onopordum bracteatum



Clematis flammula



Bupleurum flavum

It was a cousin of these I was after next as I sought to clean up on late-flowering plants. Revisiting Termessos, the stands of *Echinops galaticus* I'd been patiently watching and waiting for were finally in flower. Perhaps not the most impressive in bloom but the setting amongst the ruins is superb. Growing alongside them were the rich golden-yellow spikes of *Umbilicus erectus* and great masses of *Clematis flammula* tumbling over the ruins. Big stands of *Onopordum bracteatum* were now at their best too, the huge involucre bursts with dense mauve tufts.

The latter were particularly superb above Antalya with commanding views of the landscape at first light. But, there are still also much daintier things to be found and the delightful translucent gold of *Bupleurum flavum* really caught my eye, springing from amidst the wiry bush-like clumps of *Hypericum triquetorum*. A challenge of patience to capture on a breezy morning.

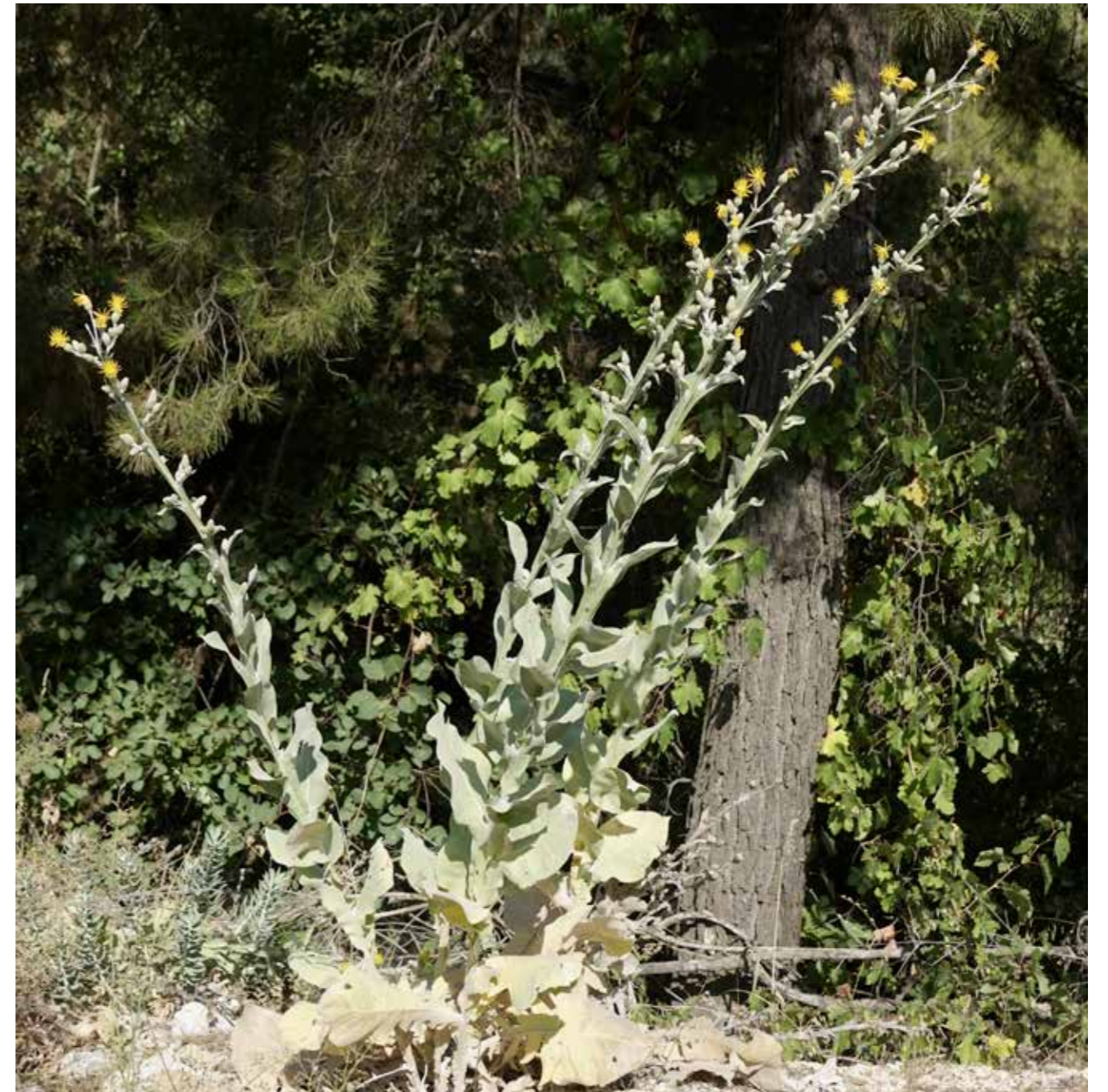
I took the back road home, winding up again into the foothills past impressive domes of *Eryngium campestre*, countless



Umbilicus erectus



Echinops galaticus



Centaurea babylonica

Eryngium spinosissimus and stands of *Ptilostemon afer*. Descending into the Kemer Vadisi I wasn't expecting to add much to this until suddenly a magnificent herb appeared on the roadside. Towering two to three metre stems emerged from clumps of greyish leaves, each lined with golden flowers. It was *Centaurea babylonica*, a remarkable plant with a great name too, which packs all this action into a biennial cycle. There was one more dainty gem to try find for and it chooses to flower at the bottom of the same valley (as well as near my house). But, the very delicate *Origanum scolymitanus* were tantalisingly out of reach here, so I'd have to wait another week or so for some easy to reach ones on my own patch.

Other than this there not much else to do than relax, swim and enjoy the summer - always with an eye on the sky to see when the first rains of autumn will come and fire up one the Mediterranean's richest displays of autumn bulbs. With any luck, late-August will see spectacular *Colchicum variegatum* begin flowering among the cedar forests above us. In the meantime I'll be switching our weekly posts to the north-east of Turkey, where summer meadows are still in full swing, as well some other parts of the world with wonderful plants.

We sincerely hope you have enjoyed spring and summer in the Taurus Mountains.