

ALPINE FLOWER TOUR 19-30 June 2010

(Tour Code: AWF) **Leader: Boris Assyov**

PRICE: £985 (Based on a group of 8 or more, a smaller group will incur a supplement).

During the Ice Age, the Balkans were relatively far from the extensive ice shields which covered most of Europe. However there was a small ice shield on the top of the highest Balkan mountains. This formed the alpine landscape and flora that we see today. A great number of northern plants migrated further south, and others became isolated by the ice, evolved and gave rise to new species, which are usually seen nowadays in very restricted areas. We shall explore parts of the Vitosha, Rila and Pirin Mountains, and we hope to see plants such as *Aquilegia aurea*, *Crocus veluchensis*, *Dactylorhiza cordigera*, *Gentiana lutea*, *G. pyrenaica*, *Geum coccineum*, *Limodorum abortivum* and *Primula deorum*.

Boris studied botany at Sofia University, graduating in 2001 with a thesis on the taxonomy of yarrows. Since then he has worked at the Institute of Botany, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and is assistant professor at the Department of Botany in the Faculty of Biology in Sofia. In 2007 he was employed by the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology in Lancaster as a botanist in the Countryside Survey.

There is no rock climbing involved on the tour, but you should be fit enough for moderate to steep walking in mountainous country and bring suitable footwear which you have already broken in. As the weather in the mountains can be unpredictable, it is wise always to take a waterproof. All accommodation has good food and wine, and is comfortable,

but not luxurious. In out of the way places, we have chosen the best available. The BBFS offers you the benefits of **over thirty years' experience** of organising tours to Bulgaria

The holiday is on a half board basis. For your **financial protection** our tour operators, **Balkania Travel Ltd.** are **ATOL bonded** in accordance with the Civil Aviation Authority's requirements.

A donation on behalf of each participant will be made to Green Balkans. (www.greenbalkans.org)

Projected Itinerary (which may be subject to minor adjustments)

Saturday 19 June Travel by direct scheduled flight from Heathrow to Sofia. Sightseeing walk in the centre of Sofia. 2 night stay on Vitosha Mountain.

Sunday 20 June Visit to Bistrishko Branishte Biosphere Reserve, looking for *Aquilegia aurea*, *Lilium jankae*, *Campanula velebitica*, *Pinguicula balcanica*, *Geum coccineum*, *Campanula patula* ssp. *Epigeia*. Some orchids are possible – *Dactylorhiza cordigera*, *Pseudorchis albida*, *Gymnadenia fryvaldskyi*, *Traunsteinera globosa*.

Monday 21 June Drive about 90 kms to Malyovitsa valley in the Rila Mountains for a 2 night stay. Explore some meadows where we expect to see *Dactylorhiza saccifera*, *D. pindica*, *Dianthus turcicus*, *Telekia speciosa*, *Cirsium appendiculatum*.

Tuesday 22 June Today there is a moderate to steep walk. We expect to see the impressive *Primula deorum*, growing only in the Rila Mountains. Other spectacular plants are *Gentiana pyrenaica*, *Bartsia alpina*, *Silene roemeri*, *Genista depressa*.

Wednesday 23 June Travel towards Bansko in the Pirin Mountains (about 120 kms) for a 5 night stay. Stop on the way to look for impressive plants such as *Achillea pseudopectinata*, *Onosma heterophylla*, *Silene frivaldskyana*, *Dianthus pinifolius*, *Scabiosa argentea*.

Thursday 24 June Today there will be moderate to steep walking to Yavorov chalet in the Pirin Mountains, to see the rich and colourful vegetation on marble, and some impressive

endemic plants, such as *Carum graecum*, *Arabis ferdinandi-coburgi*, *Genista subcapitata*, *Saxifraga stribrnyi*, *Verbascum davidoffii*, *Chondrilla urumoffii*, *Sedum kostovii*, *Linum capitatum*.

Friday 25 June We visit the marble peak of Vihren, the third highest in the Balkans (2914m), where the greatest diversity of species unique to Pirin is found. We should be prepared for some steep walking (for about 8 hours). We should see *Aubrieta gracilis*, *Arabis ferdinandi-coburgi*, *Potentilla appenina* ssp. *stojanovii*, *Viola grisebachiana*, *Carex pirinensis*, *Oxytropis urumovii*, *Papaver degenii*.

Saturday 26 June We shall travel west (about 40kms) back to Yakorouda in the Rila Mountains, where we visit the high mountain area, hoping to see *Armeria rumelica*, *Rhodiola rosea*, *Senecio carpathicus*, *Cryptogramma crispa*, *Veronica bellidioides*, *Pseudorchis frivaldii*.

Sunday 27 June Drive west (about 100 kms) to the interesting area near Rila monastery, which we shall also visit. Looking for endemic plants such as *Viola orbelica*, *Verbascum jankaeum*, *Silene velenovskyana*, *S. heuffelli*, *S. larchenfeldiana*, *Dianthus turcicus*.

Monday 28 June Drive to the town of Kyustendil (about 80 kms) for a one night stay. In the afternoon we take a short walk to explore the meadows around the hotel.

Tuesday 29 June Today we shall spend part of the day walking to the top of the mountain (moderate), expecting to see *Viola gracilis*, *Silene asterias*, *Sibbaldia parviflora*, *Achillea chrysocoma*, *Campanula trojanensis*, *Dianthus microlepis*. Mid-afternoon return drive to Sofia. Farewell dinner.

Wednesday 30 June Return flight to UK.

OUR PRICES INCLUDE:

- Return scheduled flights from Heathrow to Sofia. (Connecting flights from other airports and/or overnight accommodation near airports can also be arranged for you at a supplement).
- Airport taxes.
- Half Board.
- Accommodation in small alpine style hotels with en suite facilities on a twin bedded shared occupancy basis.
- Coach for transfers and excursions.
- Specialist Bulgarian leader.

NOT INCLUDED:

- Lunches (about £4 or less).
- Travel Insurance (Compulsory). Balkania Travel can advise.
- Drinks and personal expenses such as gratuities.
- Single room supplement (£99).

Note: Participants are not allowed to collect plants or seeds on this tour.

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