

A Trip to Turkey!

Extracts from a report By Penny Jones of Westonbirt and Daniel Luscombe of Beddebury

"We were invited to join the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh (RBGE) on a training and collecting project in Turkey October 2005. The work being undertaken is part of a RBGE/ UK Darwin Initiative project advising the Nezahat Gökyigit Botanic Gardens in Istanbul on collecting seed, propagating plants, preparing, mounting and storing herbarium samples and record keeping.

20/9/05 ARRIVING IN ASIA

Met at the airport in Istanbul and drove through Istanbul and crossed the Bosphorus, indicating that we were now in Asia.

21/9/05 This must be one of the most unique botanic gardens anywhere in the world; completely surrounded by motorways and high rise blocks of flats. Each different section of the garden can either be reached by risking life and limb and crossing the road or the safer, and more unusual, route of walking through the flood drains. Mr Nihat Gokyigit established the garden in 1995 as a way of providing the city with "green lungs" and it is named in memory of his late wife. The whole site is about 50ha. (acres) which provides locals with an opportunity for education and recreation, amongst some amazing flora.



Nezahat Gokyigit Botanik Bahcesi

22/9/05 "The Long Drive" We left Istanbul at 5 a.m. to drive to the Black Sea town of Trabzon. The roads through Istanbul were thankfully quiet and after 22 hours on the road we eventually reached a hotel just west of Trabzon at 2am.

23/9/05 we headed south towards the mountains. The road snaked alongside cultivated tea plantations and then into a very steep, high sided, gorge full of natural forest. One of the main goals of the trip was to collect autumn flower bulbs and we were really pleased to see carpets of beautiful *Colchicum speciosum* in grassy clearings alongside the road. Some of these were collected as herbarium specimens and others were carefully dug up for planting in the Istanbul garden

24/9/05 SUMMER PASTURES

We followed a winding twisting road through deep gorges until we reached and passed through the alpine village of Golyayla at 2407m. Yayla means summer pasture, there are many wooden chalet style buildings hugging the mountainside and local people move their livestock up for rich alpine grazing from June to August



It was a hot sunny day and Sabina and Basak were busy pressing collections made earlier in the day and before the material wilted in the heat. The kettle was on and our picnic lunch was about to be started when a mini-bus arrived alongside and out stepped six Jandarma with rifles/shotguns who questioned our motives for being there. Basak explained the situation and they left satisfied but with instructions that she and the driver report to the local barracks on the return journey. Most alarming but they are aware of the diversity of flora and do their utmost to prevent theft

25/9/05 IN SEARCH OF RHODODENDRON CAUCASICUM

As we made our way along the road to Artvin the sight of a new hydro dam construction greeted us. This is one of three such dams being built in the area. 26/9/05 The area around Artvin is rich in native temperate forest. The bus snaked its way around the side of the mountain towards the forest and from this height the view was spectacular. Our idea was to follow the valley up through the forest and try and get above the tree line to collect *Rhododendrons*. 27/9/05 Still hopeful of collecting some of the *Rhododendron* species we headed for Damar to pick up our guide. On the way up we came across a single plant of *Rhododendron smirnovii* in full flower. It was less than a metre high and at the bottom of its altitudinal range. It was growing with *R. ponticum* and *R. luteum*. Another bonus was that it also had seed, which we collected.



Our aim was to drive as high as we could then walk to above 2000m to collect *Rhododendron caucasicum*. The first part of the walk along a logging road was quite steep and trees were few and far between. After 20 minutes or so we reached older forest that hadn't been cut too recently and there were good-sized *Picea orientalis*, *Acer platanoides* and *Fagus orientalis*.

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The locals were in the process of creating a track around the mountainside so tourists could walk up to one of the lakes. We followed this track until it ended then scrambled the rest of the way.

When we arrived above the tree line the area was covered with an amazing display of autumn colour from the *Vaccinium arctostaphylos* (covered in black berries), bright orange/red berries of *Sorbus aucuparia* set off against the various *Rhododendron* species and the elegant *Picea orientalis*. At 1830m we came across *Rhododendron luteum*, *Rhododendron ponticum*, a small patch of *Betula medwediewii* (with a rich golden autumn colour), and a



white-stemmed species of *Betula*. This was possibly the best display of autumn colour imaginable if you could recreate this in a garden it would be amazing.

In search of *Rhododendron caucasicum* Ardahan