

International Rock Gardener

ISSN 2053-7557



Number 81 The Scottish Rock Garden Club September 2016



As the season in the northern hemisphere strides inevitably towards winter and the growing season in the southern hemisphere is so happily under way - as is shown by the great photos shared in the SRGC Forum - it may be a good idea to turn our thoughts to what floral pleasures may be found over winter and early spring in Spain - a country where some of us are lucky enough to travel at such times. Gerrit Eijkelenboom tells us about the plants he and his wife, Iep, enjoy while they spend the winter months near Calpe. Matt Topsfield also journeyed to Spain last March - [to make a study of the narcissus](#) in flower then, following the earlier example of John Blanchard in 1986 – Matt shares with us here some of the other flowers he found on the trip, which was partly supported by an SRGC Exploration Grant and part “crowd-funded”.

Cover picture: *Narcissus dubius*, photo Gerrit Eijkelenboom.

WINTERFLOWERING SPECIES IN SOUTH-EAST SPAIN: Gerrit Eijkelenboom

Every year my wife and I are lucky to spend 3 months in Benissa, near Calpe, not far from Benidorm. This region is one of the most beautiful of the Costa. The mountains encounter the Mediterranean; huge cliffs (Spanish penon) jut into the sea. After so many years we know many places where flowers grow. In this report, I will show flowers blooming from December until March.

The picture below shows on the left, the massive cliff - the Ifach - the town of Calpe, hardly visible and on the right the table mountain Olta, and the highest mountain, Sierra de Bernia (1500m)



Penon de Ifach, Calpe, Olta, Bernia.

A few words about the winter of 2016. Due to the El Nino phenomenon, it was warm, sunny and dry. Abundant autumn rains turned the Spanish landscape into a green scene. All winter long the flowers coloured the fields. The orchids came into flower a month earlier. It was, in one word, pleasant.

I have divided this report into 5 chapters:

- Some endemic winter-flowering species.
- A personal choice, showy species in the Spanish winter.
- A few monstrosities.
- Winter-flowering bulbs.
- Orchids.

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Dianthus broteri is an endemic perennial of south-east Spain. It is not a winter-flowering species, but because of the autumn rains, new shoots appeared. We found two different species - the first one: ***Dianthus broteri*** (right) on Cap d'Or above Moraira. This location is home for many fine species. The lighthouse on top of it is a goal for many visitors.



The second one: ***Dianthus broteri subsp. valentinus*** (left) grows in the interior on the slopes of Mount Campana, the highest mountain in the region, dominating Benidorm and which is responsible for the mild climate in the city.



***Dianthus hispanicus subsp. fontqueri* (Bauer Crespo & Mateo)** (above right) is an endemic. This name is accepted (The Plant List), though some see it as a subspecies of *Dianthus pungens* (Flora Iberica). The grass-like leaves are hidden under the surrounding vegetation, but the beautiful dark pink flower hits your eyes at once. One flower indeed, because it is winter.



When the boulevard of Calpe ends, a path starts, which follows the coastline over 6km until Moraira.

Along this path, the endemic ***Helianthemum caput-felis*** (left) opens his flowers in March. The grey cushions bear numerous yellow flowers, supposed to look like the heads of cats, hence its name. Rey de la Costa (King of the Costa) is its name of honour.

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Also vulnerable, like the Helianthemum, is **Astragalus hispanicus** (below). This endemic grows close to the sea but also in the mountains. The grey leaves, pinnately lobed, are so characteristic for the large genus of Astragalus.



Another astragalus growing alongside, is not endemic to Spain; its area of distribution is from Southern France to Morocco. It is an astragalus with a special red/pink colour and silvery grey leaves, **Astragalus incanus** (below).



Reseda valentina is an endemic Mignonette. We found it in the Ebo valley, a hidden area near Castell des Castell, growing on the roadside. Other resedas are more common, like **Reseda alba**, a medium to tall erect perennial, often colonising bare ground. **Reseda phyteuma** is a delicate and cute flower, an unbelievable creation of nature. We have found this low annual or biennial, on abandoned cultivated land. The steep slopes of the hills and the mountains in Spain have been cultivated for centuries. The farmers have built stone walls to prevent erosion and to create flat fields for their agriculture. Now most of these fields are abandoned for decades and are now places for people like us, searching for orchids and other plants.

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Reseda valentina



Reseda phyteuma



Reseda alba

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The genus of *Teucrium* is present in SE Spain with at least 9 endemic species. Each one more beautiful than the next. All of them excellent rock garden species, when available, which is doubtful, because of the lack of hardiness. You may admire them on the fabulous [website of Santiago Torregrosa](#).

Teucrium ronnigeri is the only one we have found.



The highlight of Calpe is the penon de Ifach. Strolling over the boulevard you have a marvellous view of this yellow giant, home of numerous seagulls, waiting for the fleet of fishing boats, approaching the port in the afternoon at 4pm. Everybody wants to make the ascent to the 332m top of the Ifach. The hike to the top is a dangerous and risky enterprise. After an easy ascent the

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comfortable path ends and a tunnel is in front of you. Here you should go back, but when going forward, be aware: the floor is wet and slippery, you cannot see much, but a rope on the wall gives you enough help. At the other end of the tunnel, there are ropes again, well-fixed (??) in the wall. Underneath your feet there is an abyss, so don't look! A very steep path continues and you climb from rock to rock, sometimes with the support of ropes. At the top you will admire a 360 degree stunning view. Surprisingly, you are not alone. There is a small colony of cats, staying alive because of the gifts of the tourists. So, do not forget to bring some catfood and water.

We are not there in order to climb the summit. We are there searching for the legendary catchfly, ***Silene hifacensis***. Endemic of course to this mountain, but surprisingly also to Ibiza. The pictures are made by my brother-in-law, Tom Beumer, when we both climbed the Ifach. His photos were much better than mine, so the credits go to him.



Silene hifacensis, photos Tom Beumer.

In the next part of my report, I would like to show you some plants which I particularly like - because they are showy and, as I presume, interesting.



Viola arborescens (left) is a real winter-blooming species. Its distribution is on the Iberia peninsula and into Morocco and Algeria. Most commonly present in the south-east of Spain, you cannot miss them. They grow along roadsides, in waste lands and abandoned fields. It is called the Shrubby Violet, hence its name. Do not think of big shrubs, 20cm high, that's all. I tried to grow it in my own garden. I gathered seeds in Spain. At home the seeds germinated soon. The seedlings grew successfully, I protected them against frost, but even after some years, no flowers appeared, so I lost my interest and the plants disappeared

one by one. They do not belong here. Heat and sunlight, that's what they need.



Viola arborescens

Last winter I was very surprised to find a *Digitalis*. I thought that foxgloves grew in temperate zones, like Western Europe, but not around the Mediterranean. Now I know better. The species of Spain grows in rocky habitats, mainly in the mountains, from June til August. The specimen we found grew in a Spartan habitat ideed. It was just luck, to find it. Because of it's beauty, I like to present it here:

Digitalis obscura.



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Fagonia cretica (above) does not grow only on Crete. No, also from Portugal east to the Orient. Not in France, Italy and the Balkans. It is a low to short, prostrate perennial, with bright magenta flowers. It grows often on the rubbish left after the building of houses. But nevertheless it is my opinion that this is a plant with remarkable flowers.

Asteriscus maritimus is beloved because of it's capability to choose the most photogenic places. Here you see it along the path, leading to the lighthouse of Cap d'Or, Moraira.

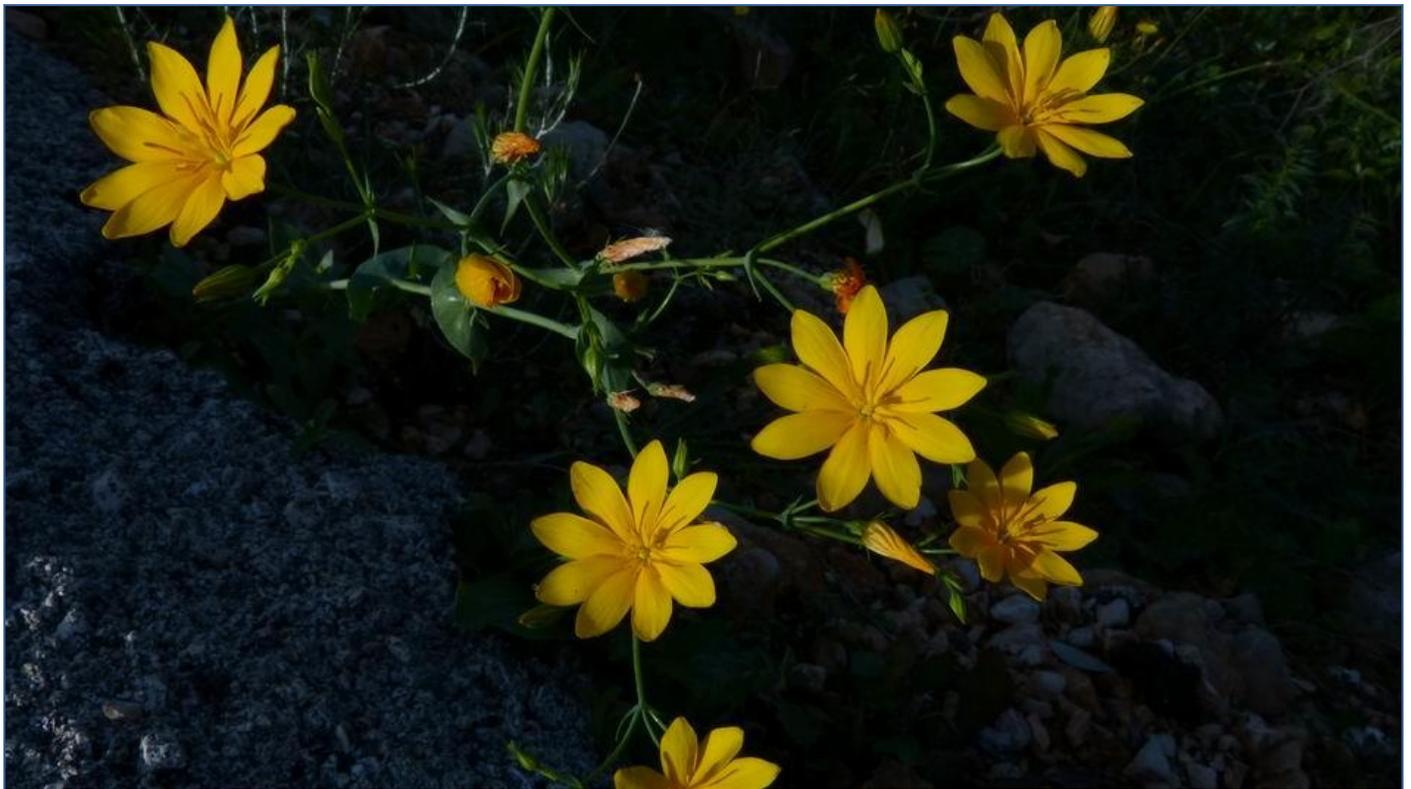


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Catananche caerulea (left): This showy plant grows in mountainous areas. We found it on the slopes of the Sierra de Bernia on an altitude of 1000m. The purple colour is very attractive, especially the papery flower-bracts beneath the flower heads. This plant is well-known and is used in dried flower arrangements. We should be able to grow it in the garden. Hardiness should not be the problem, but how to keep it dry in winter in cultivation is a different matter.

Blackstonia perfoliata (below) is a stunning eye-catcher. We found it growing along a roadside in the Jalon Valley near Benissa in rubbish. It is an annual, with 8 bright petals on a slender stem. It is a member of the Gentian family. Distinctively, the upper leaves completely encircle the stem.



Now we come to some species with soft grey leaves. Favorites of mine because of their photogenic qualities and belonging to the Borage family, the Boraginaceae.

Cynoglossum creticum, the blue houndstongue. All winter long, the promising grey hairy leaves are present everywhere in the fields and on barren lands. And then, in March it opens his blue flowers with purple net-veins. During the same period, the other, less common houndstongue appears, also with white-felted leaves, **C.cheirifolium** syn. **Pardoglossum cheirifolium**. The tiny reddish-purple flowers are scattered all over the plant. Another member of this family is the easy overlooking **Nonea vesicaria**, syn. **N. nigricans**, with "black" flowers. Actually it is not black, but dark purple. Anonymous, it lives its life, unnoticed by almost everyone, but it is a hidden treasure, when a close-up picture is taken.

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Cynoglossum creticum



Cynoglossum cheirifolium (*Pardoglossum*)



Nonea vesicaria

Sometimes you walk on by treasures without seeing it. This insignificant plant with a dreadful overall appearance, seems to be a beauty after seeing his close-up picture! ***Eruca sativa***, a member of the Cruciferae like the next three species.



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Moricandia arvensis: This showy species has purple flowers, with dark veins. Almost all pictures I have seen on internet images, show green to greyish-green leaves. My plant however has a silver-grey colour. Very special. The leaves clasp the stem. It is a short-lived perennial, hairless. *Moricandia* has many synonyms, such as *Hesperis* and *Matthiola*.

Hesperis lunata, (below) sometimes given as synonym for *Matthiola lunata*, is a look-alike of the previous species, but hairy. This perennial has purple flowers, borne in long racemes. Found in Val d'Ebo in the interior.



Matthiola lunata, (below) is a fine rock garden plant, is not easy to be found. A crucifer, growing on waste lands and on dry rocky calcareous soil. It is a low perennial.

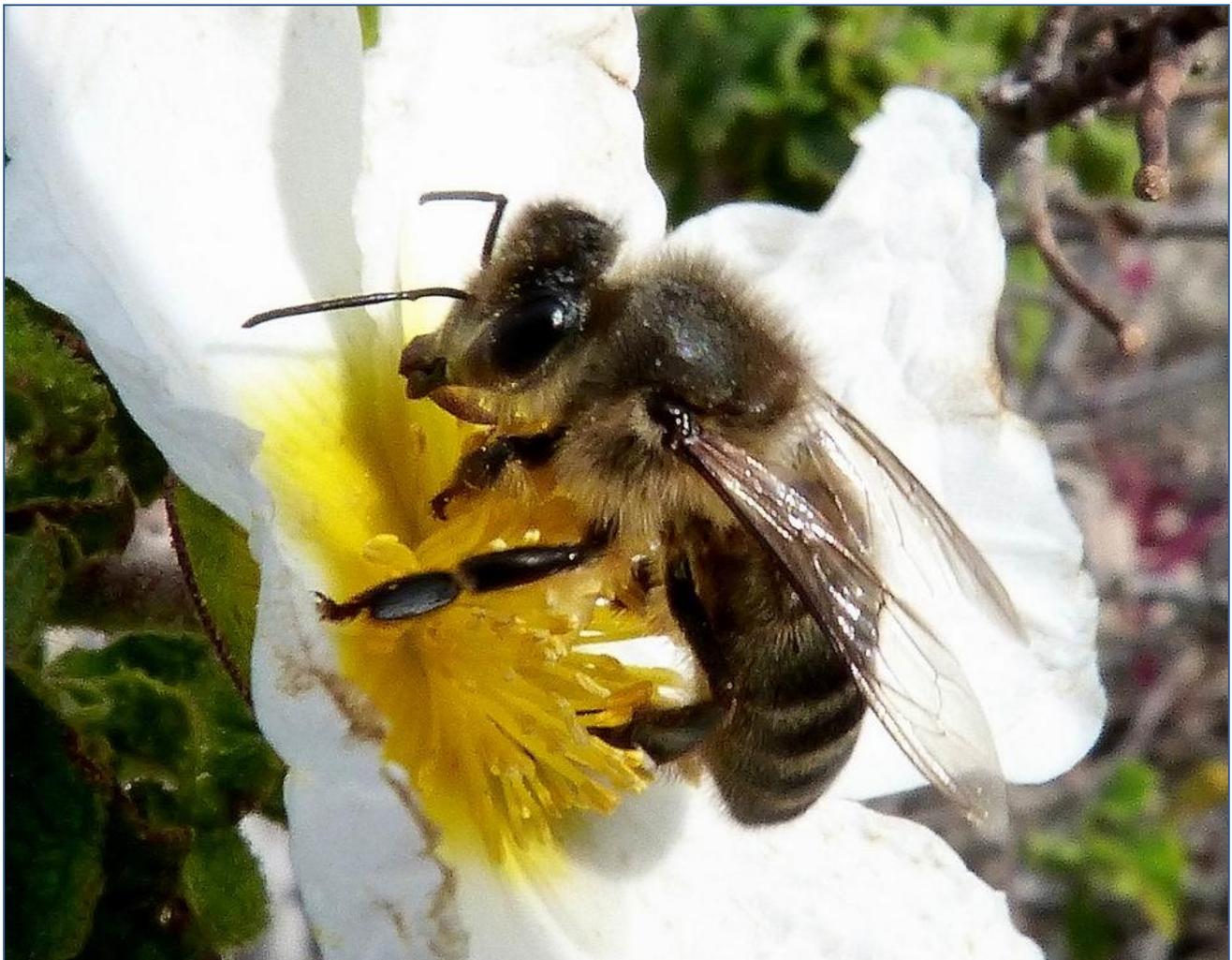


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To end this part, here are the most showy of all, Cistus. Seeing a blooming Cistus gives you the ultimate feeling of spring.



Cistus salvifolius: The flower buds are striking, as you can see and bees love them.



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Cistus salvifolius is a low shrub to 1m tall, often less. They often form large colonies on dry rocky slopes, together with ***Cistus albidus***.

The colour of the somewhat hairy leaves, greyish-white of ***Cistus albidus*** is distinctive, hence it's English name, Grey-leaved Cistus. The papery pink flowers are lovely. They stay only a day and fall off, but next day, new ones are present again.



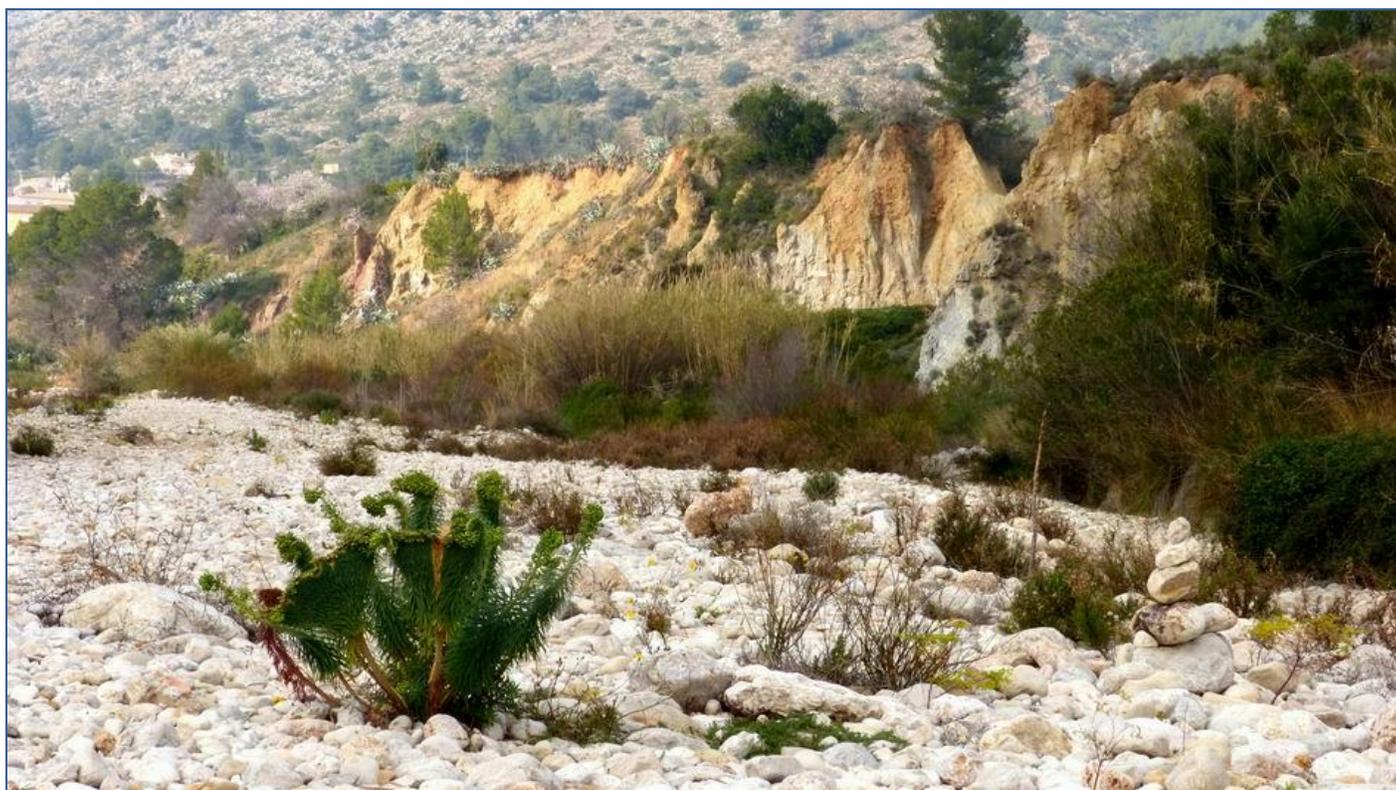
Cistus albidus



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In the next part of my report about winter-flowering species in south-east Spain, I will show you some oddities.

In the middle of the Jalon river, we had a strange encounter. It was ***Euphorbia characias***. But what an oddity. The plant was swollen by fasciation. I did some investigations on the internet, but it seems to be, that nobody understands this phenomenon. Nevertheless, an opportunity for me to take many pictures in a dramatic environment.



Euphorbia characias

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The genus of *Orobanche* is a group of parasitic plants, without chlorophyll. Although, they should be perennial, I found out that after some years, individuals disappear. From the huge plant, of which pictures were taken 3 years ago, only one shoot was left this year. The first one is named ***Orobanche gracilis***, parasitic on legumes, but here on *Cistus*.



Orobanche gracilis

When a seed germinates, it sends a thin thread out. When this thread makes contact with roots of a host, water and nutrients will be transported to the guest.

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The next broomrape is **Orobanche alba** (below), parasitic on Thymus and other Labiatae, like Salvia, Lavendula, Rosmarinus, Origanum, Mentha and others which are often present in the neighbourhood of this Orobanche. These plant are very powerful. I saw specimens, breaking through asphalt, lifting large stones and rock-hard soils. They really are stunning plants, that is for sure my opinion.



In the next part you will see the bulbs we have found in the winter. Most bulbs appear of course at the end of the Spanish winter. Actually, there was no winter as such in 2016, so we were lucky to see a lot of bulbs flowering.

Romulea columnae (right): A cormous plant with basal linear leaves, 0,5 to 1mm wide. A very small flower, smaller than your pinkie nail. So don't be deceived by the size of my photo. Growing in sandy or stony soil.



Gagea wilczekii (below left): A small bulbous herb, also with a few basal leaves, with star-shaped flowers. I think it is a mountainous species. This specimen is found on the slopes of Sierra de Bernia (1000m). The genus Gagea, with numerous species, is difficult to determine.



Gagea durieui (below): Leaves cylindrical (hollow) and long.



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Ornithogalum orthophyllum subsp. baeticum: Found in Sierra de Bernia, underneath shrubs.



Gynandris (Iris) sisyrinchium (above) is a cormous perennial, low, with few leaves. The flowers are blue, lilac or violet, short lived. They open round midday and wither already in the evening. They grow on waste and fallow land, olive groves, along paths, roadsides, so almost everywhere.

Narcissus tazetta (right) is a bulbous perennial, flowering sometimes already in November. But mostly in the early spring (in Spain). The flowers are bicolored, white with a deep yellow cup. This narcissus grows in grassy fields but also in rock crevices. The plant is widely cultivated for ornamental use in gardens or as a cut-flower.



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Narcissus dubius (below left) We found this completely white species in rock crevices on the slopes of Sierra de Bernia. An extremely showy species. More flowers can be held per umbel from each bulb.



Narcissus assoanus (above right) A small narcissus, growing with numerous quantities in the mountains.



Suddenly, the fields and meadows are coloured pink. It is **Allium roseum**.

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Fritillaria lusitanica (below left) has as a synonym, **F. hispanica**. We have found many of them on the slopes of the mountain-chain Sierra de Bernia. This fact, growing on an altitude of almost 1000m, makes us sure that the species is suitable for our gardens.

Gladiolus illyricus (below right) is a cormous perennial. Similar to *Gladiolus italicus*, but often far less than 50cm tall. A lovely species with its purple to red colour.



At the end of my report about winter-blooming species in south-east Spain, I turn to the orchids.



Ophrys fusca subsp. fusca (left). It was an early year in Spain, which means that all orchids came into flower about 1 month early. The picture of this *Ophrys fusca* was taken on January 5th. This was because of the autumn rains. The usual cycle for orchids is as follows: In summer the plants are dormant. They are tuberous or rhizomatous; the heat and drought will not harm them. The summer goes on until the end of October. When the temperatures fall, rain and lower temperatures are a wake-up call for them and the rosettes appear. From February until the end of April, the plants come into in flower. After the seeds have been dispersed, the plant soon withers and goes dormant. So, they have a short period from October until bloom to refill their rhizomes with nutrients.

Ophrys fusca is a difficult genus to determine. Okay, you may call them fusca, but if you see the difference between the individuals, you want to know the name of the subspecies.

The first subspecies is **Ophrys fusca subsp. bilunulata**. Found in an abandoned field in Senija, a N. province of Alicante. The broad yellow margin is distinctive.



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The second subspecies is *Ophrys fusca* subsp. *dianica*, syn. *Ophrys lucentina* (right). Here the horizontal lip with broad and flat lateral lobes is distinctive.



Ophrys tenthredinifera (left) This colourful orchid is not rare in the area where we stayed. We found it in the mountains as well at sea-level. Each inflorescence carries up to ten flowers. The sepals and petals are mostly pink with a green vein. The lip is large with underneath an appendix, turned up. It has a broad yellow margin, which is hairy.

Ophrys speculum (below) Spectacular because of its blue speculum, or “mirror” hence its name. The margin of the three lobes are brown with long hairs. Between them is a yellow band, forming a W. This species is very drought resistant. We found it on many places without protection by grasses or bushes in full sun after a three month period without rain. This ophrys grows near the sea as well in the low mountains in the interior.



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Ophrys lutea (above): We found this yellow orchid only in one place; on a path, frequently used by people with their dogs. We have known of this spot for many years, It really would have upset us, had it been damaged. It did not happen and the pictures are stunning.



Ophrys scolopax: This a widespread species in the Mediterranean. The three outer sepals are usually pink, but the one on the picture is almost white, with a green vein, so very beautiful. The two lateral petals are pink and hairy. The third petal, which is the lip has a complex pattern and ends with an appendage.

Himantoglossum robertianum
syn. *Barlia robertiana*

The well-known giant orchid of the Mediterranean. In the picture, a meadow with numerous examples of this fragrant orchid, showing some colour variation.



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Orchis mascula subsp. olbiensis (above and left) This is a very small and cute orchid. It appears in various colours from dark violet to pure white. The lateral lobes of the lip bend backwards. The central lobe is speckled with many red spots. The spur is twice as long as the lip and bends upward. We have found this species on the slopes of the Bernia chain at 1000m. There it was present with numerous individuals. It was just like a candy box with all those colours.



Orchis italica (right) This species is commonly known as the "naked man orchid". It has a bright pink colour, with densely clustered flowerheads. The species is widespread in the Mediterranean and often forms large groups.

G.E.

Useful Books: Cristopher Grey-Wilson - Wild Flowers of the Mediterranean.

Pierre Delforge - Orchids of Europe, N.Africa and the Middle East.

Photos: by Gerrit Eijkelenboom, except *Silene hifacensis* photos, by Tom Beumer.

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SPRING IN SOUTH-EASTERN SPAIN: Matthew Topsfield



I spent a happy few days at the end of March 2016 travelling through south-eastern Spain, recreating a trip undertaken by John W. Blanchard some 30 years before, to look for *Narcissus* species and hybrids in the wild. I found many, but those findings will be published separately in [The Rock Garden](#) and with supplementary material here in the International Rock Gardener in due course.

This photo-report aims to highlight some of the other spring flowers that I encountered along the way. This is not a comprehensive survey of the flora of the region and it will seem strange to many that the *Narcissus* are omitted. However, my aim is to present a travelogue reviewing those other flowers that were eye-catching enough to briefly distract me from the wee daffies, which were my primary focus. There's no need for your passport, just sit back and join me on this botanical road trip though Castilla-la Mancha and Andalucía.

It's a short, convenient flight from Edinburgh to Madrid and picking up a hire car from the airport I drive to Toledo where I have my first night's accommodation booked, arriving just in time for the spectacular Easter procession through the city.

Above: Matthew Topsfield at the 2015 SRGC Discussion Weekend, where he won the Reivers Trophy in the photographic competition.



The curious flowers of ***Hypecoum imberbe***, in the Papaveraceae family.

Castillo de Monalbán

The next day, travelling westwards from Toledo and through the Valle del Tajo towards the Montes de Toledo, I stopped at the Castillo de Monalbán around midday. This is clearly a historic castle and a popular visitor site with its majestic ruins perched on a clifftop. The approach takes you through dry grassland with scattered scrub and many wildflowers, including *Anchusa calcaria*, *Eruca vesicaria*, ***Hypecoum imberbe*** and *Calendula arvensis*.

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Nestled beneath shrubs are some striking plants of **Pardoglossum cheirifolium** (right), synonym *Cynoglossum cheirifolium*, their dusky pink flowers contrasting with the silver foliage - this seems to be a garden-worthy plant, but does anyone grow it?

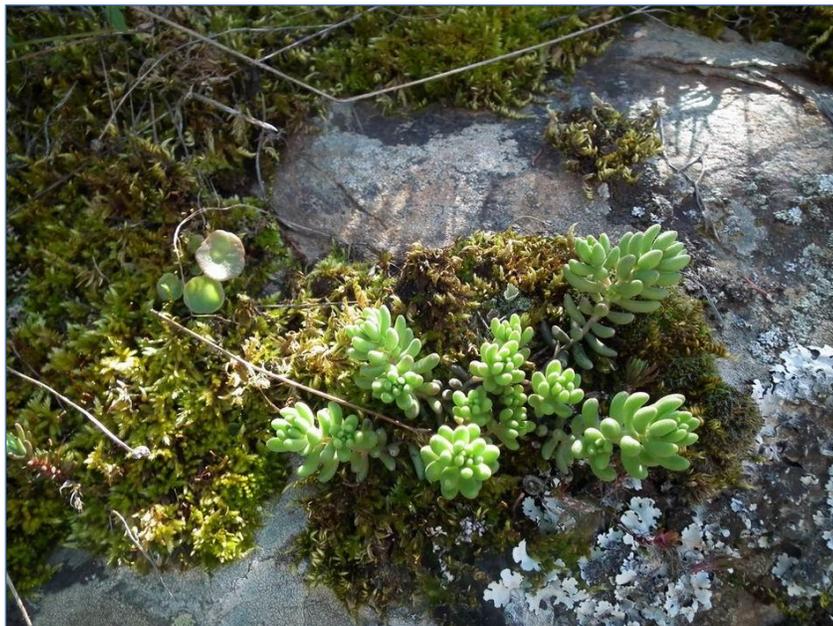
In more rocky areas the pink and green spikes of **Platycapnos spicatus** (below) catch the eye, with *Silybum marianum* providing a foil.



Within the castle walls is a large stand of *Allium ameloprasum* and *Papaver rhoeas*. Returning to the car I meander through the scrub and find very floriferous *Cytisus multiflorus* and clumps of **Muscari neglectum** (below) which is familiar to all gardeners, growing in the turf.



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Sedum album (left) is common in moist, shady places.

Parque Natural de Cabañeros

Continuing on into the hills and through the Parque Natural de Cabañeros I soon find *Saxifraga granulata* and ***Sedum album***, two plants that are found regularly thereafter on this trip, and a *Gagea* sp. scatters the ground with yellow stars.

The road is rough and winding, so botanising is easy at this slow pace. *Erica multiflora* lines the verges, but the highlight is the bright tufts of ***Polygala microphylla*** (below) thrusting through the roadside gravel.



Near Almadén

The following morning I find a scenic spot with a view on the outskirts of Almadén for a picnic breakfast. Rocky outcrops below the Ermita Virgen del Castillo are clothed with dwarf shrubs, including ***Cistus monspeliensis*** and ***Lavandula stoechas*** which will be familiar to those who garden in warmer climes. At this early hour the sun does not yet have enough strength to wilt the petals of ***Silene colorata*** which elsewhere has been drooping in the midday heat.

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Above left: *Cistus monspeliensis* at the Ermita Virgen del Castillo near Almadén, centre: Scented 'French' lavender, *Lavandula stoechas*, right: *Silene colorata* with spoon-like petals.



I will find very few orchids during this trip, but on a shady roadside bank I find a small, single specimen of *Anacamptis morio* subsp. *champagneuxii* syn. *Orchis morio* subsp. *champagneuxii*.

East of Santa Eufemia

Cutting across country on much improved roads I pull in at a likely-looking spot on the banks of the río Cigüeñuela. With the sound of frog calls drawing me on I find a lazy pool in the river carpeted with a snowy blanket made up entirely of water crowfoot flowers, *Ranunculus aquatilis* (below). Growing in the alluvial soils close by are *Ornithogalum collinum* and *Moraea sisyrinchium*, with many buds but no flowers open.



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South of Puertollano

During a warm climb up a steep slope above the Puerto de Mestanza there are impressive specimens of *Astragalus lusitanica* (right) some bearing their inflated bladders and the surrounding garrigue is rich in aromatic rosemary *Rosmarinus officinalis*.

This will be my first night under canvas, at Los Reyehos above *Solana del Pino* which has a rich flora. I pitch my tent in a clearing surrounded by rosemary and *Cistus albidus*, identifiable by its pink flowers and stalkless leaves.

In more open areas there are spikes of *Asphodelus albus* just coming into flower and the fat buds of *Paeonia broteri* are full of promise. Growing on rocks in open places are plants of *Dianthus lusitanus* but they are much nibbled by the local herbivores.



View from a lookout tower at Los Reyehos, above **Solana del Pinos**.

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Left: *Cistus albidus* at Los Reyehos.

Below: *Paeonia broteri* looking towards the Sierra de Valdoró.



Sierra Madrona and Parque Natural de la Sierra de Andújar

Continuing my journey southwards, Spanish bluebells *Hyacinthoides hispanica* grow on the roadside and tall shrubs of *Cistus ladanifer* bear huge, white crepe blooms. Soon after crossing into Andalucía I investigate a rocky outcrop, where crevices provide a toehold for *Dipcadi serotinum*, *Lupinus angustifolius* and *Cheilanthes hispanica*.



Above left: The Spanish bluebell, *Hyacinthoides hispanica*.

Above centre: *Cistus ladanifer*, huge flowers with crepe-like petals.

Above right: The subtle *Dipcadi serotinum* could be easily overlooked.



Far right: *Lupinus angustifolius*

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Still further and signs warn that **Iberian Lynx** are on the prowl in the area (left), although you would have to be very lucky to catch a glimpse of this elusive cat. However, I do stumble upon a sizeable population of ***Fritillaria lusitanica* syn. *F. hispanica*** showing great diversity in the colour and form of their flowers, with two opposite extremes depicted here.



Right: ***Fritillaria lusitanica***, brown and bell-shaped, far right: green and waisted.

The bizarre flowers of *Orobanche latisquama*, a parasite of rosemary thrust up through the ground. Everywhere wildflowers are in evidence, with some areas awash with colour and a particularly fine **verge beside the río Jándula** is scattered with the pastel colours of crucifers, *Erodium* sp. and ***Echium plantagineum***.



Above: ***Echium plantagineum***.

Left: A colourful **verge on the banks of the río Jándula**.

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Parque Natural de las Sierras de Cazorla, Segura y las Villas

A terrifying drive through this busy natural park leads me to conclude that this is the Spanish equivalent of Loch Lomond in high season! My second night camping is beneath pines at the Mirador Pas del Aires (1,204m), just beyond the scenic lookout of Puerto de las Palomas (below).



Waking to a misty morning I linger only to take a few photographs of the silvery rosettes of *Silybum marianum* (left) and *Hyacinthoides reverchonii*, endemic to the Sierras Cazorla and Segura, flowering amongst the rocky outcrops.

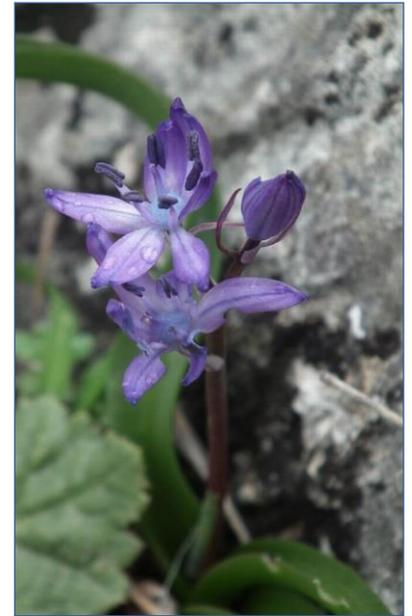


Later as I scale the cliffs at Puerto de Tiscar vultures are circling overhead (right).

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Left: *Centaurea jaennensis* on cliff faces.



Above right: The endemic and beautiful *Hyacinthoides reverchonii*.

The vegetation in this area is typical of the 'hedgehog zone' with the spiny cushions of *Erinacea anthyllis* predominating. *Carlina hispanica* grows by the roadside, *Centaurea jaennensis* clings to the cliff faces and above are more blue flowers of the beautiful *Hyacinthoides reverchonii*. Safely back at my hire car, the vultures are disappointed and will have to go hungry today! Dropping in altitude then climbing back up towards the Nacimiento río Guadalquivir, of which 16km is on unmade road, I find a single plant of *Iris planifolia* with soggy flowers that have long gone over. It is cool and moist up here, with some snow still lying in sheltered places and the woods are full of *Daphne laureola* and *Helleborus foetidus* (below).



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Above: Moss and the mossy saxifrage *Saxifraga camposii* growing on limestone.

Below: *Draba hispanica* on cliffs at the Nacimiento del río Guadalquivir



The limestone outcrops and cliffs support many interesting plants, including the mossy *Saxifraga camposii* and neat buns of *Draba hispanica* sporting bright yellow heads of blossom. Examining the leaves of *Crocus* plants scattered through the leaf litter beside the track reveals them to be *C. carpetanus* but just a single, poor flower was found.

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Parque Natural de la Sierra Mágina

After a night sleeping at some altitude above Torres I awake to a film of ice on my tent. Keen to get moving I explore the local hills before heading towards Mancha Real. A long drive up to the summit (2,057m) of El Almadén in my much-abused hire car is rewarded by the sight of many ***Colchicum triphyllum*** in flower alongside the well-developed leaves of a *Crocus* species, which I suppose might be *C. serotinus* subsp. *salzmannii* and an unidentified Amaryllidaceae.



Colchicum triphyllum at the summit of El Almadén.

Sierra Nevada and south

Shortly before sunset I take the road up towards Pico Veleta where ***Crocus nevadensis*** is in flower, here with fine feathering on the back of the tepals. The next day I explore the precipitous roadsides above Otivar, where *Mesembryanthemum crystallinum* is growing on the cliffs and the blue flowers of *Aphyllanthes monspeliensis* push up through rosemary and *Cistus monspeliensis* scrub. This is followed by an awfully dull drive on the Autovía del Mediterráneo. I spent the long journey with a continuous view of acres of polytunnels and wishing I had instead taken the route north of the Sierra Nevada!

Right: Finely feathered ***Crocus nevadensis*** in the Sierra Nevada.



---International Rock Gardener---

Close to Sorbas, east of the Desierto de Taberna

My reward at the end of this journey is the first intense heat I experience on this trip, having been at altitude previously, and a consequent change in the flora. The gypsum soils support a different range of plants, including the impressive spikes of *Cistanche phelypaea* which can reach a metre in height.



Cistanche phelypaea growing in gypsum deposits.

---International Rock Gardener---



Geophytes are common here with ***Moraea sisyrrinchium*** (left) and *Gladiolus illyricus* in flower. *Sedum* spp. and the towering ***Ferula communis*** (above) grow on the roadsides, but it takes a keen eye to spot the tiny *Chaenorhinum grandiflorum*, an endemic to Almeria province. I don't remain at this low (410m) altitude for long, but the vegetation is equally parched over the Puerto de la Virgen in the Sierra de los Filabres, where I'm lucky to spot some wild Iberian Ibex.

Sierra de los Álamos

I woke up feeling refreshed, after staying in the Hotel Nuestra Señora del Carmen, which is in the monastery at Caravaca de la Cruz (highly recommended) and set out for the hills. A fine stand of ***Ophrys lutea*** (right) was only the second orchid species I would see on this whole trip. Huge limestone boulders were productive hunting grounds, with *Chaenorhinum rubrifolium* and *Ceterach officinarum*.

Sierra de Alcaraz

An unexpected sight was a road sign warning for **amphibians** where the woods were also full of *Viola* sp. and *Primula vulgaris*. In a higher valley the leaves of *Tulipa australis* are growing in profusion beside a stream and at a mountain pass many ***Crocus nevadensis*** were found in various forms, including some pale, barely marked plants. Another excellent view of Ibex was a fitting event to mark the end of my trip.



---International Rock Gardener---



Beware of the amphibians!



Pale form of *Crocus nevadensis* in the Sierra de Alcaraz.

---International Rock Gardener---

Homeward bound

My last night was marked with the only beer of my trip and the following day was an easy drive back to Madrid, initially. A word of warning to all would-be explorers: if possible avoid at all cost driving to Madrid Airport. The spider's web of motorways surrounding the city is nigh on impossible to navigate and I took the wrong turn more than once! However, this was a wonderful ten days discovering the varied and beautiful spring flora in south-eastern Spain.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to the numerous supporters who donated towards my project "Blanchard's Spanish Diary 1986 revisited" through Crowdfunder, without whom this trip would never have got off the ground. The SRGC provided much support, including a generous contribution towards the project costs from their Exploration Fund. Many friends have provided encouragement, advice and practical support in so many ways. In particular, Margaret and Henry Taylor provided me with details of many sites of botanical interest in Andalucía, and the benefit of their experience was invaluable. I thank you all. M.T.

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Stocken, C.M. (1969) Andalusian Flowers and Countryside. Stocken, Devon
Polunin, O. & Smythies, B. E. (1973) Flowers of South-West Europe: a Field Guide. Oxford University Press, London
Thorogood, C. (2016) Field Guide to the Wild Flowers of the Western Mediterranean. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Ornithogalum collinum

growing in alluvial soil, east of Santa Eufemia.



Useful online resources

- <http://www.almerinatura.com/>
<http://naturalezaysenderos.com/>
<http://www.floravascular.com/index.php>
<http://floressilvestresdelmediterraneo.blogspot.co.uk/>
<http://www.granadanatural.com/flora.php>
<http://josenaturaleza.blogspot.co.uk/>
<http://andaluciaflowers.blogspot.co.uk/>

---International Rock Gardener---

Third Czech International Rock Garden Conference May 2017

--- A little reminder ---



Pruhonice Castle – photo by Rudi Weiss

This event, following on the great success of the first two conferences will take place from 10th – 15th May 2017. The conference will take place only 15 kilometres from the centre of Prague in the vicinity of the castle and two state parks of Průhonice (which is 24 kilometres from Prague Ruzyně Airport and just a hop from the highway D1 Prague-Brno).

The main idea is to have very compact economic conference connecting attractive lectures and exploring the best local rock gardens plus, of course, the May Show of the Prague Club and the medieval baroque parts of Prague.

The Event is planned for 10 – 15th May 2017 at the Congress and Educational Centre Hotel Průhonice. Booking is already going well so if you wish to attend it would be wise to book soon.

There are many reasons to continue organising conferences in Central Europe. The rock gardens are more mature with new additions and reconstructions and the assortment of the dwarf bulbs and rock garden plants is, after 4 long years of activity since the last event, richer and newer. Also new growing techniques are to be seen and discussed. The lectures are of a high calibre and we offer well balanced choice of western lecturers from SRGC, AGS, NARGS and the continental ones from Sweden, Norway, Germany and Czech Republic. More pleasurable hours for chatting as well as a modern choir concert is included in programme.

Website of the Conference : <http://www.czrgs.cz/> See also SRGC Forum [here](#).

---International Rock Gardener---

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When does the conference start and finish?

The conference begins on Wednesday the 10th of May 2017 and finishes on Tuesday the 15th of May 2017.

What about booking accommodation?

You must book your accommodation directly with the hotel. See the section accommodation of the website.

What about special accommodation needs?

Please contact the hotel directly to discuss any special accommodation needs.

What about extra nights in the hotel?

Anyone wishing to stay extra nights before or after the conference must arrange this with the hotel. Conference rates are valid for any extra nights.

Where I can find info about Czech Republic?

<http://www.czech.cz/en/Home-en>

<http://www.czechtourism.com>

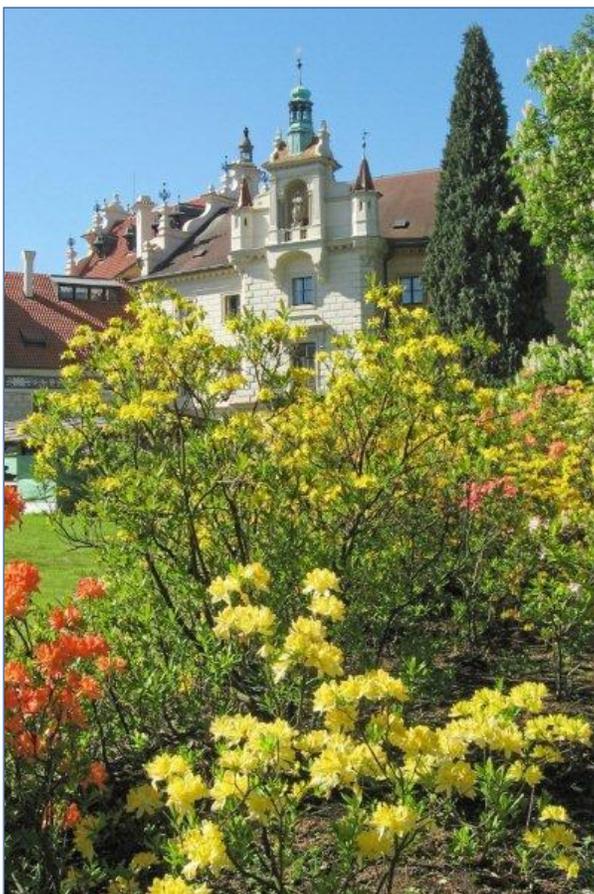
<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/czech-republic>

THE CONFERENCE VENUE

The conference will be held in Pruhonice, the village 2 km behind the border of Prague. The village is strongly influenced by two research facilities located in Pruhonice:

The Institute of Botany of the Academy of Science of the Czech Republic: the Institute of Botany keeps a large park founded by Silva Tarouca with the oldest rock garden in the Czech Republic and also one of the oldest in EU (131 years).

The Silva Tarouca Research Institute for Landscape and Ornamental Gardening (RILOG): keeps a large Dendrological garden that was founded originally as a repository garden for ornamental woody plant germplasm, but now it is designed as a park. The congress center and hotel where the conference will be held, belong to RILOG. The complex was reconstructed and now represents a farm-yard complex.



ACCOMMODATION

The accommodation will be in various hotels in Průhonice.

See more details, and full programme, on the website

www.czrgs.cz

SPEAKERS

David Rankin

Robert Wallis

Brigitte Fiebig and Michael Mauser

Henrik Zetterlund

Panayoti Kelaidis

Martin Hajman

Jiří Papoušek

Zdeněk Zvolánek

Please, come and enjoy our hospitality!

Sincerely yours,

Vojtěch Holubec, Jiří Papoušek and Zdeněk Zvolánek