

SHADOW OF THE CONDOR TRIP REPORT 2025

Day 1 3 Jan Arrival in Chile & El Yeso

My flight to Santiago arrived on time and I met Robert and Laura, had a coffee and then off we went in our large SUV. After some buying essential supplies we navigated our way to San Jose de Maipo and our comfortable hotel with some Gaudi-inspired architecture and pleasant pool and gardens.

A quick organise and we were off along the flanks of the deep canyon with matorral and cactus-clad slopes, turning off for the road to the El Yeso dam. Gaining a bit of height we started to see colour with orangey bushes of *Chuquiragia ulicina*, but we stopped first for a colony of *Chaetanthera glabrata* growing on a steep earthy bank with its smaller cousin; *C. flabellata* and even tinier *Oriastrum pusillum*. There was also a fine clump of *Mutisia acerosa* and in the scrubby matorral above sprawling plants of *M. subulata* with large scarlet-red flowers. The pale pink of *Alstroemeria pallida* was also quite common and further on and up were some superb mounds of *A. umbellata* on steep screes beside the road. The latter were something to stop for on the way back, for now we continued up seeing more and more trailing stems of *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* with big bunches of lemon to golden flowers. Reaching the blue waters of the lake we drove along the sinuous edge (it was impossible to stop easily as there was a regular passage of mining trucks). At the far end was another long slope with plentiful tropaeolums and flatter scrub with lots of *Mutisia acerosa*. After looking at a small marshy area where we saw two grey-throated seedsnipes, we returned to the slope with lots of *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* finding some plants that were still in good condition alongside lots of *Pozoa coriacea* and low-growing *Alstroemeria umbellata*. Some of the most interesting specimens of the latter were just above the waters of the lake. We trundled back behind an huge German camper van seeing a wonderful plant of *Caiophora coronata* (that was sadly heavily dressed in dust) before stopping at the big plants of *Alstroemeria umbellata* we had seen on the way in. Some were in excellent condition and working on the angles a bit we could photograph these with a dramatic hanging glacier in the background.

A good finish to our impromptu afternoon of botanising.



Alstroemeria umbellata

Day 2 4 Jan Lagunillas

A superb plant day up in the nearby hills. Driving up the winding road we passed areas that were being reforested and then huge displays of red-pink *Viviana marifolia* that smothered the upper slopes. Parking in the shade of some poplars we began our walk up soon turning off onto a slope where there was lots of *Alstroemeria pallida* a plant that would be with us all day long, as well as green *Blumenbachia dissecta*, abundant *Quichimalium chilense*, tufts of *Perezia carthamoides*, the pretty yellow wheels of *Mutisia sinuata*, along with a few *Schizanthus hookeri* and the last flowers on *Argyria adscendens*. The first of many *Rhodolirion montanum* were found nestled among the grey leaves of *Nardophyllum chilotrachoides* and these lovely crisply marked bulb just got better and better as we walked. Fine drifts of *Alstroemeria pallida* were found, with the taller deeper pink of *A. exerens* appearing too (with streaky dorsal tepals). Fine mounds of *Viviana marifolia* buried beneath fresh flowers were a constant, as were the orangey shrubs of *Chuquiragia oppositifolia* as we made our way slowly up the slope to the ridge. On reaching it there were superb views across the jagged lines of the Andes. There were also excellent views of a mountain caracara patrolling the ridge as we walked along.

The flowers continued with pretty tufts of woolly-calyced *Montiopsis potentilloides*, lovely patches of the pink form of *Cruckshanksia hymenodon*, *Nassauvia looseri*, multi-flowered clumps of *Rhodolirion montanum*, much better *Argyria adscendens* and spiny mounds of flowery *Mulinum spinosum*. Reaching the top of the ridgeline we glanced across a stony slope to where there was a superb population of *Pachylaenia atriplicifolia*, with many hefty, leafy plants with large red-tinged pink (or straw-coloured) flowers. Time was spent enjoying these exotic-looking alpines, photographing them with Andean backdrops and finding the most impressive specimens. Continuing, we then found *Montiopsis andicola* among the cushions of *Laretia acaule*



Pachylaenia atriplicifolia

and starting downslope we also found a number of *Tropaeolum sessiliflorum* tumbling among the small shrubs. The displays of alstroemeria, rhodolirion, *Viviana et al* were wonderful the whole way down with a now favourable afternoon light bathing the slope and with blue skies beyond. At one point a couple of Andean condors sailed over and nearing the end of the walk there was the bonus of a small population of *Alstroemeria umbellata* in an area of scree.

We drove down a short way and stopped by a big display of *Viviana marifolia*, also having some snacks to keep us going. Further on were fine stands of *Malesherbia linearifolia*, some mingled with the twining stems of lemon-yellow *Scyphanthus elegans*, each flower embellished with little red 'jewels'.

Day 3 5 Jan To Vilches Alto

Our first jump south took us out of the Maipo valley and down along the orchard-lined pan-americano with the hazy Andes to one side and the equally hazy coastal ranges on the other. Pausing to buy coffee we continued to Molina and then took the country route, eventually turning onto a smaller side road. There was time for a short lunch break where we found the climber *Proustia pyrifolia*, as well as tough *Adiantum chilense*, *Calceolaria sp.* and the first rather tatty *Alstroemeria ligtu*. Not much further on and we stopped again for the stunning scarlet-orange of *Zephyranthes splendens* that was flowering in a woodland edge that was also brimming with many pretty lilac to pink *Alstroemeria revoluta* and a smattering of *Conanthera bifolia*. Time was spent enjoying these, whilst on the other side of the road Laura found a fresh *Fabiana imbricata*. We stopped next for the white-lilac form of *Salpiglossus sinuata* and *Calceolaria angustifolia* and in an area of native shrubs and trees we found the dainty blue of *Triptilion spinosum*, *Epilobium sp.* and the large shrubby parasite *Notanthera heterophylla*. *Alstroemeria revoluta* was present here (and indeed had been common all the way along) and the flowers were proving irresistible to long-proboscised flies.

Moving on, we continued through a landscape of small farms and orchards to the main road and then on up towards our hotel, with the grey hulk of Volcan Decabezado ahead of us, stopping one last time for a population of *Alstroemeria ligtu* in various vivid orange to cerise colour forms.



Rhodolirion montanum

Day 4 6 Jan Laguna del Maule

A day filled with flowers, thought first we had to reach Laguna del Maule, driving towards the mountains alongside the tranquil waters of Lago Colbun with birdlife flying back and forth including burrowing parrots that crossed overhead in small flocks on several occasions, in time making our way into a landscape of light woods and scrub that flanked the broad rocky river. At these lower elevations there was nothing of interest in flower, but gaining height into a wilder landscape steep banks with *Calceolaria thyrsofolia* appeared and entering the impressive volcanic world of basalt columns and ash cones we saw some superb cushions of *Ourisia microphylla* completely submerged beneath pale pink flowers. Another population of the same also had flowering shrubs of *Escallonia rubra* in different colour forms. Not much further on and the golden spires of *Chloraea alpina* combined with the almost as vivid bouquets of *Tropaeolum incisum* that were draped over the ground with many paler yellow *Zephyranthes montanum* poking up from the grassy ground. On the opposite side of the road was a superb spread of *Oxalis squamata* with *Cistanthe umbellata*. We had moved at botanical speed, but it was impossible not to. However, there was a lot more to see so pushing on we reached the vast reservoir set within a truly spectacular landscape, a vast caldera ringed by old volcanoes and multicoloured ash slopes. Fine stands of *Schizanthus hookeri* were everywhere, lining the road and in perfect condition. Reaching a viewpoint there was also a dazzling seep with yellow and red forms of *Erythranthe cuprea* and *Calceolaria filicaulis*.

Moving on through the continually stunning landscape the slopes were generously dressed in *Calceolaria corymbosa* subsp. *floccosa* with its grey woolly leaves and red-freckled yellow pouched, yielding to the abundant *Calceolaria filicaulis* on wetter slopes and seeps. We explored a small valley, following the stream uphill, the banks encrusted with *Caltha sagittata*, whilst the drier slopes above had plentiful *Olsynium junceum*. The first dainty pink flowers of *Ourisia breviflora* appeared and we found many more as we progressed, reaching a seep with abundant *Pinguicula chilensis* in flower in pretty patches, punctuated by the crisp white of *Euphrasia subexserta* and *Valeriana macrorrhiza*. Unfortunately it was too early this year for *Loasa laterita*. Returning via a drier slope we found instead, *Loasa filicaulis* and then



Pinguicula chilensis

a good number of *Viola glacialis* in flower as well as the many lovely colour forms of *Oxalis adenophylla*. The latter became increasingly common as we climbed to the pass where open drifts of them coloured the ash slopes. Time was spent at the pass, finding not just these but floriferous mats of *Oreopolus glacialis* smothered in sweet-scented soft yellow flowers, diminutive *Nassauvia sp.* and lovely clumps of *Perezia capito* in fine flower, all with spectacular landscape backdrops. The damper gullies were packed with superb *Calandrina affinis* and these mingled with *Oxalis adenophylla* and *Olsynium frigidum* whilst in another gully a dazzling dense population of *Calceolaria filicaulis* dominated the slope above a bed of flowering *Ochetophila nana*. Returning to the car we also found tiny flowered *Adesmia glomerula* and *Nassauvia lagascae*.

Time was moving on and we had to start moving back, making a penultimate stop at a strong population of *Tropaeolum incisum* that draped over the banks and shrubberies in a cascade of gold. Rocky banks nearby also had *Euphrasia andicola* whilst the streamside were packed with scarlet *Erythranthe cupreus* and *Calceolaria filicaulis* in a final fiery display. Exiting the customs post we started down, stopping briefly for a view of the dramatic hoodoos and then a last stop for a superb population of *Chloraea alpina* growing on a flat ashy expanse and among boulders, where we also found some wonderful big rosettes of (non-flowering) *Viola congesta*. The little stream nearby had good specimens of both *Calceolaria cavendishii* and purple *C. arachnoidea* to complete the day. From here we drove enjoying the late afternoon light through the light forests of *Austrocedrus chilensis* after a very rewarding day in the mountains.



Day 5 7 Jan Altos de Lircay

There was a cool morning walk into Altos de Lircay with plenty of pretty *Alstroemeria presliana* on show along with a some good *Zephyranthes splendens* and the stunning orange daisies of *Mutisia decurrens*. The rocky road climbed to the park entrance where there were many good forms of *Alstroemeria presliana* and a bit further along there was the bonus of a good spike of *Chloraea nudilabia*. A short side trail to a lookout across the ridges and forests was productive with a relatively lush understorey in the cooler, more humid conditions including lots of *Hydrangea serratifolia* and then the delicate twining vines of *Tropaeolum ciliatum*. From here we walked back finding more good *Zephyranthes splendens* and arriving back at the hotel in good time to clean up and have a picnic lunch.

The drive across the open country of orchards and farms was easy enough, the spine of Andes revealing itself in volcanic cones with the lower coast ranges to our right. There are few more dramatic cones than Volcan Antuco, a dark brooding peak streaked with snow and after passing Antuco we made a stop with this in full view where we also found a good number of *Chloraea incisa*. It was not much further to our lodgings nestled below the Sierra Veluda. The spacious cabins were scattered among the rocky scrub where we found a couple of decent *Chloraea collicensis* to round off the day.

Day 6 8 Jan Laguna de Laja

A fine clear dawn saw warm light on the Sierra Veluda, the range we could see from our picture windows in the cabins. We began the day somewhere lush and greener, looking at the verdant foliar wall of *Gunnera tinctoria*, *Cortaderia araucana*, *Blechnum chilense* and *Fuchsia magellanica* that smothered the slopes below sheer basalt cliffs, with water chutes and falls punctuating the greenery. A stark contrast to where we looked at next, high on the slopes of Volcan Antuco. Here barren ash fields swept between lava flows of various ages that edged the blue waters of the huge lake below. Rafts of vegetation survived in this tough substrate, in places building up into green slopes. There were wonderful tumbling masses of *Mutisia oligodon* with big pink daisy flowers alongside plentiful *Quinchimalium chilense*, *Acaena macrocephala* with its swollen fruits, the small shrub *Cynanchum nummularifolium* and *Ephedra chilensis*. Among the ash grew both *Viola farkasiana* and *V. cotyledon*, though only the former had flowers at this season. A little higher and we found the pretty pink of *Tarasa humilis* and some impressive stands of *Leucheria lithospermifolia*. Descending again we also found a colony of vivid orange *Alstroemeria presliana* subsp. *australis* and many more photo ops for the natural gardens that filled the spaces between the rock outcrops and the battered old shrubs of *Escallonia rubra* with flowers from white to deep pink.

We drove on to the only area with shade (among some *Nothofagus pumilio*) for lunch and afterwards looked around a flatter area with streams cutting through that had extensive carpets of *Azorella trifurcata* and the neat white berries of *Gaultheria pumila*. Standing proud of this was a rather isolated male specimen of *Araucaria araucana* and though other smaller ones were found nearby this is



Zephyranthes splendens

not doubt a relict population from times past when there were many more trees. Next, we searched an area of rocks and ash for the lovely rosettes of *Chaetanthera villosa*, finding many plants, but alas none quite in flower. Elsewhere were more pretty patches of *Mutisia oligodon* and *Acaena macrocephala* slowly colonising the bare expanses. Our last stop was among an area of rugged basalt where the rock crevices were home to a thriving population of *Ourisia microphylla* with many floriferous plants hanging from the sheer rock faces.

Day 7 9 Jan Villarica

The sun rose into a clear sky illuminating the rugged ridge of the Sierra Veluda as we ate breakfast. Departing the hotel we drove east and then south, with surprisingly, clouds in the sky! This became quite grey after a time, but by the time we had travelled the distance south they had largely dispersed with only a few lurking around the majestic cone of Volcan Villarica. We drove directly up to the ski lift base, ate a quick lunch and then set off on foot.

The route wound up through stands of *Nothofagus pumilio* and *N. antarctica* studded with scarlet *Embothrium coccineum* and in the dappled shade were both *Ovidia andina* and *Drimys andina*. On the woodland edge we found the first cobalt-blue *Perezia fonkii*, a clump of golden *Gavilea lutea*, plentiful bushy *Adesmia emarginata*, pale yellow *Sisyrinchium arenarium* and in the flat gravelly areas was a diminutive *Baccharis sp.* and *Montiopsis gayanum*. Reaching the tree line, we followed an area of heaths and exposed ash uphill, soon finding the tight rosettes of *Nassauvia lagascae*, which got better the higher we went. *Viola cotyledon* was also very common but had finished flowering at this season. Pretty tufts of *Adesmia longipes* had both flowers and fruits, whilst two very different species of *Senecio*; *bipontinii* and grey-leaved *argyreus* were also found. Silvery mats of *Belloa nivea* grew on the stark substrate and descending the heath were packed with *Quinchimalium chilense* and lots of rich blue *Perezia fonkii*.

There were clear views of distant Volcan Llaima too as we made our way back to the vehicle.



Mutisia oligodon

Day 8 10 Jan Tolhuaca

A very different plant assortment today, based mainly in the woods of Chile's oldest national park; Tolhuaca. We drove north and then turned east heading along a dirt road that was coloured with abundant *Alstroemeria lutea*. However, it was also a dust-laden logging road which made stopping for flowers difficult and dirty. Fortunately, we found areas that were back from the road with some excellent colour forms from pure yellow or gold to rich orange, sometimes growing with *Stachys gilliesii* and stands of bamboo. Indeed, this tough and resourceful plant is capable of growing in various habitats and plant communities and we would see them just about everywhere today. However, star of the roadside botany was no doubt *Chloraea longipetala*, an impressive tall white orchid with several pristine spikes, that in places grew with fiery *Zephyranthes splendens*. Both *Mutisia spinosa* and a superb scrambling (if high up) specimen of *M. decurrens* were also seen before we reached the national park and found a shady spot for lunch.

Afterwards we set off on a walk, making our way through rich woods with at least four species of nothofagus, large trees of aromatic-leaved *Laureliopsis philippiana* and many understorey shrubs. Most had finished flowering by this time, but one, *Mitraria coccinea*, was in full flower with a fair sprinkling of its vivid orange tubular flowers laced, sometimes scrambling into shrubs or on tree trunks. There were also many feisty plants of *Blechnum magellanicum* with fresh rings or fronds on their short trunk-like bases, as well as various other ferns, bamboo, non-flowering *Luzuriaga radicans* (some with fruit) and the last flowers of *Ourisia coccinea*.

The path eventually reached a more open part with more sun and here were some fine *Alstroemeria aurea*, *Escallonia rubra* var. *macrantha*, fruit laden *Gaultheria xxx*, scrambling vines of *Vicia nigricans*, *Mutisia spinosa* and as we made our way down one or two climbing stems of *Tropaeolum speciosum* with their complex, vivid scarlet flowers. A fabulous stand of *Alstroemeria aurea* marked the end of the descent and then we made our way back to the vehicle. The drive onto Curacautin was broken first by a lovely strand of *Tropaeolum speciosum* twining around a branch surrounded by golden *Alstroemeria aurea*, the latter continuing to put on a superb display along the roadside, but our



Chloraea longipetala

final stop was for a good population of shrubby *Calceolaria dentata* subsp. *araucana* growing from the bank. The elegant snow cone of Volcan Llama rose up from the surrounding plain as we neared the town and tomorrow would be spent in such dramatic landscapes.

Day 9 11 Jan Las Nalcas

The road passed through green woods and roadsides filled with golden *Alstroemeria aurea* switching to the architectural forms of spidery-topped *Araucaria araucana*, with many impressive old specimens. The forests abruptly ended once we reached the stark, sweeping ash fields below Volcan Lonquimay, the peak topped with large snow fields but below seemingly bereft. As ever, look closely and there is more and as we drove up there where many small plants were scattered across the surface including *Loasa nana* glowing in morning sun. Alongside these were *Pozoa volcanica*, dwarf specimens of *Hypochaeris tenuifolius* and *Oxalis adenophylla*. Further on and the views grew ever more amazing, a geological jumble in a vast volcanic wilderness with 'recent' cones and associated lava flows. Stopping at another view we glanced down and there was the prize plant; *Chaetanthera villosa* a gorgeous woolly alpine with large yellow flowers. *Pinnasa nana*, *Nassuavia glauca* and *Senecio sp.* were all present too among the amazing landscape. More grand views of this and ragged lava flows followed, contrasting strongly with the green islands of vegetation that escaped the volcanic outbursts, as well as the densely forested hills beyond.

We drove back to the monkey puzzle forests and found many *Chloraea magellanica*, pretty bicolored *Lathyrus magellanicus* and a few *Fragaria chilensis* in flower before moving on to have lunch in the shade of some large *Araucaria*. Parting company with our Japanese contingent we set off towards Pino Hachado, stopping for a slope with tumbling masses of *Mutisia spinosa* and then after some distance more the trailing stems of *Tropaeolum incisum* growing on rather dry banks with *Zephyranthes araucana*. There seemed to be little else of interest in the area so we returned and took a back road that climbed into hills with superb *Araucaria araucana* forests. The yellow of *Calceolaria valdiviana* was common with some fine clumps in the woods and on the slopes, also finding the odd *Gavilea lutea*, a pink daisy



Pinnasa nana

and then mats of *Notopappus prunelloides* There were fine views out across the forested hills as we made our way back down past banks with *Vicia nigricans* and *Alstroemeria aurea*. Then, on the final stretch we stopped for two superb *Chloraea longipetala* in perfect flower.

Day 10 12 Jan To Curico

Today was essentially a travel day, but there was time to back track a short distance to where we found a good stand of *Loasa acanthifolia* growing with *Tropaeolum speciosum*. It was then a case of pinning the ears back and driving, first through the woods and pastures and then along the main Ruta 5, past plantations, nut orchards and vineyards with the spine of the Andes to our right hinting at where we would be tomorrow.

Day 11 13 Jan Paso Vergara & El Planchon

The first of our two final high Andean locations. We drove directly to the police/customs post and annoyingly had to leave Chile with passports stamped even though we were walking and staying inside the country.

(This border had been much easier in the past and we not use this route again. However, much of what we saw was also seen on our route to El Planchon).

Gardens of *Alstroemeria exerens*, *Rhodolirion montanum* and the airy inflorescences of pale pink *Leucheria viscida* filled the voids between floriferous bushes of *Chuquiragua oppositifolia* and immense stands of the big yellow daisy; *Virguiera revoluta* as we progressed slowly uphill, rocky slopes held the first of many vivid *Schizanthus grahamii*. Draped over bushes or trailing across the ground were *Tropaeolum myriophyllum* and occasional *Mutisia subulata* too. After a while we got talking to an airline pilot and his son (also a pilot), who then offered us a lift back down, which we happily accepted. Saying our goodbyes we drove off and then slowly up the narrow and dramatic road towards El Planchon. Much of the lower flora was the same as before but as we gained height the wonderful drifts of *Rhodolirion montanum* became ever more lovely and we stopped, also finding two variants of *Mutisia subulata*; orange (small flowers) and red. The road continued to climb and we stopped for a late lunch near some superb *Schizanthus grahamii*, with fine clumps of *Calceolaria arachnoidea*, golden-flowered tufts of *Chaetanthera elegans* and patches of *Nassauvia aculeata* var. *aculeata*



Alstroemeria exerens

near the rocks. There were grand views across the plunging deep valley and these grew more special as we climbed further, stopping next for a thriving colony of *Viola congesta*, many with flowers. Superb clumps of *Calceolaria arachnoidea* with the pretty stars of *Montiopsis andicola* and *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* dangling from the banks followed before we reached the upper road. Grey-throated seedsnipes were bathing in one of the many little streams that cut across the road. Our route led past more of the same in lovely combinations especially the gorgeous richly-coloured *Schizanthus grahamii*. The road eventually reached a view above the Laguna de Teno from where we turned around and drove back down stopping for good stands or drifts of this and that. Perhaps the most dramatic sight on the descent was the amazing colony of *Calceolaria paralias* that choked a dry stream bed with huge billowing plants.

The sun was illuminating the multi-hued cliffs ahead and we drove back through the picturesque valley with the rapid waters of the Rio Teno alongside us the whole way, making a final stop for pretty forms of *Erythranthe naiandinus*.

Day 12 14 Jan To Farellones

Continuing our journey north, we deviated and travelled east of the capital, attempting to find a special plant (*Ourisia polyantha*). The cactus-studded hills looked dry and uninviting, though still impressive with their steep ramparts plunging to rivers below. All was going well, until within a kilometre of our target the gate of a new dam/hydroelectric project blocked our way with no way through.

There was no option but to backtrack, grabbing a quick lunch on the way and then making our way through the city and finally onwards and upwards towards Farellones. The hills were dry here too, but there were flowers to see, beginning with a large *Leucostele chilensis* that was heavily-infested in parasitic



Viola congesta



Rhodolirion montanum

blood-red *Tristeris aphyllus*. Not far beyond this and we started to see quite a lot of dainty *Alstroemeria revoluta*, stopping for one good colony with various colour forms. From here it was up, up, up until we reached Farellones, branching off towards Valle Nevado where we found a thriving colony of *Alstroemeria umbellata* on the rocky slopes, some plants submerged beneath hundreds of pink flowers. There was a fair smattering of golden *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* too and higher still banks smothered in *Alstroemeria exerens*. A fourth equally lovely species of this genus; *A. pallida* was seen closer to the hotel when we explored and area rich in not only these but many *Mutisia sinuata*, fragrant *Mulgerea xxx* and a good number of the white form of *Rhodolirion montanum*, including one prize clump with ten good flowers. To round things off, there was first-hand experience of the 'Shadow of the Condor' with a very close fly over from three Andean condors.

Day 13 15 Jan La Parva

Our final botanical exploration was spent in the varied hills above La Parva. We drove as high as we were permitted and then set off on foot, following the switchbacks higher past trailing *Tropaeolum polyphyllum* and then onto an area with large hummocks of the impressive *Caiophora coronata* that grew in boulder rubble, enveloping the rocks with their hundreds of open-mouthed white flowers. A little further was a large population of *Oxalis penicellata* too. As the road became a bit steeper it did not take that long before we found the first rosettes of *Viola atropurpurea* together with the small white daisy; *Oriastrum apiculatum*. This wonderful species is never seen in flower during this month, but the tight rosettes are nonetheless lovely and they were abundant on the stony slopes. In places they grew alongside the glowing orange flowers of *Tropaeolum nubigena* that trailed across the gravel and rocks, sharing the space with pretty spreading clumps of *Loasa caespitosa*. From the top of the slope we could clearly see the trail leading up to the ridge and continued across a flatter area with lots of *Azorella madreporica*, occasional *Perezia pilifera* and many more *Loasa caespitosa*. Spiky stands of *Nassauvia pyramidalis* were abundant, mainly with white flowers but some were attractively suffused with pink and all somehow thrived in the rough boulder strewn landscape. Attractive clumps of *Senecio crithmoides* appeared among the steep scree slopes as we progressed



Tropaeolum nubigena



Tristerix aphyllus

and closer to the ridge we found the first *Viola montagnei* with small black-purple and white flowers on delightful rosettes.

Climbing a bit higher, Robert and Laura then found three of the remarkable *Nassauvia pinnigera* emerging from the stony ground, the short columns of overlapping leaves topped by cream and pinkish flowers. The views up to the raw peaks we becoming increasingly dramatic as we neared the top, next finding a good population of the bizarre *Nastanthus ventosus* growing near crinkle-leaved rosettes of *Viola philippii* ringed with pretty pink flowers. And, shortly before we reached the ridge there were some good clumps of *Nototriche compacta* in flower and more and bigger *Viola montagnei*. Sitting and taking in the views, a mountain caracara flew over and approached in hope of some titbits and we had superb close views of this highland bird.

Starting down, there was good clump of *Nassauvia pinnigera* in some heavy scree and then we retraced our route, finding flatter ground with lots of *Montiopsis gilliesii* and more fine *Tropaeolum nubigena* (with their orange colour now looking better in flat light) amongst the many other now familiar plants. We revisited the *Caiophora coronata* colony (now in better light) and then spent time photographing the red-tipped coloured forms of *Tropaeolum polyphyllum*. A side path then cut through a superb population of *Rhodolorion montanum* with so many beautiful clumps and colour forms on offer.

The perfect finale.

Day 14 16 Jan Flights

There was a beautiful clear dawn across the Andean foothills. It was the end of our flower-filled Andean adventure and time to descend to the hazy city below. A final floral note was provided by a revisit of the *Tristerix aphyllus* laden cactus and then it was onto the airport. Robert and Laura were flying south to Puerto Montt to experience the lush south (and more), whilst I was travelling back to Turkiye the next day to be reunited with my boys and take them to England for a second Christmas with their family there.

Schizanthus grahamii

For information on our tours
please contact
info@viranatura.com



Mimulus naianthus