

# FESTIVE ASSORTMENT



*Anigozanthos manglesii*, Perth, Australia



*Luzuriaga polyphylla*, Queulat, Chile



*Asteranthera ovata*, Chaiten, Chile

It's hard not to think of chocolate at this time of year, that delicious indulgence that never seems to wane, with the dinner table debates on which is best; Roses, Quality Street, Lindt, Green & Blacks or all of the aforementioned! So, we thought we create our own little floral assortment, nothing to nibble we're afraid but some mouthwatering botanical marvels that came our way over the course of 2024, trying to stick that those time-honoured trio of colours; red, green and white as well as the odd bit of tinsel and a cute critter that surely would have made anyone's Christmas list.

It may be a time to throttle back and have a break but our tours are still going on with a very recent trip up and down the length of Chile to be followed by a return in the early New Year for the glorious high alpine colours. And, that is where 2024 began for us, exploring the colourful slopes of the Andes with condors swooping overhead and a real kaleidoscope of flora from abundant *Alstroemeria* to oceans of *Oxalis*, the open-mouths of *Caiophora coronata* and so many marvellous *Mutisia*. From here it was a hop across the Atlantic and the stunning landscapes and rich grasslands of the Drakensberg. It was a bumper for year for graceful *Dierama*, so many different orchids, *Agapanthus*, *Eucomis* and fiery *Kniphofia*, whilst waterfalls were draped in *Gladiolus microphyllus* and *Ornithogalum regali*.

A very brief lull saw our local patch come to life at the end of February with an excellent week filled with early season flora and many delightful bulbs, drifts of



Mountain Viscacha, Lauca, Chile



*Crocus alatavicus*, Uzbekistan



*Calochortus leichtlinii*, Lake Tahoe, California



*Tulipa butkovii*, Uzbekistan



*Paeonia peregrina*, Greece



*Callianthemum alatavicum*, Xinjiang, China

Anemone coronaria and cedar woods of Cyclamen. No time to draw breath and Chris was standing on a hillside in Andalucia looking at the crisp white of Narcissus cantabricus, to be followed by slopes of dainty N. triandrus and the icy stars of Acis trichophyllus. Basak walked the Lycian way with wonderful weather and floral displays. However, seasons can be fickle and unpredictable. April in Central Asia proved this with heavy snow changing where we might see the various plants, but they were all there with the added bonus of great quantities of Crocus alatavicus and the intense red of Tulipa butkovii in Uzbekistan. Greece on the other hand was two weeks earlier than normal and we were chasing crocuses uphill to the last snows. The flip side was quality time with that gorgeous little jewel; Soldanella pindicola as well as scarce Fritillaria epirotica and even the near open flower of even rarer Paeonia parnassica. It's cousin P. peregrina was glorious in the oakwoods at Bourazani. Not long after this Basak had an iris-filled trip around eastern Turkiye, a region that we never tire of and which always delivers the goods, this time amazing displays of Iris lycotis and carpets of I. aucheri, stands of Fritillaria imperialis and superb snow melt bulbs. This place is a must!

China has always had a lure too and the chance to join some Silk Road dots and complete a region seldom visited proved irresistible even if the excesses of Chinese tourism and the controlling aspects of Xinjiang took the gloss off of things. Compensation was in the form of the stunning Erythronium sibiricum, abundant peonies, Dictamnus albus and valleys filled with roses. Yunnan and Sichuan were as floristically rich as ever and this year was a record one for rhododendrons with an incredible display. We do not exaggerate when we say every single bush was in flower, with while mountain sides encrusted in pink or white or mauve. The zure buns of Chionocharis hookeri, the spotted leaves of Cypripedium lichiangense, screes filled with rare Meconopsis, undescribed Primula and grasslands meadows bursting with flowers are a few of the high points. Chris even got to drive on China.

A destination that is maybe not considered for summer came next; California. There is no where better in the world to see a wide variety of lilies than here and they were as plentiful as ever, at times alongside vast colonies of pitcher plants or vying with immense redwoods. Chris went onto to explore the Sierra Nevada afterward where he found beguiling meadows and the remarkable ancient forest of bristlecone pines. These battered old relics were enjoyed on a cloudless day and in solitude high in the White Mountains. There is a famous quote



*Sarcodes sanguinea* Lake tahoe, California



*Meconopsis punicea*, Sichuan, China.



*Rhododendron phaeochrysum*, Yunnan, China.

attached to this area which sticks in the mind “Things up here take a long time to die” in reference to extreme longevity of the forests. Something not to be missed. At the same time Basak was leading a lily-filled tour of Georgia, with marvellous mountains, meadows and great food. August is family time, then same the flora of south-west Australia, a mind-blowing experience for the sheer diversity on offer. The rains had been good and the displays of everlastings were dazzling, accompanied by an abundance of many different Drosera, the pretty twining vines of Thysanotus (fringe lily) and we also saw over fifty species of orchids, countless proteaceae, myrtaceae and confusing fabaceae, revelling in the abundance of architectural kangaroo paws and this must have been a bumper year with superb displays of Anigozanthos manglesii and our grand finale to the tour the black kangaroo paw; Macropidia fuliginosa just as we were driving back to Perth!

Basak took over in October looking at the many lovely autumn bulbs that appear, often among some of our world-class historical sites. Again it was great weather. And that brings us to now, Chris having just completed a unique tour in Chile where he showed the fabulous landscapes and distinct floras of three very different parts of this incredible country. The high altitude altiplano of the far, far north is crowned by the magnificent snow-capped Volcan Parinacota (6380-metres), this year even better than usual with a layer of very fresh snow. Below, the organic emerald forms of Azorella compacta engulf rocks whilst very cute Mountains Viscachas bound from rock to rock and Vicunas move graceful across a simply vast landscape. All change in the Valdivian forests of the south with lushness wall to wall, the fjords clothed in thick forest and the vegetation typified by an unrestrained abundance of Gunnera tinctoria, Blechnum chilense, Embotrium coccineum, Fuchsia magellanica and giant alerce trees (some millenia-old). Clinging to the trees are the exquisite waxen bells of Philesia magellanica and epiphytic finery such as dainty Luzuriaga polyphylla and Asteranthera ovata. Our grand journey ended in Patagonia, beneath the sculpted ramparts of one of the world’s most appealing mountains ranges in Torres del Paine. Here the ever present Embotrium coccineum took on a deeper hue alongside that loveliest of Chilean orchids; Chloraea magellanica, the porcelain orchid. Orchids in general were very common, other gems needed teasing out and though we had already seen a few Calceolaria uniflora growing with the gorgeous clumps of Oxalis ennaephylla, there had to be more and climbing a little higher into the hills one day we found the stunning finale of a patch of twenty-one Calceolaria uniflora flowers.

Chris will be back in Chile very soon, much as Christmas seems to come round that bit quicker every year. Never quite quickly enough though for a certain eight-year old who is champing at the bit and churning out letters to Santa and hanging stockings all over the house.

We wouldn’t have it any other way. Seasons Greetings from Chris, Basak, Merlin (14) and Aren (8).