ISU-Botanical trip to Kyrgyzstan.
17th of June - 28th of June 2017

Kyrgyzstan, Switzerland of the Orient, is located on the West Side of China, South of Kazakhstan, North of Tajikistan and East of Uzbekistan. It has the surface of one third of Germany but is home to only 6 million inhabitants. In the past, it often was occupied by different nations like Mongolia, Russia and China. Never ISU-enthousiasts went so far for stilling their botanical hunger. Brian Kabbes met his wife Meerim Kozhoshova here in her beautiful homeland. Both guided this trip already for the fifteenth time. Meerim is the organiser, speaks Dutch, English and Kirgiz. Brian is the speaking dictionnary of the Kirgiz flora. Most of Kyrgyz people are Muslim, what we even in the middle of the night could hear when the imam asked for the pray....

One third of the population lives in the capital Bishkek. This busy metropolis has a much higher standard than the countryside where we found the standard of living like two or even three generations ago in Europe. Here in Bishkek, we underwent the typical Asiatic busy atmosphere flavored with a sauce of past sovietunion relics. The neighbour China is entering slowly in the life and structure of this poor country by building perfect highways that are as good or of even better quality then our European ones. The Kyrgyz people are very friendly and have a high amount of humor that shows their intelligence. They served us healthy, well spiced, not too hot food with little meat (sheep - no lamb) and plentiful use of vegetables. We always had a save feeling all over the country except at the bazaar were the police tolerate the pickpockets, only at the entrance, for a rich percentage of their “income”.

After an accidental and retarded nightly flight to Bishkek over either Istanbul or Moscow, 15 ISU members of Belgium, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland met each other in the first two basic but good guesthouses in Bishkek. After a short rest and brunch we made at Sunday afternoon 18 June a walking city tour. The 4 hour time difference made it a short day.

**Monday 19 June - Chong Kemin National Park**

Botanizing in the fields. We went to Nora’s Guesthouse. After installing for 2 nights she, the animist chief of the good kept guesthouse, hunted the bad ghosts away by burning dry branches of Juniperus semiglobosa. At this first botanizing day we saw immediately the interesting flora that was very differing from the more known alpine flora in Europe. During the whole trip we will be accompanied by herbs like Artemisia dracunculus, A. absinthium, Cannabis ruderalis…..

The most important plants were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aconitum leucostomum</th>
<th>Eremurus fuscus</th>
<th>Nonea caspica</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adonis aestivalis</td>
<td>Galium turkestanicum</td>
<td>Onobrychis arenaria</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artemisia santolinifolia</td>
<td>Geranium collinum</td>
<td>Pedicularis alatauica</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centaurea ruthenica</td>
<td>Geum aleppicum</td>
<td>Phlomis pratensis</td>
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<tr>
<td>Codonopsis clematidea</td>
<td>Lathyrus parviflora</td>
<td>Rosa amblyantha</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dianthus kaschkewiczii</td>
<td>Leonurus turkestanicus</td>
<td>Salvia deserta</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dictamnus angustifolia</td>
<td>Ligularia heterophylla</td>
<td>Scutellaria przewalskii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echium vulgare (“the plant of the region”)</td>
<td>Linaria transilensis</td>
<td>Thymus marschallianus</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Linum alga</td>
<td>Ziziphora clinopodioides</td>
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</tbody>
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**Thursday 20 June - Chong Kemin National Park**

Botanizing in the Annie Djok Valley. Here it was cloudy and not as hot as in Bishkek (27°C / 36°C), because of the altitude (+-1500m). Driving on the bad regional and national roads needs good drivers. Our two drivers did a good job, although it was still Ramadan. The perfect highway to Bishkek is recently built by big brother China. A bird (roodmus in Dutch) is singing: “Pleased to meet you”

**Wednesday 21 June - Chong Kemin National Park**

Botanizing in the gorge of the Chong Say. Transport in 2 good vans to Bokonbaev situated South of the Ysyk-Kul lake at 1800 m height. Here we enjoyed the landscape decorated by the high mountains covered by eternal snow. Here we saw the nice solitary plants of Achnatherum splendens. Eating and sleeping in a yurt made us aware of the luxury life we have in Europe. No chairs and hard matrasses were an attack on our lazy backs. That night the dogs of the camping protected their territory against an attack of wolfs - some of us who didn't enjoy a deep sleep heard the crying wolfs and barking dogs.

**Pictures:** 8 Eremurus fuscus, 9 Papaver pavoninum, 10 Dactylorhiza umbrosa, 11 Onobrychis arenaria
Thursday 22 June - Bokonbaev - Skazka – Bokonbaev
Walk through Skazka valley. We walked through a small valley. At the end we came to a very miraculous landscape with bizzare sandstone formations and Kazakh tourists. The name Skazka means fairy tale in Kyrgyz and it was really a fairy tale landscape.

On the way back we took a bath in the Issyk Kul Lake, the second large lake situated on the second highest place after the Titicaca lake in Peruvian and Bolivian alteplano. A jump into the rather cold lake refreshed us. Knowing that in winter there is a temperature of -35-40°C the lake never freezes heated by hot water sources.

Driving back to our guesthouse we saw the deserted 2 km long touristic settlement financed by a - now bankrupt - Turkish capitalist.

Friday 23 June - Bokonbaev - Temir Kanat – Bokonbaev
Botanizing in the majestic landscape of mountains and steppes of Temir Kanat. Many of the herbaceous perennials have garden potential.

**Pictures:** 12 Limonium kaschgaricum, 13 Kyrgyzstan is at least not ready for megaloman touristic investments, 14 Perovskia scrophularifolia, 15 Leontopodium ochroleucum, 16 Kyrgyzstan made us relaxed, 17 Lindelofia stylosa
Saturday 24 June - Bokonbaev - Ak Say - Bokonbaev

Ak-Say valley is situated in the central part of the country at 260 km from Bishkek. Thanks to the use of an old Russian truck, we were the first group that reached this wonderful valley. After a walk between high loess walls with a very spare vegetation, we reached the Issyk Kul. The beach was a wonderful picnic place.

Sunday 25 June - Bokonbaev - Burana – Bishkek

Visit the archeological site of Burana and a short botanic survey around. The Burana Tower is a large minaret in the Chuy Valley. It is located about 80 km from Bishkek, near the town of Tokmok. The tower is all that remains of the ancient city of Balasagun, which was established by the Karakhanids at the end of the 9th century along the Silk Road. In the evening, we had a very nice meal in a Uzbek restaurant. That reduced the sadness we felt about the destroyed group of more than one hundred Delphinium semibarbatum that Brian found the year before and that was burned down on a bad chosen moment.

Pictures: 18 The always ice-free lake Ysyk-Kul, 19 Russian basic but reliable transport, 20 Goniolimon cuspidatum 21 Delphinium semibarbatum, 22 The Burana tower, 23 Allium caeruleum, 24 Xeranthemum annuum
Monday 26 June - Bishkek - Ala Archa – Bishkek

Brian and Meerim kept the nicest trip till the last botanizing day, which was the protected amazing Ala Archa Park. Here the with eradication threatened snow leopard is still alive. Because of the end of the Ramadan Kyrgyz people used the day off for visiting this beautiful park. At night again, tired, we went back to our guesthouse and tried another cuisine. The cook of the Uyghur restaurant prepared on high flames a magic meal.

Tuesday 27 June – Bishkek

We visited interesting felt shops, the famous Osh bazaar (5 km x 5 km!) and souvenir shopping. The real Chinese food that we tasted at the “Last Supper” again was of a high level and very appreciated by the group. The members of this very close and friendly group said goodbye at each other.

Brian enjoyed this amazing days and said that the ISU people formed the slowest but the most interested group he ever had……

Wednesday 28 June - Departure from Bishkek. Transport to Manas airport.

Pictures: 25 Trollius dschungaricus + Alchemilla sibirica, 26 The Ala Archa Park, 27 Gentiana karelinii, 28 To many to try, 29 To nice to eat, 30 To exuberantly to wear