

Jabal Moussa March 2014



Jabal Moussa was visited as part of a field study of the Lebanese species of cyclamen by a group from the United Kingdom. The particular focus of this study was the endemic *Cyclamen libanoticum*. This species has a very restricted distribution, and is of great interest to the Cyclamen Society, which sponsored this trip.

Cyclamen libanoticum has not been studied in the wild by western botanists for a number of years and it was important to establish the extent and size of any populations and to judge the state of their health.

Two excursions onto Jabal Moussa were carried out as part of this study. The first flush of spring flowering was past and the major wave was yet to start, therefore the visit took place at a time when the flowering peak was yet to come. The first excursion was from the village of Chouwan just above (river) Nahr Ibrahim, to Al iibre, a small village just below the ridge of the mountain on its northern aspect. The path starts in the village and climbs rapidly up the northern flank of the mountain. This path is to be further developed to form a circular footway from Chouwan and then back to Chouwan. The northern side of Jabal Moussa is protected from the direct harshness of the Mediterranean summer sun and benefits from increased water retention as a result the accumulated leaf mould. There are many limestone outcrops with much leaf mould underfoot. Abandoned terraces occupy the lower part of this area of the mountain and the walls of these have significant populations of *Cyclamen persicum* with a good range of flower colour from white to deeper pink and variable leaf patterns.



The path continues through *Pinus brutia* and *Quercus coccifera* forest and rises very steeply in parts. There are small numbers of *Cyclamen libanoticum* all along the path and occasional larger populations.



Also present were small groups or isolated individuals of *Orchis galilea* and *Orchis anatolica*, the former especially, in full flower. There are occasional plants of *Brimeura amethystina* along the way and *Genista sp.* in full flower. Also present were unidentifiable species of *Cephalanthera*, (probably *damasonium*), *Epipactis* and other non-flowering orchids. *Lilium candidum* was also present, but yet to flower. This walk is not an easy stroll, rather a climb, but it does give a glimpse of the extraordinary flora of this beautiful mountain.

Orchis galilea



Orchis anatolica



The second excursion was to the southern flank and ridge of Jabal Moussa starting near to the village of Qehmez. This southern flank is in sharp contrast to the northern flank. The latter has limestone outcrops with shade from the large number of trees and the aspect, leaf mould underfoot and a much cooler environment; in contrast, the southern flank of the mountain is hotter and drier with much exposed limestone rock and a more typical Mediterranean maquis vegetation. There are occasional meadow like areas with deeper soil in which trees and shrubs have become established which ameliorates the harshness of the summer sun.



Within such places there are areas which suit the third of the Lebanese species cyclamen namely *Cyclamen coum*.



Within these shady areas and the meadows also occurs *Gagea lutea* and the endemic *Paeonia kesrouanensis*, with good populations of *Anemone blanda*. *Cyclamen libanoticum* also occurs here, but much less commonly since the conditions which it favours are much less frequent. *Cyclamen persicum* grows prolifically amongst the rocks on the lower slopes, towards the village of Mchati, which are also occupied by rock hyrax. *Juniperus* of various species are also present.



This mountain is often snow covered in winter, and is baking hot in summer. The animals and plants which live here are well adapted to survive in these conditions. Sadly such environments are increasingly rare and under pressure for natural resources and agriculture. Fortunately the establishment of the Jabal Moussa Biosphere Reserve will help to protect and maintain this place for the animals and plants which live here and the people who visit.