

CROCUS GROUP BULLETIN NO. 21

Hon Secretary's Notes

The Crocus Group now has 107 members. The recent rapid increase is, I am sure, linked with the successful seed exchange. It has never been necessary to ask for a subscription, but the proceeds of the Annual Auction can no longer support the increased cost of printing and postage. New members joining in 1993 have paid a £5 'joining fee' and I do not intend to ask any more from them. Overseas members have never paid anything because of the problem of currency. I feel however, that there are probably members who no longer wish to receive the Bulletins but have never liked to say so. What I propose is that any British member wishing to receive future bulletins should send me a cheque for £5. I will do what I have been meaning to do for a long time, and start a Crocus Group account in a local bank, into which I can pay cheques made out to the Group. Overseas members need not send cash, but I would be grateful for a card saying they are still interested. I hope members will continue their support for the Auction, and I expect the £5 to be a sort of 'top up' to keep us going for many years before I need ask for any more.

Primrose Warburg

South Hayes
Yarnells Hill
Oxford OX2 9BG

Sunday 26 September 1993

This is the 2nd year of a trial of autumn crocuses at Wisley. Alan Edwards who is on the committee judging the results has offered to show us round. Meet at the main turnstiles at the entrance to Wisley RHS gardens at 11am. If you have an RHS members ticket, please bring it.

Saturday 19 February 1994

We are invited to visit the garden of Joy & Geoff Bishop. Several greenhouses if the weather is unpleasant and a great many interesting bulbs are sure to be in flower.

Address: WHEELSPIN, 83 MACDONALD ROAD
 LIGHTWATER, SURREY GU18 5XZ
 TEL: 02764 72500

Sunday 27 February 1994

We have been invited to visit the garden of Mr & Mrs R Leeds, well known for their successes in AGS shows, and a winner of a Crocus Group silver spoon. Arrive at 11 am and bring sandwiches to eat under cover after seeing round the garden. Please telephone if you intend to come. Map will come with Spring bulletin.

Address: CHESTNUTS, WHELP STREET
PRESTON ST MARY, SUDBURY, SUFFOLK CO10 9NL
TEL. 0787 247627

Tuesday 12 April 1994

Annual Crocus group lecture at 4 pm in the RHS New Hall will again be given by David Stephens who did not have time to finish last year and was unanimously requested to give us the other half this year. The title was "Crocuses of Turkey" illustrated by superb slides.

This will be followed by our annual auction of members' spare crocuses. Please come to bring and buy. This was the only time a room was available for us and we have to be out by 6pm.

THE INDIGENOUS PROPAGATION PROJECT AND CROCUS OLIVIERI ssp ISTANBULENSIS

The future of the golden Crocus olivieri ssp istanbulensis has been made more secure following work by the Indigenous Propagation Project in partnership with the Turkish Department of Forestry. The crocus was described as recently as 1982, and is restricted to a single site on a bushy hillside on the outskirts of Istanbul. Yet despite reasonably intensive levels of botanical survey in the Istanbul area (a third "Flora of Istanbul" is currently in production), no further colonies of this attractive and distinctive plant have been located.

As part of the Indigenous Propagation Project, project officers Sema Atay and Andy Byfield surveyed the sole locality in 1992, and located about 200 plants restricted to an area only 2 hectares in extent. As such, C. olivieri ssp istanbulensis is the most threatened of Turkey's 32 Crocus, and perhaps endangered of all the members of the country's diverse bulb flora. This extreme localisation seems to be related to the soils of the region - the small area where the plant grows overlies limestone in an area largely dominated by ancient igneous rocks and acid sands, and is in general extremely rich botanically speaking, with plants such as Aristolochia pallida, Aster linosyris (rather localised in Turkey) and Iris attica.

Whilst the plant is afforded some protection since it lies within state-owned forest land managed as a picnic area for the people of Istanbul, much of the surrounding area has been afforested. Whilst this does not directly affect the crocus, it has resulted in the cessation of grazing over the whole site, and the crocus site is now becoming rapidly overgrown with scrub. Project staff estimated that the plant would largely have died out within 10 years if the scrub continued to grow at current rates.

Thus the project staff organised the clearance of scrub off the site in conjunction with, and the full support of, the Department of Forestry. Over 0.5 hectares of the site were cleared in March 1993, by forestry and IPP project staff; and the local staff of the forestry department are now very keen to clear further areas in future years, and to maintain the area in perpetuity for the Crocus, in partnership with the Indigenous Propagation Project. That the site is managed as a picnic area by the Department of Forestry is a blessing: many similar areas around Istanbul - noted for their flora rich in endemic species - are severely threatened as this, the fastest growing city in Europe, continues to expand. The future of many of the other 20 Istanbul endemics is considerably less certain.

Whilst such clearance work for particular species is commonplace in countries such as Britain, to our knowledge this is the first example of this type of work undertaken solely for the purposes of saving endangered species anywhere in Turkey. We are thus especially delighted with the highly positive response of the Department of Forestry - and for their practical help in securing the future of this attractive species.

The Indigenous Propagation Project is a joint project between the London-based Fauna and Flora Preservation Society and the Turkish Society for the Protection of Nature. The principle aim of the project is to encourage the trade in artificially-propagated and cultivated bulbous plants, instead of the wild collection of such plants, which takes place at the present time. However, where possible, actions are taken to save species threatened by factors other than collection for horticulture.

Andy Byfield
Indigenous Propagation Project - Turkey
May 1993

CROCUS VARIETIES AND CULTIVARS

Yellow-flowered species

The yellow-flowered crocuses have yielded rather few significant named cultivars. The big exception is the ordinary Dutch yellow crocus now known as 'Golden Yellow'. It is a sterile clone derived from Crocus flavus and has been in cultivation for at least 300 years. Bowles suggests that there were three similar clones differing in the amount of external marking.. The origin is unknown. It is remarkable in being the most vigorous yellow crocus despite centuries of vegetative propagation.

A number of other unusual seedlings of C. flavus have arisen in the past and some of them are illustrated in Maw's 'Monograph of the Genus Crocus'. Several had pale flowers with or without white tips. All appear to have had a weak constitution and it is doubtful if any survive. Crocus 'Sulphureus Concolor' was commercially available in the 1960's and was characterised by its pale yellow flowers appearing late in the season. I rashly grew it in the open garden and it eventually disappeared. Aesthetically it was a poor thing compared with wild C. flavus.

Amongst seedlings of C. flavus I have had pale forms which for one reason or another have failed to persist. One orange seedling with white tips to the segments has however continued to grow. It is just a curiosity and does not merit a cultivar name.

Of the species allied to C. flavus, C. candidus is white and the so-called C. candidus subflavus is almost certainly a hybrid with C. olivieri. The narrow-leaved forms of C. olivieri were formerly known as C. suterianus and had orange-yellow flowers. There was however a butter-yellow form known as C. suterianus 'Jamie'. Unfortunately it no longer appears in bulb merchants' lists and I have not seen it for many years.

What used to be C. balansae has now become a subspecies of C. olivieri. Wild-collected plants I have seen have been unexciting but the cultivar 'Zwanenburg', selected at the Van Tubergen Nurseries, is highly desirable and one of the deepest orange crocuses I grow. Even more striking is 'Chocolate Soldier'. It is deep orange-yellow with a solid brown blotch covering most of the outer surface of the outer segments. This is a Bowles plant, mercifully preserved for posterity by our secretary, Mrs. Warburg. I have very few corms in the collection but several have been distributed to other growers who hopefully will help to keep it going. It does not increase freely and its well-being in pot cultivation is a source of constant anxiety.

We come now to the yellow-flowered members of the reticulate subseries, the best known being C. angustifolius (formerly susianus). The species is variable in the degree of striping and feathering. I have a clone with solid brown outer markings which I have received as 'Kew form'. R B G Kew has no knowledge of it and I think the name simple reflects the origin of the corms and does not merit being retained as a cultivar.

C. angustifolius 'Minor' differs from the type only in its smaller structure.

C. ancyrensis is best known as the cultivar 'Golden Bunch'. This easy, free-flowering clone gives a misleading impression of the species since wild forms are not at all amenable to cultivation. Some of them have reddish-purple tubes and would be a great asset if they were easier to obtain and grow.

C. korolkowii is very variable in the shade of yellow ground-colour and in the extent of the purplish-brown external markings. Bowles found that the plants from the western end of its distribution were better garden plants than those from further east. Several cultivar names have been applied. 'Unicoloratus' (= 'Concolor'?) is a form with practically no external markings. 'Albus', which I recently received from Czechoslovakia, is not white but an attractive pale primrose yellow with faint external purple flecks. I have not yet seen three cultivars recently offered by Dr Paul Christian, 'Golden Nugger', 'Yellow Prince' and 'Spring Cocktail', all said to be garden-raised seedlings from Russia. The most distinct form which I grow is 'Dytiscus' in which the yellow flowers are set off by the solid mahogany marking on the outer segments. My plant originated in Eastern Europe and I cannot be certain that it can be traced back to the plant raised and named by Bowles. Even if it is simply a "look alike" it is highly desirable. Some commercial stocks of C. korolkowii show a wide variation of shade and markings and it might be rewarding to raise seedlings and possibly to try to cross it with the closely related C. alatavicus.

This concludes this brief survey of crocus cultivars. The author would welcome additional information about these or other cultivars and to hear of other members' experiences.

Ray Cobb

SEED EXCHANGE 1994

Just a short note to remind members that the Crocus season is once again upon us and to ask that you will hand pollinate your plants to produce seed for next years seed exchange.

Also, when planning next years holiday, that you only go to countries where you can find Crocus seed.

Seriously, the 1993 exchange has just finished and there were some very desirable donations. For the first time ever in any list to my knowledge, we had almehensis and gilanicus and many others that are rare and difficult to find such as alatavicus, biflorus nubigenus, gargaricus gargaricus (not herbertii, the common cousin), kotschyanus cappodocicus, veneris, and a new subspecies of kotschyanus.

So, as you can see, it is well worthwhile participating and as the main purpose of such an eclectic group as ourselves is promulgation of the Crocus, I would ask you all to help make the Seed Exchange in 1994, even better than in 1993.

Outlined below are details on how to join in the 1994 seed exchange, either as a donor or non-donor.

There is no intention to make a charge for the exchange, the only cost will be for postage, except for overseas members, from whom no postage cost is required.

- 1 We wish to distribute seed as fresh as possible, so ask donors to send seed by July 31st in each year at the latest. This should allow for late flowering species and high altitude late collections.
- 2 Although all species, subspecies, forms and varieties will be welcomed, we ask donors not to send seed of commercial forms of common species. It is not felt that members of such a specialized group would desire these. Wild collections of these are of course welcome, as are unidentified collections.
- 3 We most earnestly request overseas members in Crocus growing regions to send seed of their native species. These would be particularly welcomed in the UK where sometimes only one, or a limited number of clones are available of less common species.
- 4 In common with other seed exchanges, donors will receive their choices before non-donors. In the case of rare species in short supply, the lucky recipients will be chosen by lot until the supply is exhausted.
- 5 We ask all members of the Crocus Group to donate seed, even if they do not wish to avail themselves of the seed exchange. What is commonplace to some may be of interest to others.
- 6 For wild collected seed, or seed of known provenance would you please add field notes, collection numbers and other details.
- 7 Details on where to send seed, and how to obtain the 1994 seed list will be given in the Spring'94 edition of the bulletin.

David Stephens