

## CROCUS GROUP BULLETIN NO. 22

### Hon Secretary's Notes

Nearly all the 'old' original Crocus Group members have kindly sent me £5; recent new members have paid a 'joining fee' of £5, so our financial position is assured for some time ahead. Please, however, continue to support our annual crocus auction thus postponing as long as possible the need to ask for more cash from members.

Primrose Warburg  
South Hayes  
Yarnells Hill  
Oxford OX2 9BG Tel: 0865 247883

### Sunday 23 October 1994

Ray Cobb, who has now passed on the National Collection of crocuses to David Stephens, says he and his wife Sylvia are happy for us to see his remaining collection of crocuses and other bulbs. The garden frames and greenhouse are packed with interesting things. Come at 11 am and bring a packed lunch - coffee is promised on arrival. Tel. 0602 281525 if you intend to come. Address: 188 Bramcote Lane, Wollaton, Nottingham NG8 2QN

We hope we can visit the National Collection in its new home in 1996 when it has been settled in.

### Saturday, 29 October 1994

I have a dozen or more crocuses which have been seeding themselves in short grass for about 40 years. If you would like to come to see them and many other bulbs, come at 11 am and I will provide coffee. I am 2½ miles west of Oxford, marked on maps as Botley or North Hinksey, along an unmarked private road at the top of Yarnells Hill. Address & phone number as above. Please telephone if you intend to come and bring a packed lunch.

### Sunday, 5 February 1995

We are invited to visit the garden of Alan Edwards, well known for award winning bulbs and lovely photographs. After we have seen his garden he hopes to show us round the garden of the late Sir Wm. Laurence. Come at 11 am, bring a packed lunch and in the afternoon we shall be taken 'behind the scenes' at Wisley by Jill Skilton to see their crocuses and other bulbs. Alan Edwards' address is: 'Tyfan', Burney Road, West Humble, Dorking, Surrey.

Telephone: 0306 883775

**Saturday, 18 February 1995**

We have been invited to visit the garden of Mr & Mrs Wills. This is a large and very interesting garden with many unusual trees and shrubs as well as spring bulbs. Come at 11 am, bring a packed lunch and afterwards someone, I hope, will know the way to Monocot Nursery, run by Mike Salmon, who will be open specially for us that afternoon. Please telephone if you intend to visit the Manor House.

Mr & Mrs S M Wills  
The Manor House  
Walton-in-Gordano  
Cleveland  
Avon BS21 7AN  
Tel: 0275 872067

Monocot Nursery  
'Jackland'  
Jacklands Bridge  
Tickenham  
Clevedon  
Avon BS21 6SG

If you need to telephone, please ring Peter Bird - 0272 682782.

**Tuesday, 21 February, 1995**

Annual Crocus lecture will be given by David King, exact title will appear in spring newsletter. Lecture will be at 5 pm at RHS, Vincent Square, followed by an auction of members' spare crocuses. Please give generously to swell our funds. Come along to the lecture and stay and buy.

## Saffron Cookery

Last autumn the Sunday Times ran a special offer of small quantities of Saffron. Having never had any success with the style *brancheo* from my own *Crocus sativus* I bought one of these packets and found out a bit more about how to use it. Saffron as picked in fields in Spain is dried in shovels over heat, which I had not done. The most important thing is that it must be steeped in either white wine or citrus juice for at least 20 minutes and can then be added to whatever you wish. Steeped in white wine and heated it really releases its scent and orange-red colour. Try it with scrambled egg - it will astonish you. Sadly I do not think I like the smell and taste very much but do not let that put you off.

Do be careful to make sure you are buying real saffron 'threads', as they call them. Half a teaspoon of the real things are said to be enough for 4-8 servings, but cheap 'saffron' from a foreign market stall is likely to be adulterated. Merchants were burned alive for this in Nuremberg in the 15th Century but modern entrepreneurs seem to escape this drastic punishment.

Primrose Warburg.

### *Crocus sieberi* - a yellow variant

In the 'Handbook of *Crocus* & *Colchicum*' Bowles records finding the now justly famed *C. sieberi* 'Bowles White' among his seedlings "after 30 years of hopeful expectation". In late January 1994 I made a similar startling discovery, (but after a wait of only five years) when a yellow form appeared among 1989 seedlings raised from *C. sieberi* ssp. *sieberi* material collected originally in Crete in 1982. It is well known that the latter ssp. is doubtfully hardy outside in this country whereas 'Bowles White' has proved resistant to British winters. For this reason it seems reasonable to assume that 'Bowles White' arose from *C. sieberi* ssp. *attica* and not from ssp. *sieberi*.

In size, shape and foliage my yellow form is indistinguishable from 'Bowles White'; even the anthers and style are evenly matched. The segments are ample and pleasingly rounded in outline as in 'Bowles White', but are best described as being butter yellow with a throat of darker yellow. The outer segments are very slightly paler than the inner set, but all exhibit the same fine, but virtually colourless veining found in 'Bowles White'. Only the tube shows variation, this being stained olive-green in place of pale yellow.

I would be interested to hear from any member who has raised any non-lilac variants of ssp. *sieberi*. To my knowledge this is the first time a yellow seedling has been recorded. As in the case of 'Hubert Edelstein' and 'Lingwood Beauty' the offspring of ssp. in the *C. sieberi* family have hitherto always reflected the lilac or violet tones of their parents, 'Bowles White' being the notable exception.

Alan Edwards

31.8.94

## SEED EXCHANGE

Today is September 2, and I have just completed the annual Crocus Group Seed Exchange distribution. This has prompted me to write a short piece for our bulletin.

This is the third year we have organised a seed exchange, and it is apparent that the scheme is becoming very successful and popular.

In 1992, our first year, 70 lots of seed were offered, and about 8% of the membership participated, either as donors, recipients or in both capacities.

In 1993, 82 lots of seed were offered, and about 12% of the membership participated.

This year, 123 lots of seed were on offer, 25% of our members participated, including 7 overseas members. (54% of all known species were on this list).

These three exchanges have offered seed of many crocus that are not available in the trade and are extremely difficult to obtain by any means, such as *almehensis*, *gilanicus* and *veneris*.

We routinely list rare and difficult to obtain species such as *abantensis*, *adanensis*, *alatavicus*, *antalyensis*, *cvijicii*, and *vallicola*.

We have even offered seed of three possible new species, *paschei*, *rujanensis*, and a *kotschyanus* ssp *nova*. I am also pleased to report that a significant proportion of seed is wild collected, which if done responsibly, widens the gene pool and introduces greater variability.

To those of our members who do not grow crocus from seed, could I ask, why not? It is so absurdly easy to do, even for the rarer species, and is the only cost effective way of obtaining a reasonable quantity of the more expensive species. Perhaps you are put off by the 3/4 year wait from seed to flower.

However, if like me you sow some pots of seed every year (200+ pots per year in my case), from the third year onward something new comes of age every year. For example, I have just this morning detected the first flowering noses on a pot of about 50 *cambessedessii* sown in 1991.

How much would it cost to buy 50 corms in the trade? I now have large enough quantities of some of the rarer species to allow experimentation in growing conditions, something you would not dare with only one precious corm with a tenuous grip on life. For example, I am convinced that as long as they are correctly sited in the right conditions, that nearly all crocus will do far better planted out rather than in pots, I can now try.

Crocus grown from seed will always succeed better than bought corms because of naturally selected genetic adaptability to your environment.

Will all these wonderful reasons for growing Crocus from seed, make sure you participate in the 1995 seed exchange.

Also, could I put in a plea for everyone to consider donating seed, even if you do not wish to participate in the exchange.

Do not be put off by thinking that your offerings will be too common or too small. Except for the garden hybrids and varieties, seed of all species will be welcome to someone somewhere.

I will issue a reminder in the spring bulletin and here remind you of the unbelievably easy rules of the seed exchange, viz:-

Send seed or a SAE for seedlist before July 31, to:

David B Stephens, Sherwood, Bunce Common Road, Leigh, Surrey RH2 8NS, UK.

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Quite a few of you have told me that you would like to participate in the annual auction but cannot attend or have no crocus material available at that time of year. This provokes me to suggest some sort of corm/cormlet exchange of surplus/spare material during the dormant/repotting season. We would have to think very carefully about the rules/logistics, but I am sure some sensible system could be devised. If you would be interested in such a scheme, write to me at the above address, and I will try to co-ordinate.

David.