

CROCUS GROUP BULLETIN SPRING 1995

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. Please telephone Alan Edwards beforehand if you intend to come. 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. Afterwards we shall be shown the way to Mike Salmon's very interesting Monocot Nursery, opening specially for us that afternoon. If you intend to come, please telephone Mr Peter Bird on 0272 682782.

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

Tuesday, 21 February, 1995

Annual Crocus lecture and Auction at RHS, Vincent Square. Due to unforeseen circumstances David King will not be available to give this lecture. [He is due to retire soon and we hope to persuade him to talk to us at a later date]. Due to the short notice it is difficult to find another speaker but we are going to have a general discussion on growing crocuses, led by Alan Edwards. Please will anyone intending to come bring a few slides and be prepared to say something about them.

Please bring any crocuses you can spare for our auction in aid of Crocus Group funds. I am sorry this bulletin is later than intended but it is due, as they say, to circumstances outside my control. I hope members were efficient enough to transfer dates of meetings from their 1994 diaries. Please support our garden visits and bring interesting or un-identifiable crocuses with you for the rest of us to see and marvel at. Happy Gardening!

Primrose Warburg
Yarnells Hill
Oxford OX2 9BG

Telephone 0865 247883

Crocus Notes from Brian Mathew

Some good news recently received is that two new species and a new variety from Turkey have now been given their botanically correct names, even though they have been in cultivation for some time with unofficial ones. I should explain that, botanically speaking, a name is not validly published until it has been given a latin description in a publication which has a reasonable circulation to libraries etc. A dried specimen - the type - also has to be deposited in a herbarium so that there is something for future researchers to refer to; these are just the basics to explain why some Crocus enthusiasts have been growing Crocus paschei, Crocus kerndorffiorum and Crocus biflorus subsp. albocoronatus but the names were not acknowledged in botanical literature such as Index Kewensis. The tardiness in validating them was caused by publishing delays to the journal of the International Bulb Society, Herbertia. All is now well, and their descriptions appear in the latest part of Herbertia, Volume 49, Numbers 1 & 2, pages 67--86, published in October 1994. Publication delays may seem only a slight inconvenience but they can have annoying consequences. For example, had someone else found the same undescribed species in Turkey and decided to publish a paper about them more quickly, Erich Pasche and Helmut Kerndorff would have been upstaged and the names which they have bestowed upon the new species would have entered the realms of synonymy. This has happened, of course, and not infrequently, sometimes in all innocence when one botanist has been unaware of another's work and sometimes through pure jealousy! I believe that there is a case where someone published a species (not a Crocus) in a local newspaper just to validate it quickly before anyone else! However, back to new crocuses.

Crocus paschei Kerndorff, from the Taurus Mountains, is a spring-flowering species (the type was collected on 7 March 1991) with a papery corm tunic splitting lengthways at the base. The author compares it with the species of series Flavi - C. antalyensis, C. flavus, C. olivieri etc. It has a similar flower colour to C. antalyensis, pale to deep lilac blue on the inside and silvery or buff on the outside with a small amount of speckling near the base; inside, the throat is yellow, as in C. antalyensis, but this yellow area is surrounded by a white zone which C. antalyensis does not have; C. paschei also has a three-branched style which distinguishes it from this species.

C. kerndorffiorum Pasche is from the central Taurus Mountains, the type specimen collected on 5 March 1991. It is also spring-flowering, and has a membranous corm tunic splitting into vertical fibres at the base, not horizontal rings. The flowers are a variable shade of lilac-blue (rarely white) with a yellow throat and have variable markings on the outside, described as 'creamy-white or yellowish with a more or less narrow, median blue or violet stripe, sometimes closely accompanied by very fine veins,

the median stripes converging with short stripes of the same colour radiating from a brown-violet segment base.' The anthers are yellow at first but developing a blue-green to grey-green discolouration; the style has three short bright red branches. The author compares it particularly with C. leichtlinii; however, the new species has a rather more softly membranous corm tunic, that of C. leichtlinii as we know it being tough and egg-shell like splitting into triangular teeth and somewhat reminiscent of that of C. laevigatus in texture, although really quite distinct from all others. On the matter of C. leichtlinii the author goes on to question whether the plant now in cultivation under that name (introduced by eg. John Watson, T. Baytop etc.) is the same as the true original C. leichtlinii which was known to Daniel Dewar of Kew and to E.A. Bowles; he suggests that the new species may in fact be the original C. leichtlinii and the Watson and Baytop collections represent an undescribed species. If this scenarion were true, it would mean that C. kerndorffiorum would become a synonym of C. leichtlinii. However, all this depends upon the characteristics of the original C. leichtlinii, first published in 1891 by Dewar as a variety of C. biflorus, then given specific status by Bowles in 1924. Unfortunately the wild source of the original C. leichtlinii was not accurately specified. In view of the questions raised by the description of this new species we now need an investigation of the three plants: C. kerndorffiorum, the original C. leichtlinii of (Dewar)Bowles [if there are any living plants now in cultivation], and the ?C. leichtlinii, as collected more recently by Watson and by T. Baytop. [If all three are available I would be willing to co-ordinate the work, starting with chromosome counts-BM].

The third taxon to be described [the word 'taxon' is useful: it means a unit of unspecified level - species, subspecies, variety, etc.] is C. biflorus subsp. albocoronatus Kerndorff, also collected in the central Taurus Mountains. It is a colourful spring 'annulate' crocus, described by the author as follows: 'The inner surfaces of the segments are mid- to deep-violet having a more or less distinct white zone [hence albocoronatus -BM], streaked with few lilac veins above the dark yellow base. The outside of the outer segments cream-coloured, heavily striped with 3-(-5) dark brown to violet stripes. The outside of the inner segments is light violet with a dark brown to violet base. Throat yellow, glabrous.' The style is divided into three orange to red branches and the anthers are yellow.

All three of these new crocuses have been introduced into cultivation - they are certainly in Germany and Britain - so it is to be hoped that they will soon start filtering around among the enthusiasts. My own limited experience to date is that they present no problems in pots and a sandy bulb frame but I have insufficient corms to try them outside as yet.

CROCUS GROUP SEED EXCHANGE 1995

This is the fourth year we have organized 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.

In 1994, 123 lots of seed were on offer, 25% of our members participated, including 7 overseas members. (54% of all known taxa were on this list)

These previous 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 responsibly done, 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, from the third year onward something new comes of age every year.

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

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

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.

Let me remind you of the unbelievably easy rules of the seed exchange, viz:-

Send seed and/or a SAE for seedlist before July 31, 1995 to:

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