

Crocus Group Bulletin No 27

Summer 1999

Patron	Brian Mathew	Members	186
Committee	Ray Cobb	Home	148
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	David Stephens		
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editorial

Another hugely successful seed exchange safely finished for this year. Only one or two casualties who for one reason or other did not meet the timescales (post office to blame in one case). The timetable for the seed exchange is very carefully ordered so as to ensure that you receive seed at exactly the correct time for sowing (in the northern hemisphere). The autumn flowering has started well here, since the middle of July I have had a succession of flowering on *kotschyanus suworowianus*, *cappadocicus* and *hakkariensis* with various *speciosus ilgazensis* and *xantholaimos* and a few early *pallasii* forms. The main autumn display is just starting now with *nudiflorus* and *serotimus* forms just showing. Those members who know me, also know that I rather eccentrically grow my *Crocus* in cut off plastic milk bottles. This is actually a calculated device. I am not interested in showing per se, so the container the plants grow in is incidental to the welfare of both the plant and myself. I have over 1000 pots of *Crocus* and using containers that stack together in blocks cuts the space needed down dramatically. Stacking in blocks also provides good insulation and obviates the need to plunge. I also find that plastic enables me to grow the plants a trifle damper than in clay, which is a significant factor in the hot part of southern Britain where I live. I was finding that in clay my plants were tending to dry out and go dormant too early in the spring, leading to smaller corms with the old corm not fully re-absorbed. As it is now several years since the *Crocus* Group were invited to see my *Crocus* collection, you are all welcome this autumn to come and see the National Milkbottle Collection - details overleaf. **DBS**

Is there 'Maw' to it than meets the eye!

Several years ago I opened my 'piggy-bank' and purchased a loose-leaf set of the coloured plates that form part of 'A Monograph of the Genus *Crocus*' by George Maw. They were advertised in one of the well-known second-hand book dealers catalogues. The plates are contained in a maroon rigid folder with the appropriate description in gold leaf on the front outside cover. To date - this is the only set that I have seen intentionally separated from the text - or maybe some member knows different. The plates are identical with those that normally form part of the complete book. As the result of the generosity of one of our members I was able to obtain a copy of the full text from their own photocopy. The result is a good 'working' text that is accompanied by the original colour plates.

Inspection of the colour plates revealed that No. 17 was missing. Now inquisitive, I also inspected the text which revealed that all references to species No. 17 were also conspicuous by their absence! My next visit to the Lindley Library confirmed that their own complete copy of Maw's *Crocus* did not include Plate No. 17 nor any references to species No. 17.

It happened that about twelve months ago Brian Mathew was sitting at our breakfast table; I took this opportunity to ask if he had noticed the missing bits? He was not aware of the omission but promised to investigate.

His subsequent helpful reply includes 'the copy of Maw that I inspected', not the Lindley Library copy - 'is also missing Plate No. 17'.....in all the places where Maw lists the species he omits No. 17. Maybe he did it so that the rest of us would puzzle over it for ever more 'Or may be you know different? Answers on a postcard - please! May be there is a bona fide rationale for the missing '17' bits. **John Sanders**

Crocus carpetanus

Since the airlines have been good enough to introduce cheap return flights to various parts of Europe, I have been taking advantage and going on long weekend breaks to see *Crocus* flower in the wild. I told you about one of these trips I took last autumn to see *Crocus medius* in Liguria. During the last week of March this year I took another trip to Madrid in Spain to see *Crocus carpetanus*. Just north of Madrid lies the eastern end of the chain of mountains that stretches from here westwards to Portugal which is variously known as the Guaderramas and Gredos ranges. At this easterly end they are known as the Montes Carpetanes, hence the derivation of the specific name for our *Crocus*.

Taking the main highway northwards from Madrid, after about 30 miles a major road leads westwards. If you take this road there are various side roads which criss cross the mountain passes. This is a favourite ski region for the Madrid populace and it is pleasant to go up to the ski slopes in the certain knowledge of a place to get a drink and meal when you get there. Our *Crocus* is very abundant in this region and I have never had any problem finding it. Indeed, I was very lucky this trip to find the *Crocus* in full flower by melting snow on the higher slopes and in ripe seed lower down, some of which luck found its way into the seed exchange.

This is a beautiful flower in the wild and never looks quite so good in a pot. In the bright sunlight and snow glare, it has almost a crystalline quality to the colours which are quite variable from a good proportion of pure to near whites through tones of pink to nearly purples, with lots of bi-coloureds. It is one of those *Crocus* which are very shallow growing, often in the top inch of leaf litter under trees, not like the majority which grow quite deep. I did not test the soil, but am told that this is an acid loving plant unlike the majority of *Crocus*. Although covered in snow until flowering, the area in which it grows north of Madrid must get as hot as hell in mid summer, so it probably wants to be kept on the dry side in dormancy. I have never found it particularly difficult to grow with a little care, but it is rarely seen in cultivation. **DBS**

National Collection Report

This, the most junior of the NCCPG National *Crocus* collections, numbers 635 accessions (August 1999) including 103 of the recognised taxa. Whilst I have been collecting *Crocus* for at least ten years, the collection has been boosted in recent years with the help of David and Ray, and of course the Seed Exchange. I am also indebted to several other Group members for their contributions.

I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn about *Crocus* and their cultivation from several accomplished growers. It is clear there is a wealth of knowledge and experience in the Group's membership. To support the aims of the Group (and the NCCPG), I would like to gather information on cultivation, collate and pass it on to members through this newsletter.

To this end I invite members to contact me at the address below with their experiences of cultivating *Crocus*. A brief outline of your local conditions (climate, rainfall, soil type etc.), the number of taxa you grow and any notable successes or failures will get us started. Do you have any tips on composts/watering regimes? While I grow the collection in pots, I am interested to hear about your experiences with *Crocus* in the open garden. Do some of us cosset our 'pets' in pots when they may be better off planted out?

Please drop me a line with your experiences. Who knows - this may develop into a 'Correspondence Column'
Tony Goode. 3 Woodland Road. Hellesdon. Norwich NR6 5RA

Autumn visit - come to see me and/or my *Crocus* on Sunday October 24th from 1100 onwards, bring any spare *Crocus* for the auction in aid of Group funds.

David Stephens
Sherwood
Bunce Common Road
Leigh. Surrey
Tel. 01306 611420

Spring visit - **Brian Mathew** rather rashly agreed that the *Crocus* Group could visit him next spring. I haven't agreed a date with him yet, but will let you know in the Spring Newsletter.

WANTS/SWAPS/NEEDS etc.

Thought it might be a good idea to have a slot for members to advertise any material they are looking for or have spare for swaps or sale etc. We'll start this one off with a request from a Dutch member:-

Jac. Zweeris, Irenestraat 34, NL-1756 AK 't Zand - fax. 00 31 224 591 218
is looking for corms or seeds of *autranii/pelistericus/paschei/mathewii/robertianus/goulimyi* Mani White.
he has many crocus to exchange, especially uncommon Dutch varieties, fax or write him for a list.

Crocus pelistericus.

In 1996 I was the fortunate recipient of a gift of one or two small *Crocus pelistericus* with a little information on their natural habitat. The corms had plenty of root growth and were immediately planted in a mixture of moss peat, lime-free grit and alluvial neutral soil. The pot was left out in the elements and watered daily with rain water. During the winter of 96/97 care was taken that frost didn't penetrate the pot but no special protection was needed (SW Britain climate!!)

I had planned to travel with a friend to northern Greece in May 1997 and one of our objectives was a known site of this beautiful *Crocus*. We had no difficulty in finding them growing at around 1800m together with *C. veluchensis* but with the two species occupying very different habitats. *C. veluchensis* grew in the drier alpine turf and down the banks of a gully but *C. pelistericus* was actually flowering through two inches of slowly moving water at the bottom of the gully. We returned to this site again at the same time in May 1998 but found the season much further advanced than in the previous year. Not a flower of either species to be seen and as *C. pelistericus* has no white line down the leaf we had extreme difficulty in confirming their existence among the dwarf sedge leaves. The water level had receded but the turf was water-logged - squelchy under foot!

The information gathered from these two trips has been used to good advantage in growing my plants. During the winter months the pot stands in a shaded spot which receives no direct sunlight and on frost free days is watered sparingly from above. At this time most of the leaves will have died off. As the temperature increases evidence of new growth appears and then watering is dramatically increased - a daily soaking - with the occasional addition of Phostrogen. The pot is brought out into better light and placed in a plastic tray containing an inch of water. As the season progresses the depth of water is reduced and at the moment (early June) the tray is just moist. Watering from above is also reduced but at no time is the growing medium allowed to become dry and in the autumn the pot is returned to its winter quarters.

I have not repotted the bulbs!! On every occasion that I carefully knocked out the contents of the pot I found strong, healthy root growth and felt it inadvisable to disturb them. So a larger pot was found to give more space topping up with mixture as before. From my observations in the wild the plants appear to form quite large clumps numbering up to 50 individuals so overcrowding should not be a problem.

1997 and 1998 were years of consolidation for the plants and when new growth came through this year the original few had increased to 16 and from these appeared four flowers. Each set seed, most of which is in the Seed Exchange. I would add however, that one of my original plants had set seed and I'm pleased to say that from these I now have an extra pot containing around 12 youngsters!

From my limited experience with *C. pelistericus* I am sure that it should never be allowed to dry out. Remember that *C. pelistericus* commences growth here in the UK much earlier than in its natural habitat. During the growing season from, say, late February, daily soaking of the pot preferably with rain water is a must subject to protection from frost. From late June watering can be gradually reduced making sure the potting medium is always wet, not just moist and during the winter months, when in nature the bulbs would be covered with a thick layer of insulating snow, reduce watering even further keeping the compost just moist. **Peter Bird**

Crocus Group visit on February 21 1999 to Dr Terry Smale at 28, St. Leonards Road, Epsom Downs, Surrey. 01737-350834 e-mail: terry@smale1.demon.co.uk

Those of you who are interested in *Crocus* monoculture should be warned that this genus only constitutes a small part of Terry's plant collection. He grows a wide range of Eurasian and South African "bulbs" plus many succulent plants. To reach his house, at about 3.5 miles north of junction 8 of the M25 on the A2 17 Reigate to Sutton road turn west onto the A240 Kingston/Epsom road at a set of traffic lights. Go past the Asda store to the next set of traffic lights and turn left onto the B2221 Epsom Downs/Sports Centre road (Great Tattenhams). Take second left by church with white fence into St. Marks Road and follow road right into Chapel Way. The second left is St. Leonards Road and number 28 is on the right hand side immediately before the school. The yellow lines are not operative on Sundays. Please phone Terry and Jennifer if you need further information. Arrive at 11-11.30 for tea/coffee etc. on arrival.

Crocus Group visit on February 27 1999 to Dr John Grimshaw at 35 Wessex Way, Cox Green, Maidenhead, 01628 778491 e-mail: JM.Grimshaw@BTInternet.com

FROM M4: exit at Junction 8/9 - take first exit (A404(M)) to Henley, Oxford etc.

FROM M40: exit at Junction 4 - take A404 (M) to Marlow, M4

On A404(M) Exit J9A signposted White Waltham & Cox Green

FROM M4: At mini-roundabout turn LEFT

FROM M40: At mini-roundabout turn RIGHT and continue over bridge & straight over next mini-roundabout. At larger roundabout immediately afterwards, turn RIGHT into Cox Green Road now with speed bumps and a gratuitous roundabout. Continue past 'The Foresters' round the left hand bend into Wessex Way. No 35 is on the left after about 300 yards. Arrive at 11-11.30 and John will kindly provide tea/coffee etc. on arrival. Please phone John if you need further information.

Crocus medius by David Stephens

I have at least three different stocks of *Crocus medius* in cultivation here, obtained from various sources over the years. Two of these are probably the same stock, being a commercial clone of some antiquity in the UK. I also have a stock which originated from the garden of Cedric Morris, though whether it was originally a wild collection of his own or his friends, or is yet again more stock of the old commercial clone, I do not know.

What I do know, is that I believe that the old commercial clone(s) of *medius* in the UK are virused. All the forms I grow and have seen look alike, and all have a curious reddish streak running through the background colour of the segments. I have wanted to grow 'clean' *medius* from plants or seeds of known wild origin for a long time, but there appeared to be little to no collections of known provenance from which to draw material in the UK.

Also, I had been fascinated by an obscure article published by a botanist in the journals of an Italian Botanic garden which sought to rename *medius* on the grounds that the herbarium specimens of the type plant were actually conspecific with *nudiflorus*. He suggested the name *ligusticus*, as the whole of the known wild range of the plant lies within the Italian province of Liguria. There are he says two distinct populations based on the Alpic calcareous and Appeninic serpenticolous areas that they grow.

If you look at a map of the Riviera border between France and Italy, just on the border is a town called Roquebrunne (there are various spellings). This is the most westerly point at which *medius* will be found, growing in the hills above the town, or at least that was the case in the early part of this century, it is pretty much built over now. The coast road eastwards through the Italian Riviera for the next 75 miles or so to Genoa is paralleled inland by the ranges of the Alps. If you take any road going north from the coast road in the whole stretch between the French/Italian border and Genoa, you are likely to find *medius*. After Genoa, the coast turns south into the main body of Italy, and there is a gap where no *medius* grows between where the Alps come to an end and the Northern Appenines start. The second place where populations of *medius* are found is in a smaller area than the Alpic (as opposed to alpine which has a different meaning) populations, being found at various points inland from the coast into the Northern Appenines for a distance of about 20 miles ending at the town of La Spezia on the Ligurian/Tuscany border.

This last October, I decided to take advantage of one of the cheap flight offers, and took a three day trip to see *medius* in the wild. I flew to Nice in France where a car was hired and over the next days drove to Genoa and back, exploring inland as I went. Unfortunately there was not time in such a short trip to turn the corner into the Appenines and see those populations.