

# **Crocus Group Bulletin No. 28**

## **Autumn 2000**

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<b>Committee</b>	<b>Ray Cobb</b>	<b>Home</b>	<b>156</b>
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### **Editorial**

The *Crocus* Group has an e-mail address - [thecrocusgroup@hotmail.com](mailto:thecrocusgroup@hotmail.com). One day I might even get round to a web page. **S**

### ***Crocus nudiflorus***

Have just returned (23.9.00) from a few days break on the Isle of Wight. (For our overseas members, this is an island off the south coast of Britain). Carrying our bags to the car on the last day, I noticed some purple spikes in the lawn behind the car park of the hotel where we had stayed. Further investigation found several open flowers of *Crocus nudiflorus*. A vague memory caused me to look at the hotel brochure where it was revealed that part of the hotel and its grounds were the site of a 10th c. Cluniac monastery. Previous research into the few known naturalised populations of *nudiflorus* in the UK, has shown them all to have been associated with Cluniac monastery sites, where it is speculated that they may have been brought to provide a source of saffron. Astonishing to think that a little group of plants can survive and flourish for nigh on a thousand years. Anyone who wants to see these plants in future years will find them in the car park of the Priory Bay Hotel, St Helens, IOW. The hotel is well worth a visit as well. **S**

### **Millennium Subscription**

Thanks to those members who have paid £5 for continuing membership, we should be able to stagger on for quite a few more years now. For members who have not yet paid, you have until the year end to send your contribution to Ann Borrill at the address shown above before you are struck off. **S**

### **The *Crocus cancellatus* complex in Jordan**

*Crocus hermoneus* is very threatened in Jordan. It was mainly found from the western outskirts of the capital city of Amman westwards toward Salt. Most of this area today is urban sprawl, the habitats of the plant having been built over. There are a few remaining populations<sup>1</sup>, but these are small and probably threatened. This species crosses westward over the River Jordan into north eastern Israel where we can only hope it is fairing better.

These Jordanian and Israeli populations have been given subspecific rank as *hermoneus palaestinus* because of supposed differences from the type plant which grows on Mt. Hermon, further north. It is doubtful that there is sufficient distinction to warrant this separation, but not enough field work has been done to prove it either way, and its not easy to get to the top of Mt. Hermon these days.

<sup>1</sup> see also Kerndorff in *Herbertia* 50

There is a confusing situation some 50 kms north of classical Jordanian *hermoneus* territory. In the Ajlun hills there are populations of a *Crocus* which appears to share characteristics with both *hermoneus* and *cancellatus*<sup>1</sup>.

*Crocus hermoneus* is closely related to *cancellatus*, and probably evolved from that species. In flower, the two species cannot be told apart, and likewise two of the subspecies of *cancellatus*, viz. *cancellatus* and *damascenus* can also not be identified by the flower alone<sup>2</sup>. Taxonomic descriptions cite flower characteristics as a difference, but this breaks down in field observations.

It is in the corm tunic that the difference between these three taxa lies. *Crocus hermoneus* has a fibrous and membranous tunic with weak reticulation toward the apex of the corm. *Crocus cancellatus* has strongly reticulate fibres with coarse reticulation in *damascenus* and fine reticulation in *cancellatus*.

The plants in the Ajlun hills have fibrous and membranous corm tunic tendencies but have stronger reticulation than *hermoneus*, tending toward *cancellatus cancellatus*. The type species of *cancellatus* has not been described from Jordan previously, but the other subspecies *damascenus* has, and is widespread throughout southern Jordan.

What appears to be *cancellatus cancellatus* was found in two localities much further south than the Ajlun plants, near the town of Mu'ta, and another north of Petra. Unlike the plants from the Ajlun hills, these plants have corm tunics which are unmistakably finely reticulate.

What is confusing about finding the type species of *cancellatus* is that its commoner cousin *damascenus* is found in the same vicinities, although they do not grow together. If you accept the normal view that subspecification is the result of adaptation to environment, then you do not expect to find two subspecies growing geographically close together. **S**

### **Other *Crocus* from the Levant**

Trips to Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Iran by various friends and myself in recent years has provided the chance to see the *Crocus* of that region. Unfortunately it has also provided further information on loss of habitat. I think we all appreciate that the old ways of that part of the world must inevitably give way to the new. It would however be nice if the governments of these countries could build in some protection for the narrowly endemic plants that they possess, but then again who are we, wherever we live, to preach to others, given the record of our own countries. If you have plants of any of these endemics, particularly *moabiticus* and *hermoneus*, grow them well and produce and spread as much seed as possible, they are nearly gone from the wild. **S**

### ***Crocus hadriaticus* and other Greek taxa**

In a recent article for the Greek journal *Botanika Chronika* entitled 'Peloponnisos (Greece) - A *Crocus* Paradise', Brian took the opportunity to do a bit of housekeeping. He describes *hadriaticus parnonicus* as a new subspecies, and elevates var. *parnassicus* to subspecific level. As can be seen from the name, ssp. *parnonicus* comes from the environs of Mt. Parnon although there are also populations further south around Monemvassia. The distinguishing characteristics are the perianth colour being a pale lilac with no yellow zone in the throat, ssp. *parnassicus* being white with no yellow zone in the throat. The type, ssp. *hadriaticus* also has a pale lilac form, var. *lilacinus* from the Taygetos range, but this does have a yellow zone in

<sup>1</sup> see also Kerndorff in *Herbertia* 50

<sup>2</sup> see also Kerndorff in *Herbertia* 50

the throat. In the same article he also elevates *goulimyi* var. *leucanthus* to *goulimyi* ssp. *leucanthus*. Luckily for us, Steve Keeble collected some seed of the new *hadriaticus* ssp. and several members have received it from the seed exchange.

Brian also mentions that populations of *Crocus niveus* in the Mt. Parnon area appear to be different from the type form by having style branches which are much divided at the apex, which may make it worthy of varietal or higher rank. So, those of you who are travelling to the Peloponnese this autumn to see the *Crocus* have some fieldwork to do. S

### Autumn visit

We have been invited to see the gardens and plants of Tony Goode and Ann Borrill our erstwhile secretary. They are relatively close to each other in East Anglia. Tony lives in Norwich and Ann in Wymondham. Tony is the furthest away (unless you are one of our few members who lives even further east !! ), so we will meet at his garden at 1100 on Sunday 29th October, stay with him for a few hours and go on to Ann at about 1300. If you require directions give Tony and Anne a ring.

**Tony Goode, 3 Woodland Road, Hellesdon, Norwich, Norfolk. tel. 01603 409074**

**Ann Borrill, 153 Lime Tree Avenue, Wymondham, Norfolk. tel. 01953 605709**

### Seed Exchange

Although a year when the supply of seed was very poor, more members than ever wanted to participate. Seed set on plants from most of the major donors was lower than previous years ( except for Alan Edwards who uses voodoo ), despite the fact that it had not been a bad flowering season. However, a very worthwhile list went out with the usual crop of rarities. As usual, my request is now for next years seed. Get out the paint brush and start pollinating. S

### *Crocus alatavicus*

This year I was fortunate enough to travel with a small group to Kazakhstan in late spring. On May 3rd we were taken by an old and rather rickety bus up a steep winding road to a former soviet astronomical observatory high in the Tien Shan mountains south of Almaty.

As we got higher, a few *crocus* appeared, single plants, mostly well past their best. It wasn't until we got up to about 3000m that they became more common.

The observatory was sited on a plateau surrounded by high snow covered peaks. There were still patches of snow around, but mostly, the snow had recently melted, leaving the ground quite wet and soggy. Here the *crocuses* grew so thickly that you could almost believe the ground was still covered by snow. Our Russian botanist said she had never seen so many, so we must have timed things just right.

Many of the plants formed small clumps but there were also single flowered plants. Although all the flowers were white, the outer perianth segments varied considerably both in the ground colour and in the colour and intensity of the stippling and striping on the outside of the outer segments. In some of the newly opened flowers the ground colour was a very pale straw yellow which may have faded into white as the flowers aged. Unfortunately I wasn't there long enough to follow the progress of individual flowers.

The stippling on some was almost black, on others it had a purplish tint and the amount of colouration varied from all over stippling to a stippled central area or to twin 'stripes' or to a much fainter stippling. The tubes varied too, being quite dark in the heavily marked flowers, to white in those with paler markings. All plants had leaves showing, most as high as the top of the tube.

When I returned home I looked to see what Brian had to say about the species. It was quite reassuring to find that his description tallied almost exactly with my observations, except for the altitude. We did see *crocuses* elsewhere at lower altitude, but only as small scattered individuals and by early May these were well past their best. **Ann Borrill**

### **Bulletin and Newsletter**

I don't know how the tradition arose, but the Crocus Group has a Bulletin in the Summer/Autumn which is sequentially numbered, and a newsletter in the Spring which is not numbered. The Bulletin number is useful as being annual, it equates to the age of the Group. The Bulletin is the larger publication which tries to carry interesting and topical articles. The newsletter is just a vehicle to remind members to send in seed to the seed exchange and give the address and date of the spring garden visit.

A lot of members travel to see our chosen plant in the wild. All members grow the genus, and some of them very well. There are even members who show their plants. Most members must have a short story to tell as an article for future bulletins. Send the odd few paragraphs to share with your fellow enthusiasts. **S**

### **Corm auction/sale**

We have tried over the years, without a great deal of success, to find a forum to distribute members spare corms either for sale or as an auction, to benefit members and to add a few coppers to the Group fund. The problem has always been to try to tie up the auction with either the spring or autumn visit. Obviously, spring is the wrong time, unless members are prepared to grow their spares on in individual pots. Autumn is not much easier, as the timing of the visit is to see an optimal number of the autumn species in full flower. Any spare corms should have been potted well before this. What is needed is a way to offer spare corms at the time when most members have just finished ( or should have finished ) repotting, in late August or early September, with the end of September as a backstop.

As a Group, we really should try to find a way around this problem. We could perhaps have a corm exchange, similar to the seed exchange, but it would be quite difficult to operate and would need a pretty dedicated co-ordinator ( the seed exchange is bad enough ). If anyone has any bright ideas or wants to volunteer to run with this one, let me know. **S**

**List of currently recognized taxa at specific and subspecific level**

1	s	<i>abantensis</i>	44	s	<i>corsicus</i>	87	a	<i>nudiflorus</i>
2	s	<i>adanensis</i>	45	s	<i>cvijicii</i>	88	a	<i>ochroleucus</i>
3	s	<i>aerius</i>	46	s	<i>cyprius</i>	89	s	<i>olivieri balansae</i>
4	s	<i>alatavicus</i>	47	s	<i>dalmaticus</i>	90	s	<i>olivieri istanbulensis</i>
5	a	<i>aleppicus</i>	48	s	<i>danfordiae</i>	91	s	<i>olivieri olivieri</i>
6	s	<i>almehensis</i>	49	s	<i>etruscus</i>	92	a	<i>oreocreticus</i>
7	s	<i>ancyrensis</i>	50	s	<i>flavus dissectus</i>	93	a	<i>pallasii dispathaceus</i>
8	s	<i>angustifolius</i>	51	s	<i>flavus flavus</i>	94	a	<i>pallasii haussknechtii</i>
9	s	<i>antalyensis</i>	52	s	<i>fleischeri</i>	95	a	<i>pallasii pallasii</i>
10	a	<i>asumaniae</i>	53	s	<i>gargaricus gargaricus</i>	96	a	<i>pallasii turcicus</i>
11	a	<i>autranii</i>	54	s	<i>gargaricus herbertii*</i>	97	s	<i>pascheri*</i>
12	a	<i>banaticus</i>	55	a	<i>gilanicus</i>	98	s	<i>pelistericus</i>
13	s	<i>baytopiorum</i>	56	a	<i>goulimyi goulimy</i>	99	s	<i>pestalozzae</i>
14	s	<i>biflorus adamii</i>	57	a	<i>goulimy leucanthus*</i>	100	a	<i>pulchellus</i>
15	s	<i>biflorus albocoronatus*</i>	58	s	<i>graveolens</i>	101	s	<i>reticulatus hittiticus</i>
16	s	<i>biflorus alexandri</i>	59	a	<i>hadriaticus hadriaticus</i>	102	s	<i>reticulatus reticulatus</i>
17	s	<i>biflorus artvinensis</i>	60	a	<i>hadriaticus parnassicus*</i>	103	a	<i>robertianus</i>
18	s	<i>biflorus biflorus</i>	61	a	<i>hadriaticus parnonicus*</i>	104	a	<i>sativus</i>
19	s	<i>biflorus crewei</i>	62	s	<i>hartmannianus</i>	105	s	<i>scardicus</i>
20	s	<i>biflorus fibroannulatus*</i>	63	a	<i>hermoneus hermoneus</i>	106	a	<i>scharojanii</i>
21	s	<i>biflorus isauricus</i>	64	a	<i>hermoneus palaestinus<sup>1</sup></i>	107	a	<i>serotinus clusii</i>
22	a	<i>biflorus melantherus</i>	65	a	<i>hyemalis</i>	108	a	<i>serotinus salzmännii</i>
23	s	<i>biflorus nubigena</i>	66	s	<i>imperati imperati</i>	109	a	<i>serotinus serotinus</i>
24	s	<i>biflorus pseudonubigena</i>	67	s	<i>imperati suaveolens</i>	110	s	<i>sieberi atticus</i>
25	s	<i>biflorus pulchricolor</i>	68	a	<i>karduchorum</i>	111	s	<i>sieberi nivalis</i>
26	s	<i>biflorus punctatus</i>	69	s	<i>kerndorffiorum*</i>	112	s	<i>sieberi sieberi</i>
27	s	<i>biflorus stridii</i>	70	s	<i>korolkowii</i>	113	s	<i>sieberi sublimis</i>
28	s	<i>biflorus tauri</i>	71	s	<i>kosaninii</i>	114	s	<i>sieheanus</i>
29	s	<i>biflorus weldenii</i>	72	a	<i>kotschyanus cappadocicus</i>	115	a	<i>speciosus speciosus</i>
30	a	<i>biflorus wattiorum<sup>2*</sup></i>	73	a	<i>kotschyanus hakkariensis</i>	116	a	<i>speciosus ilgazensis</i>
31	a	<i>boryi</i>	74	a	<i>kotschyanus kotschyanus</i>	117	a	<i>speciosus xantholaimos</i>
32	a	<i>boulosii</i>	75	a	<i>kotschyanus suworowianus</i>	118	a	<i>thomasii</i>
33	a	<i>cambessedesii</i>	76	a	<i>laevigatus</i>	119	s	<i>tommasinianus</i>
34	a	<i>cancellatus cancellatus</i>	77	s	<i>leichtlinii</i>	120	a	<i>tournefortii</i>
35	a	<i>cancellatus damascenus</i>	78	a	<i>longiflorus</i>	121	a	<i>vallicola</i>
36	a	<i>cancellatus lycius</i>	79	s	<i>malyi</i>	122	s	<i>veluchensis</i>
37	a	<i>cancellatus mazziaricus</i>	80	a	<i>mathewii*</i>	123	a	<i>veneris</i>
38	a	<i>cancellatus pamphylicus</i>	81	a	<i>medius</i>	124	s	<i>vernus albiflorus</i>
39	s	<i>candidus</i>	82	s	<i>michelsonii</i>	125	s	<i>vernus vernus</i>
40	s	<i>carpetanus</i>	83	s	<i>minimus</i>	126	s	<i>versicolor</i>
41	a	<i>cartwrightianus</i>	84	a	<i>moabiticus</i>	127	a	<i>vitellinus</i>
42	a	<i>caspius</i>	85	s	<i>nevadensis</i>			
43	s	<i>chrysanthus</i>	86	a	<i>niveus</i>			

\* published since 'The Crocus'. B.Mathew 1982.

<sup>1</sup>doubtfully distinct from the type

<sup>2</sup>although published as a subspecies of *biflorus*, Brian says that in hindsight he should have given this taxa specific status as *wattiorum* pers.comm. **DBS**