



Crocus Group Bulletin No. 38

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Patron Brian Mathew MBE VMH

Members 134*

Committee David Stephens

* plus 94 awaiting renewal subscription

Alan Edwards

Hon. Sec. Tony Goode

Hon Sec notes: Welcome to a new venture. This e-newsletter is distributed to the 104 paid up members who have accepted email communication. There will continue to be a paper (text only) newsletter annually in July for those who cannot access email/internet. The great advantage of this method of distribution is that it allows the use of colour images at no extra cost. This issue relies mostly on contributions from SRGC forum users who have given permission for re-use here. Hopefully there are many of you who record the crocuses they grow and see in the wild using digital cameras. I will be delighted to receive pictures, short accompanying notes (or full length articles) by email or on CD/DVD. It is your newsletter, please contribute if you can. Even pictures of common taxa will be of interest, for example the variation in the ubiquitous *Crocus vernus* would keep us going for years! Send your contributions to: Tony Goode, 3 Woodland Road, Hellesdon, Norwich. NR6 5RA. UK.

Email to: tonyg@thealpinehouse.fsnet.co.uk this address copes with large email attachments. The address in the last newsletter is for correspondence only.

Visits and Outings

I have been asked if there will be any garden visits or group outings in future. We have met in the past at various gardens, mostly in the South of the UK. With our increasingly global membership and the distances involved, even around the UK it is perhaps time to consider other options. I would like to invite members who have an interesting collection of crocus or who know of naturalised (or native) crocus that might be worth a visit to advertise the fact through the group newsletter. If you are prepared to act as local CG representative and welcome visitors on a named date or by arrangement then we might have mini-meetings to suit members in a particular region. Please contact me with your ideas. I will publicise them through future newsletters.

In Norwich we have some superb naturalised *Crocus vernus* and *Crocus tommasinianus* in Earlham Cemetery with extensive plantings of *C. biflorus/chrysanthus* cultivars on nearby roadsides. These are well worth a visit. I am willing to act as local representative. If you want to come and see these plantings please contact me by email or phone 01603 409074. Ideally come on a sunny day! I can give directions and possibly meet you on site. The crocus are just beginning to flower as I write these notes but given the cold conditions here it seems likely they will not be at their best until late Feb/early March.

Web Update

In the last newsletter I wrote briefly referring to some of the interesting crocus seen on the SRGC forum in the previous year. It is now possible to bring some of those images together for you to enjoy

The forum is open for non-members to read and despite the inevitable chit-chat there are some experienced and well travelled contributors. You do not have to be an SRGC member to join in the discussion. Quite a few of the CG members already contribute but we are always keen to hear from newcomers

Crocus veluchensis wild in Bulgaria



Chris and Simon have relocated from the UK to Bulgaria, in the Stara Planina mountains where they have started a nursery.

Enthusiastic forumists they have posted records of a wide range of plants both those that they grow on the nursery and many that they have seen on plant hunting expeditions in the Balkan region. Crocus are a regular feature, here *Crocus veluchensis*. *Crocus biflorus* and *Crocus pallasii* will feature in a later Bulletin.

They have recorded some of their travels on their website.

<http://www.balkanrareplantnursery.com/>

May 2009

Two comprehensive photo reports from Ulu Dag and from the Abant area by Ibrahim Sözen who is based in Istanbul. Showing variation in *C biflorus* ssp *pulchricolor*, and hybrids with *C chrysanthus*. *Crocus gargaricus* ssp *herbertii*, *Crocus abantensis* and *Crocus olivieri* ssp *olivieri*.



Snow lay late this spring



Crocus olivieri habitat



Crocus abantensis



Crocus abantensis



Crocus biflorus ssp *pulchricolor*



Crocus biflorus ssp *pulchricolor* feathered form



Crocus biflorus ssp *pulchricolor* x *chrysanthus*

In autumn 2008 Kees Jan van Zwienen photographed the plant illustrated below. It was proposed as a wild hybrid of *C. cancellatus* and *C. kotschyanus*. This would be a most unlikely hybrid! Found above Findikpinari in the Bolkar Daglari, south central Turkey, outside known range of *Crocus cancellatus* ssp *pamphylicus*. Corm tunic = *cancellatus* type.



This discussion prompted Janis Ruksans to investigate further. Thanks to Janis who has recorded his experiences for us below

Crocuses in SW Turkey – 2009 Janis Ruksans

It was my first visit to Turkey in autumn and idea for it I got from entry of Kees van Zwienen on Crocus forum of SRGC. Last autumn he showed very interesting picture of Crocus found in mountains N of Erdemli. By corm tunic it was typical *C. cancellatus*, but flower had white anthers and undivided stigma. Their team found 3 such specimens in place where are growing *C. cancellatus mazziaricus* and *C. kotschyanus kotschyanus*, so they supposed it to be hybrid between both species, but it is very unlikely as both genetically are very far. So I supposed that it is new species and wanted to find it and collect type specimen for herbarium.

Weather broadcast was not very favourable. In mountains the autumn rain season had started. Such mountain trips always are quite uncertain because you must be in correct place in correct time and in more or less good weather. Unfortunately we met rains every day, not far away were horrible floods with victims (watched in TV). Usually first half of day was more or less acceptable but in afternoon started heavy rains, even horrible rains, hail and thunderstorms. Flowers in most cases were closed due wetness and cold, a lot were damaged during night and sometimes I sat at some bloom waiting for it to open at least partly when some sun shined through clouds.

We went up in mountains by very good road and reaching around 1500 m altitude met first *C. kotschyanus* on large roadside meadow near pine forest edge flowering side by side with *Cyclamen cilicicum* (in shade of trees). After last large village road changed to ground road and soon our car was forced to stop. Heavy showers of last nights washed away surface covering and opened bottom boulders and rock, making road impassable for our car. So we continued our road up through peach orchards to mountain pass by foot. Again we met *Crocus kotschyanus*, growing mostly in grass but more on sides of earlier ploughed fields. There were lighter and darker coloured specimens, although the colour can change with age. The best form found had very dark strong purple stripes around yellow blotch-rimmed throat. We walked up in hills for around 2 hours. Unfortunately again clouds became denser and denser, started lightening and we were forced return to car before meeting with *C. cancellatus* growing higher. Halfway down we were picked up by local driver with better car and we reached our car together with heavy shower. So we didn't find this mysterious crocus but a later discovery seems that cleared mystery.



Crocus kotschyanus
variation



Crocus cancellatus subsp. *mazziaricus*

The first population *Crocus cancellatus* subsp. *mazziaricus* we met near Uzuncaburc (Silifke district). Here it grew on quite stony ground between sparse pinewoods, only on open spots. Population was quite uniform, mostly varied petal colour.

After that we drove back to west, passing night in Antalya. Next morning we continued our road to West in direction of Labranda to check wild population of *Crocus nerimaniae*. In spring 2008 I collected 10 corms of this beautiful species and this autumn it bloomed for first time in my collection and... I was shocked for 4 specimens clearly showing virus infection. Similar reports I got from my trip partners. Virus infected plants in wild populations aren't great surprise for me - I saw such *Allium*, *Fritillaria*, *Tulipa*, *juno Iris* etc., but so great percentage... Reality in wild shocked me. There were groups where 90% of flowers showed more or less heavy virus infection, there were groups with ~10%, but in average almost 50% of flowers looked suspicious. Of course some could be regarded as damaged by insects, by weather conditions, but many undoubtedly were infected. Those were plants with expressed symptoms, certainly must be a lot infected which still didn't show infection. Question is about agent of distribution. It is place where I saw highest number of beehives. Every more or less flat spot were covered with beehives. The honey is harvested from greenflies parasitizing on pine trees and from *Erica* flowers just starting blooming. There are theories that bees are distributing viruses but I don't think so and both my colleagues (both biologists, one famous lily breeder) agree with me that bees didn't work as virus distribution agent. Most possibly there are plenty of greenflies specialised on other plants, may be on Crocuses, too.



Crocus nerimaniae and habitat



Plain colour and feathered *Crocus nerimaniae*



Crocus nerimaniae has little variation. Mostly vary outside base colour from deep purple to light yellow with darker brown stripes. I saw only 2 specimens with striped flowers and 2 almost whitish, with only slight lilac shade. But introduction of *C. nerimaniae* from wild is quite dangerous. Far better to rise it up from seeds as viruses usually are not transferred through seeds. My stock raised from seeds collected by some Czech seed collector at Labranda before description of this species as seeds of *C. biflorus* s.l. which later turned as *C. nerimaniae* were absolutely free from virus infection

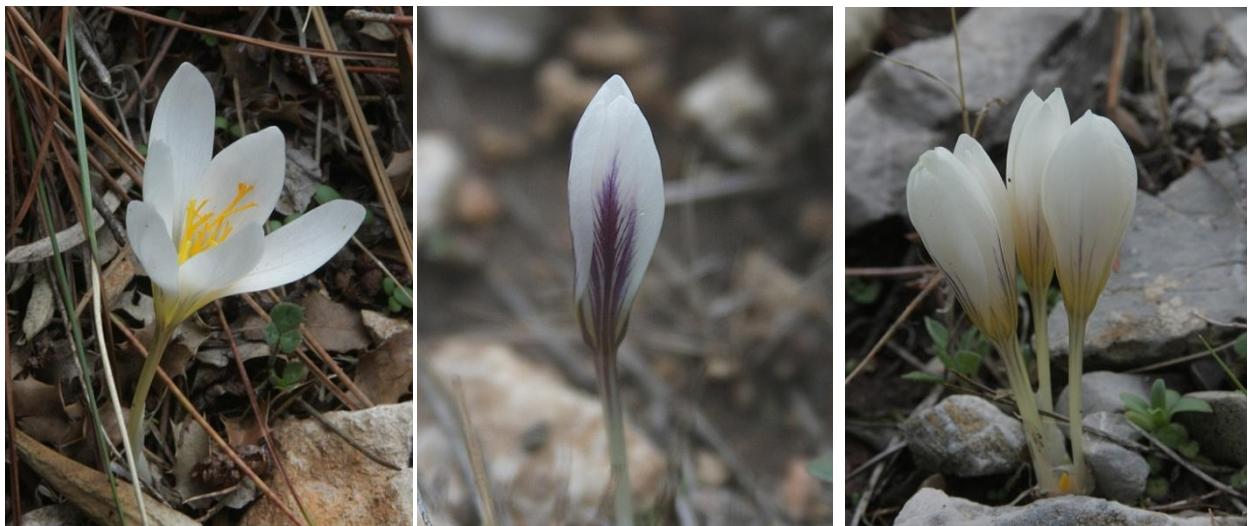
◀ *Crocus nerimaniae* virus infected plant as seen in wild locations described.

Following day was used for cultural program - we visited Ephesus (one of the greatest monuments of Greek-roman time in Turkey) and famous resort at Pammukale. Weather again was rainy and it was impossible to visit some passes near Denizli so we turned back to South coast. When we turned in direction to Dirmil pass on roadside we again noted some crocuses. It turned most marvellous population of *Crocus cancellatus* subsp. *mazziaricus* of greatest variability. Varied not only petal colour from pure white till lilac but very variable was throat colour from whitish till deep purple and degree of stigma branching - from typical *cancellatus* many branched up to unusual with only 3 branches - just as in plant found by Kees van Zwienen. One specimen looked as typical *C. mathewii* with light lilac flower segments, but it had typical *cancellatus* corm tunics. Presence of all those variants in one population growing in open meadow with sparse shrubs and little grass shows how great variation could be in one species in one population and how difficult could be identification by flower picture only and by single cultivated plant without seeing natural population. Only some time later in my brain came understanding that the three specimens found by Kees van Zwienen most possibly are the same extreme marginal forms of *C. cancellatus* subsp. *mazziaricus*.



Crocus cancellatus subsp. *mazziaricus*

In following days from *Crocus cancellatus* complex we saw only quite uniform subsp. *lycius*. Everywhere variability was limited to amount of outside stripes at base and back of outer flower segments, colour of stigmatic branches - mostly typical yellow, but sometimes even deep orange. Usually style branches were +/- at level of anther tips; flowers are generally smaller than in subsp. *mazziaricus*. In nature there are no problems to identify it. Its localities tend to pine forest sides, it grew in forest, too but more abundant is just on forest sides. The greatest number we found in place where forest was cut for high-power electro line. Soil there usually is very stony; in case of subsp. *mazziaricus* it is more soil-like.



Crocus cancellatus subsp *lycius*

We passed night in Kankal - in excellent 2-star hotel (Kelebek hotel) on roadside for price 50,- Euro for 3 persons in 2 rooms. Evening meal was superb made by hotel owner and his wife and we were served by their son. 3-dish meal cost us another 50,- Euro together including bottle of quite good Turkish wine. In night again were heavy rain but morning greeted us with bright sun and we drove in search for *Crocus mathewii*.

Crocus mathewii was quite variable in colour of inner base and in colour of flower segments. I didn't find any with white flower base. For me most lovely was specimens with light lilac flower segments. *Crocus mathewii* locally was quite abundant but in many places there were occasional findings only. It mostly grew in deep grass and on sides of solitary shrubs, in some places between low spiny shrubs. Still every night was rains and many flowers were heavily damaged by water and even by hail. One of the most impressive, unfortunately flower segment substance was washed out by last rains, was vegetative clump formed by 7-9 corms. Higher *Crocus mathewii* disappear from explored sites and left only *Crocus cancellatus lycius*, growing almost everywhere and we turned back to coast.



Crocus mathewii white, lilac and vegetatively increasing clone

Next stop we made when I from fast driving car noted again white crocus on roadside slope which in shape of closed buds looked slightly different from so common *lycius*. As all the time periodically dropped some drops of rain, flowers were closed and only after long search I found a pair slightly open which showed its three-branched stigma and colour of inside. At first I named it *Crocus pallasii*, but population was quite unusual. If usually *pallasii* is more or less lilac, only rarely you can find pure white specimens, in this population all plants were white only few slightly lilac shaded so I renamed it as *C. asumaniae*, although we found it far from Akseki - locus classicus for *C. asumaniae*, confirming that it is much more widespread than supposed initially. Brian Mathew in personal communication expressed opinion that may be *C. asumaniae* better could be regarded as variant of *C. pallasii* including in this complex even *C. mathewii*. Here it grew only on very open roadside slope, higher under pine trees I spotted only *C. cancellatus lycius*, rarely fundable between *C. asumaniae*, too, but easy separable by shape of flower - much slender and longer than in *lycius*. Soil was very stony clay.



Crocus pallasii and habitat

In afternoon we tried to find *Crocus wattiorum* but failed. Really we were very close to its localities, but in autumn darkness start very early so we returned to Antalya leaving this crocus for future trips. As *C. nerimaniae* it is very uniform in colour, so there was little chance to picture some unusual colour form and the last day of our trip we used for visiting of place where many years ago at peak of summer I collected pair corms of *Crocus pallasii*. Now it was in full flowers scattered on very stony N-NE faced slope, mostly between stones, very rarely inside very spiny shrubs. Population was very uniform in colour - generally light lilac and I saw only one or two relatively whitish specimens and only when we were driving out of valley I suddenly noted one dark lilac group of three flowers forcing me to stop car for additional picture. We returned to Antalya through Karlik Dag hoping to see some crocuses there, too, but left with nothing. Few years ago I crossed this ridge in spring and found no one crocus, too, although some spots looked quite good for crocuses. May be we were not in best time and best places there. It always is great luck to catch the exact moment. Really our trip was very successful. We found almost everything what we wanted to see, made a lot of pictures. And I hope that we discovered the secret of this Crocus of Kees van Zwienen

Crocus from the Levant

During the autumn of 2009 many interesting crocus featured on the Forum. Included in these were several field trips including the one which Janis has recorded for us above, with many more pictures than those used here.

Oron Peri, a CG member lives in Israel and records the wild geophytes of the region. Here are a couple o snippets from his posts in November 2009.

Crocus hyemalis blooms by the millions almost everywhere, mainly at low altitudes up to 700m
We had some very good rains so far that will result in an excellent blooming season...



This morning i went to visit the northern coastal part of Israel where a rare form of *Crocus aleppicus* is in bloom at the moment.

It differs by being smaller in size, slender, reminding much of *C. veneris*.

It appears in white or tinged with purple.



*Luckily!!!! I have found the most beautiful aleppicus I have ever seen.
One have to see the population to realise how something like this is rare.*



And finally for this edition: From the Crocus Groups newest member, Hendrik Van Bogaert



*Crocus hyemalis, from a collection around Ajlun (North of Amman), Jordan.
Not as showy of those from Israel, but botanical very interesting.*

I welcome contributions for future e-newsletters from all members. Please, if you have enjoyed this new venture consider making a contribution in future. I also welcome feedback on layout and delivery from anyone with experience of creating similar publications. **TG**