

CROCUS GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 44: Spring 2015

Patron	Brian Mathew	MBE VMH
Committee	Wim Boens	Seed Exchange Organiser seedexcrocusgroup@gmail.com
	Tony Goode	Membership Secretary crocusgroup@hotmail.co.uk
	John Grimshaw	Northern Hemisphere Editor john@oltarakwa.co.uk
	Mat Murray	Southern Hemisphere Editor Mathew.Murray@rbgsyd.nsw.gov.au

FROM THE EDITOR

First, my sincere apologies for the late appearance of this Bulletin. This spring has whistled by and disappeared among the increasing demands of work and other commitments, though fortunately a few warm, sunny 'crocus days' occurred while I was at home to enjoy the flowers. My *Crocus* collection here in North Yorkshire is quite minimal, partly as a result of the depredations of rodents shortly after moving here, but mostly because for some years I've had no frame or greenhouse facilities to grow anything more challenging than easy garden species.



My main crocus bed in late February, with selections of *C. tommasinianus*, *C. vernus*, *C. heuffelianus* and hybrids, plus a few other things including *Galanthus plicatus* 'E.A. Bowles'.

I think the possibilities for increasing the diversity of robust, good garden plants in the genus remain remarkably little explored. *Crocus vernus*, surely the best of all for naturalising, is neglected, perhaps because the Dutch clones have overshadowed the charms of the wild type, which is also less likely to increase vegetatively and is thus a less easy subject for the nurseryman to bulk-up. In March I visited the Kilmacurragh National Botanical Garden in Co. Wicklow, Ireland, where there is a centuries-old *Crocus vernus* meadow. Diminished in the past by inappropriate mowing, sensitive management by the current curator, Seamus O'Brien, is restoring it to its former glory. Most flowers are soft purple there are whites and striped, and although most are singletons there are some good 'clumpers' too, and these are the sort of thing to select and bring into any breeding and selection work.



Crocus vernus at Kilmacurragh, Co. Wicklow, in front of the sadly roofless remains of Kilmacurragh House, on a slightly 'soft' day late in the season.

A seedling population of *Crocus tommasinianus* in the University of Leicester Botanic Garden <http://www2.le.ac.uk/institution/botanic-garden> is the focus of their annual Crocus Days, attracting a large number of people if the weather is kind. Planning the dates to get into their events calendar is something of a chancy business, I was told when I visited at the tail end of the season.

Mat Murray or myself will be delighted to receive information and comment for inclusion in future Newletters, and please remember to inform Tony Goode of any changes to your email address

John Grimshaw



A promising white *C. vernus* × *tommasinianus* with 4×4 segments, returned from the RHS Wisley Crocus Trial a few years ago as an interloper in none of the stocks I submitted.

Crocus Collection in Norfolk

In the autumn of 2014 I was very fortunate to be awarded a grant from the Norfolk Plant Heritage Collections fund. At present the collection shares frame space with other bulbs while the seedlings are in makeshift frames away from the project site. The aim of the funded project is to provide sufficient frame space for the full collection, including the current overflow of seedlings, within two dedicated beds, these to have Access frames for protection.

Since its inception the collection has been kept primarily in cold frames. One of these has an Access frame above while the others, enclosed by a mixture of brickwork and concrete blocks were covered, Dutch Light style, with secondary glazing panels of assorted sizes. This was often a rather haphazard arrangement but despite this the plants mostly received adequate protection. However, as the collection is once again

expanding, mostly through new accessions from seed, by the autumn of 2014 there was considerable competition for the available space. The overflow of seed pots was standing in trays in unsuitable places.

Using funds from the award I employed a local builder to build block walls to equal the height of the existing brickwork, creating a chamber roughly 15ft x 4 ft and 2ft deep. At the same time I used my own funds to create a second chamber which will support a frame for other plants and bulbs. The pictures will illustrate this better than words can. The two chambers quickly became known as 'the stone coffins' ☺ This was the easy bit – next the coffins have to be filled to 8" below the brickwork. Progress has been slow – a character building volume of 'spoil' is needed – but the area to be covered by the new frame was completed in February allowing the seed pots from 2013 onwards to be relocated to more appropriate accommodation



Work in progress

During the summer of 2015 the collection will be re-organised within the two new cold frames. Spring and Autumn flowering taxa will remain separate as most of the autumn taxa make considerable leaf growth before the spring ones begin to flower. I will also develop an area for those taxa which require a cooler, slightly moist rest period within the new raised frame.

The 2014/15 growing season has been a tale of two halves. The autumn taxa flowered superbly, shown off to good effect by the good weather. Warm and sunny for much of the flowering season has ensured a reasonable seed set too. However the winter was often mild and many species began to flower in January when the weather was dull. Flowers often failed to open and were mostly rather drawn. A prolonged colder spell through February and March, with relatively little sun meant that flowers were often spoiled before

opening properly and opportunities for seed set were reduced. I do not expect to harvest much seed from the spring taxa.

Many new accessions were sown during the last year. For the future I am keen to receive seed of the many new taxa described in the last few years. For this to remain a truly representative collection I will need to include the new species in the future.

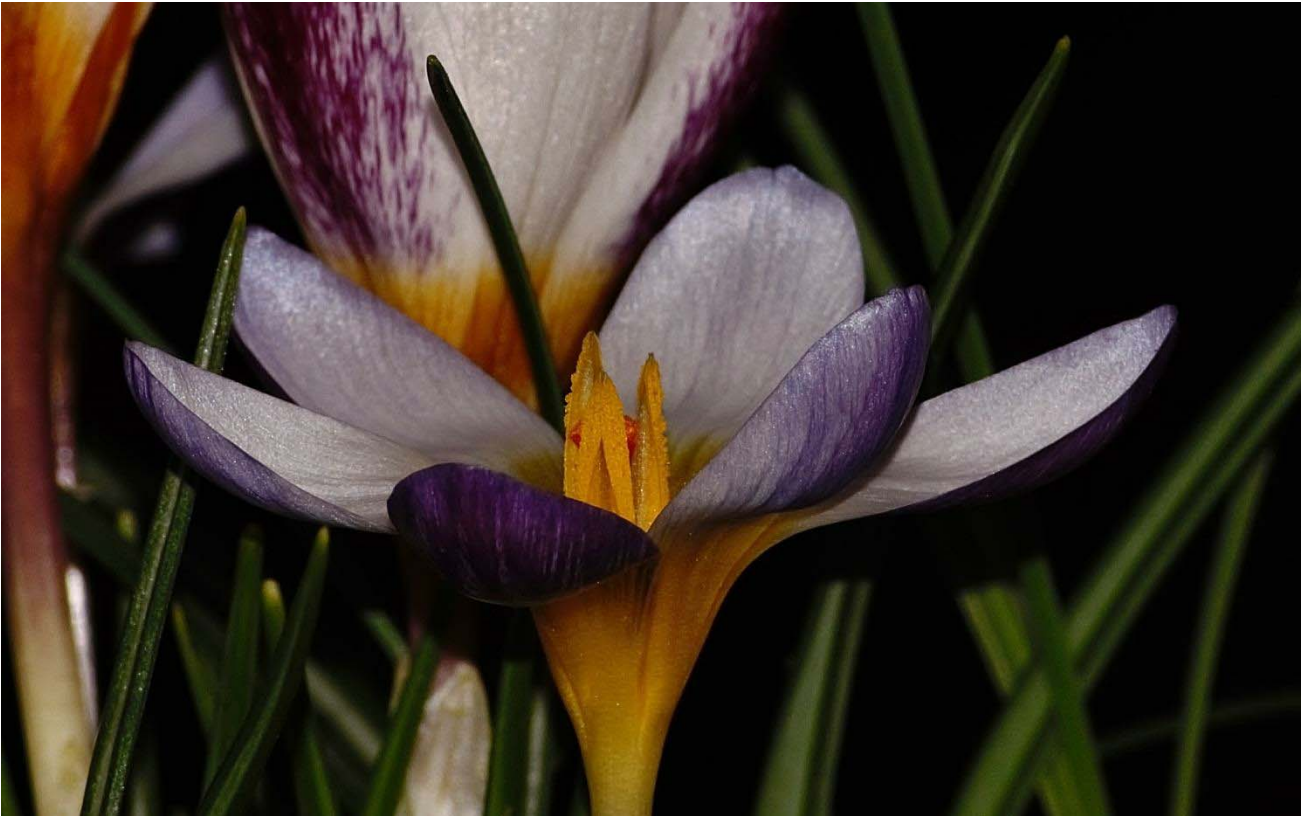
Tony Goode



Newly erected cold frame



Crocus cartwrightianus – planted outside in a raised bed. Will it survive to flower again?



Crocus sp. ... Spring. Received as *biflorus* ssp.



Crocus orphei – received as *Crocus reticulatus* ex Greece. These are 2nd generation seedlings.

SEED EXCHANGE

Dear fellow-Croconuts,

A year has passed since I took over as seed-exchange manager from David and the time to ask for your *Crocus*-seeds and corm(let)s has come again. This year I've seen loads of pictures of flowering Crocusses on the different forums and social media, so I'm sure we'll have a good catch...with your cooperation we can share those wonderful gems with each other, so a big thank you goes out to all donors in advance.

One change in regards with last year is that **I will be accepting corms and cormlets in the exchange too**. Last year a couple of members asked me if that was possible and we had a test with a few species which turned out positive, so if you have any corms and/or cormlets to spare please send them too.

Here's the rundown: like in the previous year's it's the aim of the seed exchange to get *Crocus* seed to members as close as possible to the correct time for them to be sown during the higher temperatures of late summer for optimal germination. *Crocus* seed has been shown to germinate best if sown during the higher temperatures of late summer before the lower temperatures of autumn and winter initiate germination. The best time for sowing is therefore at the same time as nature does it in the wild, that I when the ripe seed is expelled from the mature seedpod in late spring to early summer. For that reason we normally ask members to send seed as soon as possible after they have collected it, and in any case before the **15th of August**.

During the last weeks of August I'll compose the list and e-mail it to members who have requested it (Donors who are members will receive the list automatically). Your request for the seedlist should reach me before **the 15th of August too**. See e-mail address below.

This year I'll use the same system as last year, with a small change, donors will be allowed to choose from the list first but non-donors will also be able to make a choice from the list and I will take into account what they ask for too. Orders should reach me by e-mail before **the 15th of September**. I will try to send all orders out before the end of September. Seeds should be sown immediately and left exposed to the weather until they germinate, after which they may be brought under cover.

Requests for the seedlist should be e-mailed (before the 15th of August) to:
seedexcrocusgroup@gmail.com

Donations of seed can be sent to:

(For the UK):

Tony Goode, 3 Woodland Road, Hellesdon, Norwich. NR6 5RA

(For the rest of the world):

Wim Boens, Brugsesteenweg 17, 8750 Wingene, Belgium

With the kindest regards

Wim

For those of you interested in the numbers of last year's exchange:

We had 25 donors and 50 members who asked for seeds.

A total of +/- 750 seed-packets were made and sent out.

Price for sending to members = +/- 4 € per person.

The top 10 of species most asked for:

Name	
1	<i>micelsonii</i>
2	<i>aerius</i>
3	<i>autranii</i>
4	<i>baytopiorum</i>
5	<i>cvijicii</i>
6	<i>mathewii</i>
7	<i>robertianus</i>
8	<i>biflorus</i> subsp. <i>alexandri</i>
9	<i>vallicola</i>
10	<i>pelistericus</i>



Crocus pulchellus, RHS Wisley, October 2014

