

## **CROCUS GROUP NEWSLETTER No. 47: Spring/Autumn 2016**

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### **From the Southern Hemisphere Editor:**

In Australia it is just past our Winter Solstice. Things can only get brighter from here on in. It has been a colder winter than normal here, with heavy frosts and snow. It's a relief after a hot dry summer.

Mid-winter Crocus are beginning to flower. The earliest here are the various cultivars and forms of *Crocus sieberi*. Beginning with *C sieberi ssp sieberi* itself. I think it's missing the snow melt of the mountains in Crete.... I remember seeing it in flower in early spring. Here it's almost 6-8 weeks earlier!! *Crocus sieberi* is a beautiful flowering plant and a good plant in many Australian gardens. *Crocus sieberi* "Bowles White" is one of the best white flowering cultivars in my opinion.

I have been collecting as many of the ssp of *Crocus biflorus* as I can. There are an amazing array of them!! More every year it seems. I have been surprised with how easily they grow for me. Many of them flowering after 2 seasons of growth!!! Flowering for the first time for me are *Crocus biflorus ssp punctatus*. Gorgeous with its blue speckled petals. A new one for me too was *Crocus biflorus ssp isauricus*. It has beautiful feathering and marks on the backs of its petals. *Crocus biflorus ssp nubigena* flowered for me last year and has stunning lilac flowers with a bright yellow throat, which are enhanced by the black anthers.

Another new species flowering for me is *Crocus fauseri*. This is a newly described species named after one of the "greats" of Australian Bulb growers: Otto Fauser. He kindly gave me 2 seedlings a year or so ago. The first flowered last week and I was lucky to catch the declining flower since I had been away overseas. Alas too late to take a picture. The flower is a white colour with dark feathering on the back. Very similar looking to *Crocus biflorus ssp nubigena* with its dark anthers and golden throat. The leaves are also more grey and broader than *C biflorus ssp nubigena*.

*Crocus gilanicus* also flowered for the first time for me this year. It's a slender very pale lilac, almost white, hyssanthous flower. Not the most stunning Crocus but pleasing nonetheless. In vast contrast to flowering in a couple of years from seed, this took almost

17 !!!!! I was given some seed on a trip to the UK by Brian Mathews in 1998. It was the same trip I met Ray Cobb and he encouraged me to join the Crocus Group. An unexpected first flowering was *Crocus cambessedesii*. The first corm I grew I lost. A *Crocus* sp I raised from Crocus group seed flowered for me in April. Unexpectedly it turned out to be *Crocus cambessedesii*. Often I select the *Crocus* sp seed when it's offered. You just never know what is going to turn up.

Shortly the seed list of the Crocus Group will be available. (It's now been distributed) I eagerly await it each year. For the members in the southern hemisphere it is often the only way to get our hands on many of the species. Without this list I certainly would not have been able to have anywhere near as many species as I currently grow. I encourage all members to pollinate as many of their plants as possible to get a better set of seed. I am pollinating like crazy. You should be too!!

I am always trying new techniques to grow and propagate bulbs: all bulbs, not just Crocus. Recently I was demonstrating a technique I use to increase offsets on Corms. I remove the main (Terminal) bud soon after the plant goes dormant. This encourages the auxiliary buds which often remain dormant, to shoot. Normally I sterilize the area using a mild Bleach solution and then dust it with wettable Sulphur. One of the attendees at my workshop suggested that I use honey instead. I was aware that honey is often used to strike cuttings. I am also aware that it has anti-bacterial and anti-fungal properties. I had not considered it before!! I have now experimented with dormant *Gladiolus* corms. I am curious to see if it works. Once my *Crocus* go dormant I will experiment with them too. I will let you know how it goes.

Here is a link to some information on the use of honey for propagation

<http://www.gardeningknowhow.com/garden-how-to/info/honey-root-hormone.htm>

Recently I became aware that Janis Ruksans is in the process of writing another book on Crocus. It is titled THE WORLD OF CROCUS ... it is expected to be over 500 pages with 1500 colour photos. Janis is seeking support to help him get it printed. You can find some information regarding this book here:

[http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2016Aug251472126130IRG\\_August\\_80.pdf](http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2016Aug251472126130IRG_August_80.pdf)

or here:

<http://www.srgc.net/forum/index.php?topic=14685.0>

I am looking forward to getting a copy myself.

Happy growing XXX Mat Murray ... Hope you enjoy some of my happy snaps

*Crocus biflorus ssp adamii*



*Crocus biflorus ssp alexanderi*



*Crocus biflorus ssp pulchricolor*



*Crocus biflorus ssp nubigena*





*Crocus biflorus ssp punctatus*



*Crocus biflorus ssp isauricus*



*Crocus biflorus ssp biflorus*





One of my first hybrids *Crocus biflorus* ssp *pulchricolor* x *C biflorus* ssp *alexanderi*



*Crocus gilanicus*



*Crocus cambessedesii*



*Crocus cyprius*





A sunny late winters day in my garden. *Crocus gargaricus* flowering with *Galanthus* “*Spindlestone Surprise*” I like the bright yellow flowers of both these plants and they grow very happily together





Flowering slightly later are *Leucojum vernum* and *Crocus heuffelianus*.

