Crocus Group Bulletin No. 50: Summer/Winter 2018

We are slowly slipping into Summer in the southern hemisphere. It has been a very variable spring in the Sydney region. A very dry start to spring threatened a bad season for bushfires and drought. Welcome rains have since come and eased our concerns. Its been a collection of warm and cold temperatures. Normally by now, almost all Crocus have long since gone dormant. I still have some species growing!! It has been a good year for seed production for me. I look forward to sending them in for inclusion in the seed list.

Below, is the first part of an article I have written on a trip I did with the Alpine Garden Society to look at bulbs in the Taurus Mountains of Turkey in March. I hope you enjoy it.

Wim Boens and I have also written a piece on some of our favourite species and cultivars of Crocus. I encourage anybody who wishes to also share their expertise and experiences to submit their selections for inclusion.

Happy growing and good health to all the members of the Crocus Group

Mat Murray (Southern Hemisphere editor)

Turkish Delights from the Taurus Mountains of Turkey.

In March this year, I had the good fortune to accompany the Alpine Garden Society expedition to the Western Taurus Mountains of Turkey. I was the recipient of a scholarship from both the AGS and the SRGC. We went there to look at bulbous plants, particularly Crocus. There have been 26 new Crocus species named from this area alone!!

The Flora of Turkey is a particularly rich one with 30% of endemic species (plants that are found only in this country. Please note the meaning of this word. It appears repeatedly) compared to the 1.5% of the UK. I was astonished by how many species are only found in Turkey. Turkey is a mountainous country and a large one (783,400 km in area) The climate varies widely. From the cool and wet north

to the warm and dry south. From the Mediterranean west coast to the dry steeps of the east. The mountains are steep and high with big valleys in between. The species that grow on one mountain can be quite different from its neighbour. The mountains and valleys stop the easy movement of species. So, each has evolved its own species.

There is another contributing factor for Turkeys wealth of plants and animals. The past ice ages covered much of Europe, the middle east and Asia. Turkey remained relatively free. It was a refuge for many species.

The expedition only covered a small portion of the Taurus mountains. Which run almost the length of the western coast. But the region we explored had a diverse range of habitats. From the sun-kissed coast to the soaring mountains. From snowmelt to fertile valleys.

We started in the beautiful seaside town of Alanya. I woke up to the view of a broad harbour with big snow-capped mountains on the other side. They were our destination. To look at the snow melt plants.

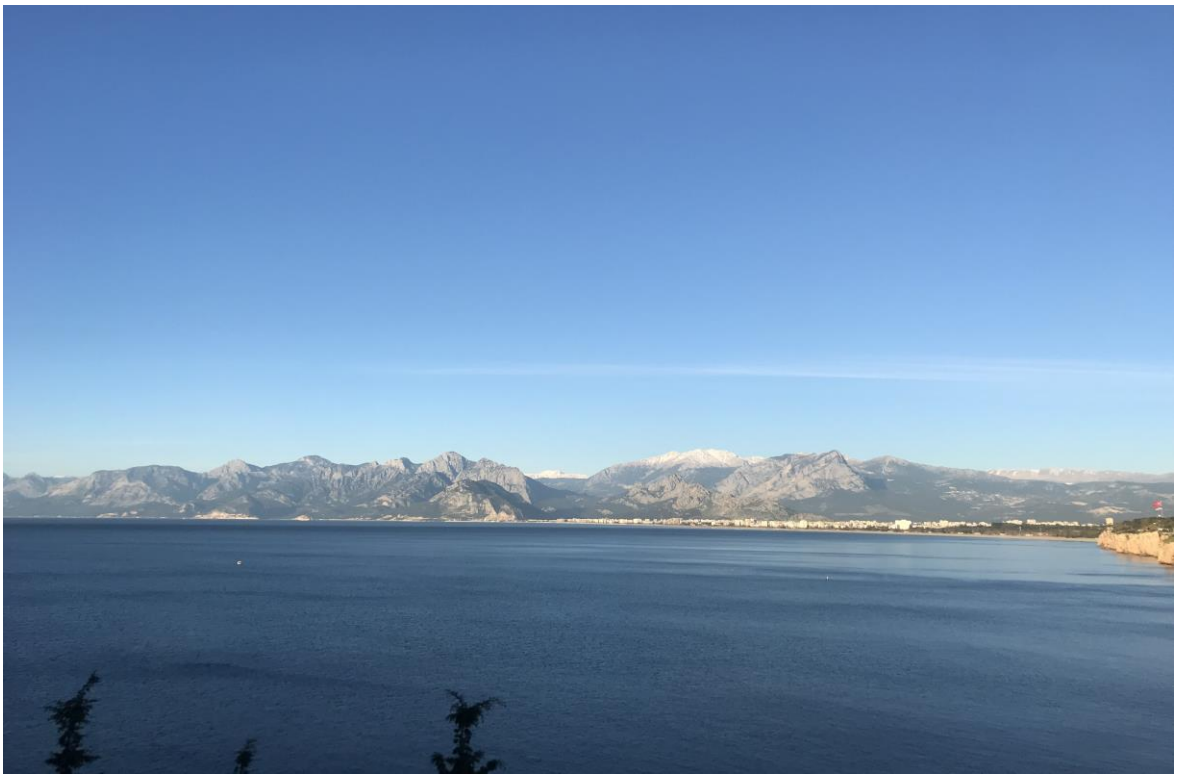


Figure 1 View from Alanya to snowcapped mountains

As we climbed, we stopped time to time. Our 2 leaders were very familiar with this region having taken other groups there or been to the area to study it. One was Yaesmin Konarulp, author of the Wild Flowers of Turkey and proponent for the preservation of Turkish flora, fauna and culture. The other was a Botanist from Istanbul University, who specializes in Crocus. Having described some of the new species himself, Osman Erol.

Our first stop was to find a species recently described by Osman, after Yaesmin. It was past its best but still pretty with its dark anthers, darkly feathered petals and unusual smell. Which, Yaesmin was not fond of.

Higher we went, and our next stop yielded a new species, Crocus roseoviolaceous. It is a beautiful species found growing in patches amongst the Pine forests.

Figure 2 Crocus roseoviolaceous

Our final stop was up to the snowmelt where we found a multitude of bulbous plants in flower in the meadows flowing with water. Eranthis hyemalis, Scilla biflora, Anemone blanda and the list goes on. We found late flowering Galanthus elwesii. Which was over collected in the past. But with strict laws prohibiting the collection of any of Turkeys plants or animals. It is happily on the increase.

Figure 3 Galanthus elwesii

The next day we climbed once again into the mountains. But this time to the Yaylas. These are the Summer grazing ground for the ever-increasing herds of Goats. These meadows are a wealth of plants. In winter they are covered in snow. In spring the snow melts and the plants rush to flower in stunning profusion and produce seed before the Goats return. The goats spend summer grazing the meadow and fertilizing them. Its been a happy balance in the past. But the demand for more goat products has meant even more of them and they have been returning earlier. Before the plants can shed their seed. Resulting in great stress on the plants. The Yaylas was a wonder for me to behold. Hectares of bulbs in a profusion of flower. There were also 2 new species to be found here. Crocus gembosii and Crocus mawii. These 2 species hybridise so there was every combination possible in between.

Figure 4 Crocus hybrid

Our next area of exploration was the Akseki region. This is an inland region with broad, cultivated valleys surrounded by high mountains. It is a rural area and the village we stayed in, Ormana. Was particularly beautiful with “Button Houses”

Figure 5 Button house in Akseki

We explored the valleys and there were plenty of flowering Orchards. But due to the warm spring weather. Many of the bulbs had long passed flower.

We returned to the mountains and found more bulbs in flower there. Crocus chrysanthus in various forms. From pure yellow to darkly feathered forms. It was interesting to compare it to Romulea crocea. To the uninitiated, it would be easily mistaken.

Figure 6 Romulea crocea

Further up we found a new species. Crocus oreogenus. The species name means “Mountains born” Most appropriate because we found this very variable and attractive species high in the mountains just after the snow melted.

Figure 7 Crocus oreogenus

Many of the new species are named after the place they are found. Another new species is named after the Ziyaret Mountains. Crocus ziyaratensis with its striking black anthers. Black anthers are an attractive feature on many species. There is a reason for these anthers. Pollinators are not only interested in nectar. Bees harvest the pollen too. It is a rich source of vitamins and minerals. The large black anthers are most attractive to pollinators. They advertise to come here!! There is plenty of food for you. Thus, the flowers get lots of attention.

Figure 8 Crocus ziyaretensis

One of the most unassuming, but still charming species we found was Crocus minutus. It's also another new species. It was previously under the name Crocus danfordiae

Figure 9 Crocus minutus

I asked Osman Erol. Why are there suddenly so many new species?? He explained to me. With the use of Genetic Sequencing to identify species rather than just physical appearance (Morphological) it has been discovered that species that were once thought to the same plant or related. Are not.

Another area we explored was the gorgeous green, Lake Comcegolu. This lake has been attributed with mystical healing powers if you bath in or imbibe it. It was certainly too cold to consider either as it is snowmelt lake surrounded by snowy peaks and also a gorgeous species of Crocus. Crocus beydaglerensis. That grew in great profusion on its shores. This is a species that does not like to be dry and warm during summer.

Figure 10 Crocus beydaglarensis

In one of the meadows, we stopped at. I could see something bright red like flames amongst the grass. I inspected it closely. It was the diminutive, but delightful Adonis flammea.

Figure 11 Adonis flammea

There are approximately 130 species of Fritillaria. Turkey has over one-third of them.

The most notable that we found were. Fritillaria kittaniae in great diversity and colour forms. All with their distinctive swept back petals. This species is endemic to turkey.

Figure 12 Fritillaria kittaniae

What was for me on the nicest plants of the entire trip was the superb Fritillaria serpenticola. This tiny but tough bulb grows only on the mineral-rich serpentine soil. Where few other plants survive. Its chubby yellow bells were in clusters of one, two or occasionally three on short stems. Many plants that grow on serpentine soils are difficult to grow in cultivation. Requiring special attention to the media they are grown in.

Figure 13 Fritillaria serpenticola

Found nearby was another yellow flowered bulb that delighted me. I am not normally an aficionado of the genus Muscari. However, we found a group of Muscari macrocarpum and I was smitten by its yellow flowers. It was described by one of my colleagues as “looking like a bunch of bananas and smelling like them too” There are 42 species of Muscari and Turkey has over half of them growing in it. Including another species that I loved also. Muscari muscarimi. With its jade coloured buds that transformed to white and finally to lavender. I have become enamoured of the larger flowering species and now sought out seed to grow some of my own.

Figure 14 Muscari macrocarpum

TO BE CONTINUED ….. next edition.

Seed-exchange Crocus Group 2018

Some numbers regarding our latest seedex.

We made about a thousand small packets of seed from 175 different species/cultivars/forms of Crocus which were sent in by 29 donors and sent out to 50 members.

Here below the top 10 of the "most wanted" species, but almost all seeds were asked in high quantity. As always, I could not give everyone everything they asked for, but I did my best.

No.	Name	Packets asked
108	michelsonii ex LEE408	25
16	babadagensis	17
137	robertianus GP18A04 (wild collected)	17
3	abantensis JATU-006 (cormlets)	16
6	alexandri	16
104	mathewii	16
15	autranii	14
25	cappadocicus	14
74	kerndorffiorum	14
90	laevigatus CRO-1012 (cormlets)	14
58	gargaricus	13

Total price for sending to a member (package and postage) was up to 4.82 € p.p. this year.

I would like to thank the donors for taking the time to collect and send the seeds, the members who asked for seeds and Eddy Tijtgat and Luc Gilgemyn for helping me with the packaging of the seeds.

Looking forward to a year with a good seed set and a wonderful seed-exchange next year.

Happy sowing/growing,

Wim Boens
Seed-exchange manager.

Species and cultivars in the spotlight

This is a new section in which various species and cultivars will be focused upon. Wim Boens and I will kick it off with our selections. With a little information upon each and cultural notes also from our personal experience. I would love any other members to contribute to this section with their selected species/cultivars and cultural experiences too. Obviously, my Australian conditions may be slightly different from those in other parts of the world. My Crocus growing season is normally Cool to cold with plentiful sunshine and occasional snow.

Crocus banaticus 'Novak White'.

C. banaticus grows in the wild in Romania, former Yugoslavia and in the Carpathian Mountains of Ukraine. This particular cultivar was selected by the Czech botanist František Novak (collection number FN75/3) and named in his honour.

Up until now three different white flowering forms of C. banaticus have been named, 'Snowdrift' (Jānis Rukšāns), 'First Snow' (Jānis Rukšāns) and 'Novak White' (František Novak). C. banaticus is a shade loving species which dislikes terribly dry soils in summer. The cultivar here described isn't that very common in cultivation and the most important difference with the other white flowering forms is that 'Novak White' is smaller in all parts, the tepals are more pointed and look like an arrow-head. There's a light yellow sheen on all tepals and of all white-flowering cultivars this cultivar flowers the earliest, up to 2 weeks before the other C. banaticus, in the northern hemisphere it starts flowering around the 10th of September, while the other forms often wait until the end of September. In short, I can highly recommend this cultivar for a shady place in the garden.

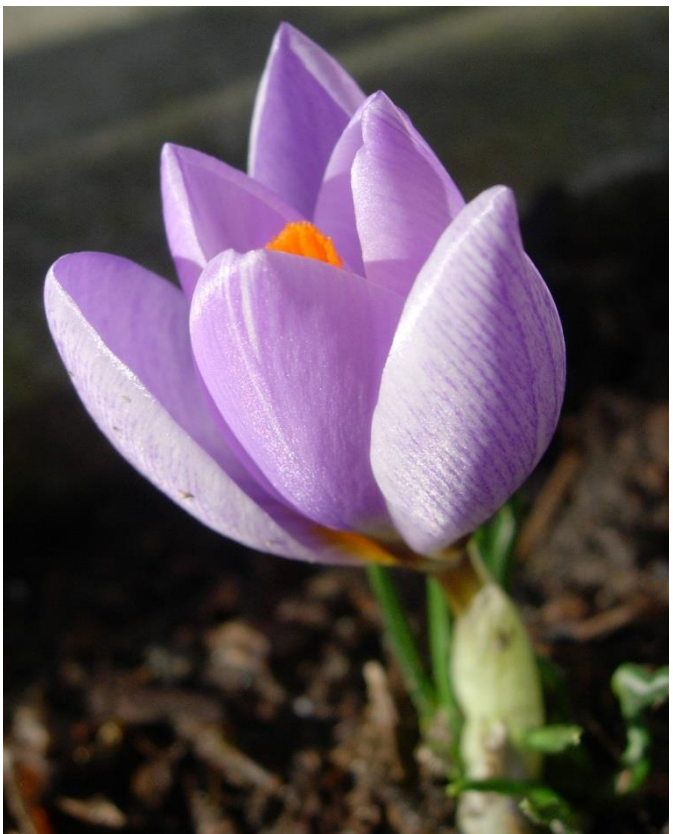
Crocus banaticus "First Snow"

Crocus banaticus "Novak White"

Spring cultivar in the spotlight: Crocus sublimis 'Michael Hoog's Memory'

The cultivar ‘Michael Hoog’s Memory’ is a selection from the species up until recently known as Crocus atticus subsp. sublimis, growing in the wild in Greece, Albania, the FYR. Macedonia and the south of Bulgaria. This particular cultivar was found in the wild in Greece in a mixed population with the autumn flowering Crocus robertianus and originally collected as being this species.

Flowering in spring, only a few cultivars were named from this species, of which the most well-known is ‘Tricolor’ for sure. ‘Michael Hoog’s Memory’ is a cultivar which grows well and multiplies very quickly. It was named by Jānis Rukšāns in memory of the Dutch bulb collector Michael Hoog who collected this form in the wild. In the northern hemisphere it flowers in January-March and forms a nice clump of lilac-violet flowers very quickly, the flowers have a silver sheen on the outside and a nice orange/yellow throat.



Winter flowering species in the spotlight .... Crocus alatavicus.

Crocus alatavicus grows naturally in mountain meadows in the Tashkent area of Uzbekistan. It is the only species to naturally occur in China.

It flowered for the first time with me this year. In mid-winter July in Australia. I was astonished at the beauty of the flowers. Pure white with a yellow throat. But, it was the very fine, brown markings on the back of the petals that really captured my attention. Fine brown markings. A friend described them, "like it has hair growing on the petals" Which indeed it does.

The seed was sown in 2015 from Crocus Group seed. It appears to be easy in cultivation in my Australian conditions. Our winters have hard frosts most nights. But, the temperature during the day is normally 5-8'c, Deep freezes are rare. Winter is also one of the driest and sunny seasons. I have only grown this species in pots so far. But I keep the pots dry and warm during summer dormancy.

Figure 15 Crocus alatavicus

Crocus harveyi.

Crocus harveyi grows naturally on the Greek Island of Samos.

I received this plant originally as seed collected by Marcus Harvey. It was originally sown as Crocus biflorus ssp nubigena. It grew well for me and so I planted it out in my garden, where it flowered. I

was astonished to see a post in the SRGC forum notifying of a new species, named after Marcus. I compared the image of the new species with photos of my own. They were identical!!

It is a beautiful plant with its deep yellow throat and striking black anthers. It has several flowers from each corm. It flowers in late winter, August for me.

This species has grown happily in the open garden for 3 years now. It is in a position that is moist and sunny all autumn, winter long. But dries out somewhat in summer as herbaceous perennials cover the area. Keeping it drier and cooler in summer.

Figure 16 Crocus harveyi

Figure 17 Crocus harveyi

Crocus cyprius

Crocus cyprius grows naturally in the west side of the Troodos Mountains in Cyprus. It is a high-altitude species growing above 1000m.

Crocus cyprius is one of my favorite Crocus species. It is a species I have grown for some years now. It does well for me. Flowers every year and sets seed most years too. I grew it from seed I received off Marcus Harvey. It flowered 3 years from sowing.

The flowers although only small are beautiful. In the form I grow they are a lilac colour with a darker reverse. The throat is a deep yellow and can be seen from the outside. It flowers in mid winter July, here.

This species is also easy for me. It grows well in a pot. I keep it cool and dry in dormancy. It increases slowly by division. Seed is however a quicker way to increase it. This year I was fortunate enough to receive seed of the other Cyprian species. Crocus hartmannianus. It's germinated, and the seedlings are growing nicely. I am looking forward to seeing it flower.

Figure 18 Crocus cyprius