Crocus Group Bulletin No. 51 : Summer/Winter 2019

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Welcome to the summer/winter newsletter of The Crocus Group. As I write this rain is falling. It is very welcome after an unusually mild and dry Autumn on the east coast of Australia. The only significant precipitation lately has been snow.
Sitting in front of me in full bloom is Crocus alatavicus. I am pollinating it in the hope of setting seed for the future seed exchange.
This newsletter has some excellent contributions from other members. Spread across the globe. From Australia to Argentina and also to Belgium. It also has some very useful internet links to information about Crocus and information regarding this year's seed/corm list.
For the first time I have deposited the newsletter in the SRGC forum especially for the Crocus Group. It provides an easy way to view the newsletter, rather than clogging up your inboxes. Some of the images are HUGE!!
Hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter.
Mat Murray

Cultivar and species in the spotlight:

This section is dedicated to Crocus species and cultivars that we have known and grown. It has some information about them and also how myself and others have grown them. I hope you find it useful and informative. If you have

any particular Crocus you would like to tell the Crocus group of your experiences with. We would love to hear from you.

Crocus mathewii.
This beautiful Autumnal flowering Crocus has rapidly become one of my favourite Crocus. It flowers quickly from seed, It flowered in 3 years after sowing. It has multiple flowers. This year from 2 flowering sized corms it flowered with 10 flowers!! The flowers just kept coming! The flowers are scented and hold themselves up well. It sets seed easily. I have seedlings from last years pollination growing now. It also increases well. From my original 2 plants it is now 8 in 4 years from sowing. I keep it dry in summer. This year I repotted the original 2 seedlings into a larger pot after flowering. They have really benefitted from this.

Crocus moabiticus.
This is one of the saffron crocus group, all of which do very nicely for me. Our relatively mild winters with plentiful sun and warm dry summers suit them. I have found all the saffron crocus enjoy a good fertiliser regime. They form large corms and so need a good feed. I do not protect any of my Crocus from frost or snow. However, this is one that I do. If frost is imminent. I bring it under cover. It’s a good flowerer, but rarely increases by division. Seed seems the best way to raise it. It grows easily from seed. I think it would be a good doer in Melbourne or Buenos Aries. (Photo courtesy of Oron Peri)

Crocus robertianus. This was a plant I had coveted for years. I tried it several times as plants. I just did not seem to be able to keep it going. I assumed being from Greece it would like warm dry summers. At last Marcus Harvey offered it as seeds. So, I tried it again. I researched its native conditions and realised its a plant that likes cooler and slightly moist summer conditions. Growing in summer shade. So I tried keeping it with the bulbs who I store for summer dormancy under a large conifer for summer. They grew very nicely. I planted them out after 3 years underneath a large Michelia yunnanensis. They flowered very nicely. To my surprise the first one that flowered was a beautiful white. They seem very happy there.

Crocus balansae ‘Chocolate Soldier’.

You can find C. balansae growing in the wild in the west of Turkey and on the Greek islands of Samos and Chios. The species was named for the French botanist Benjamin Balansa. This specific cultivar has very intense yellow inners and almost complete dark brown outers, which makes it stand out from a distance.

In the famous “A Handbook of Crocus and Colchicum for Gardeners” (1924), written by E.A. Bowles, he mentions a form like this being grown at Myddelton House but without giving a cultivarname. If it was a seedling from his own garden or if it came in from a wild collection is unsure. After that, this form seems to have disappeared, but it must have been going around in the inner circle of Croconuts, cause in 1996, when Primrose Warburg died, 3 corms were collected from her garden at South Hayes by Alan Edwards and by that time it had gotten the cultivarname ‘Chocolate Soldier’. It seems that E.F. (Heff) Warburg had gotten them from Bowles directly and then gave that

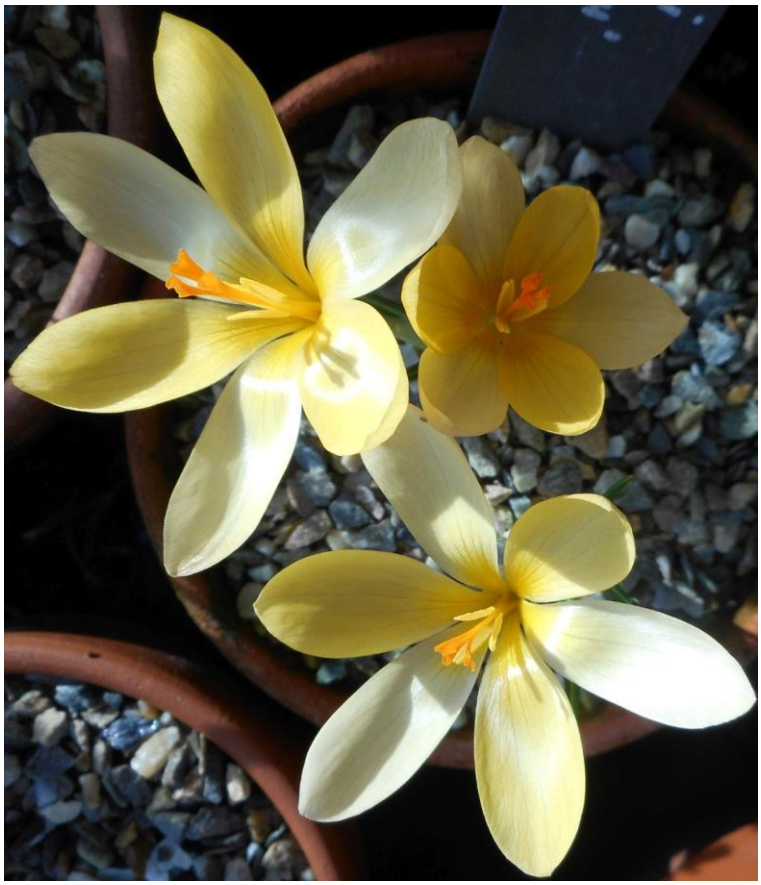
name to it. I haven't tried this one outdoors, but it should be hardy enough. In pot in the cold frame it flowers reliably around the end of January, beginning of February and it seems to be not too difficult to propagate. One last remark I have to make, is that Jānis Rukšāns in his latest book "The world of Crocuses" (2017) doubts if this is form of C. balansae or of C. olivieri. Whatever it is, it is a very striking cultivar with a very interesting history.

Cultivar in the spotlight: Crocus sieberi 'Midas Touch'.

C. sieberi grows in the wild on the island of Crete and was named for Franz Sieber, who collected this plant for the first time. The other parent of this probable hybrid is C. cvijicii, which grows in the wild in the north of Greece and was named for the Serbian geographer Jovan Cvijić.

In 1994 Alan Edwards found a yellow seedling amongst a regular group of seedlings of C. sieberi. Those seeds originated in the garden of Lyn Bezzant

in Scotland and were most probably hybridized with C. cvijicii. Taking this into account, the plant should be called Crocus x ‘Midas Touch’, but it’s been known as a sieberi for so long, I preferred to keep it as C. sieberi ‘Midas Touch’. The buds, which appear at the end of January, have a rich apricot colour and when the flower is completely open (by the beginning of February), it takes on a pale butter yellow colour. It’s not a very difficult plant when grown in a pot, it might not like our cold winters (as most C. sieberi dislike the frost) so I’ve never really tried it in the open garden. Luckily, it’s not very slow to multiply vegetatively when grown in the cold greenhouse or the bulb frame.



It’s always great to be able to hear from other Crocus enthusiasts. Recently I heard of an enthusiast from South America!! Buenos Aries in Argentina. Alberto Castillo. He offered to write an article about growing Crocus in his area. It is below. Alberto would like to hear from any other Crocus enthusiasts in South America. He asked that you contact him via email please. Let me know if you wish to get in contact with him.

GROWING CROCUSES IN ARGENTINA

I have been growing bulbs for over 40 years. The collection is in Ezeiza, 35 km SW of downtown Buenos Aires. It was appointed a Botanic Garden in 1986. It is mostly in 20 litre containers, 800 of them. Larger species are in the ground in borders or in raised beds. The first bulbous plant I was in contact with was Crocus sativus. Finding that big, striking, fabulous violet goblet growing among weeds in a neglected corner of the property was a total surprise. The original plants had been grown years ago by my late father, who was very active in trying new vegetables and garden plants. He had passed away years by then but many of his plants were growing everywhere in what was our house for weekends. From them on it was just a matter of searching for more plants similar to that original Crocus.

THE PAMPAS OF ARGENTINA

Argentina in the southermost tip of South America is a huge country 5000 kilometres long by some 900 kilometres wide at the most and with every posible climate from tropical to almost arctic conditions in the extreme south. A third of the country is Patagonia, the cold, wind barren, arid steppe with many unique and fascinating alpines.

Buenos Aires is in the pampas of Argentina, a región of very fértile plains comprising hundreds of millions of hectares. This is the agricultural heart of the country where cattle is raised and many kinds of crops are grown. The soil is alkaline, clayey and very rich in nutrients. Intense sunshine is the rule the year round. Rainfall is distributed year round, in all seasons, although there is a peak in spring. Year round rainfall is far from adequate for bulb cutlivation and this is why although gardens in the pampas of Argentina can be spectacular they seldom include bulbous plants. Watsonias, Crinums, Crocosmias, Arums, Zantedeschia aethiopica and the native Zephyranthes and Ipheions can be regarded as permanent. The immense majority of others demand more specialized cultivation with a dry dormancy. As for temperatures, long cool winters with a good number of slight frosts were the rule but with global warming things are different now and to this add buildings, pavements, vehicle effluents and you have a practically frost free environment. Buenos Aires has grown to be a huge megalópolis 100 kilometres long and some 20 kilometres wide and in permanent expansión. You can see Ficus benjamina as street plantings and Spathiphyllums and Syngoniums in gardens in downtown Buenos Aires. A few decades ago such plants would be frozen dead with the first frost.

In Ezeiza the climatic change has limited frosts to a few, perhaps one or two every winter and this has of course had a strong effect on the cultivation of bulbs from cold climates or from long winters. Among them, of course, alpine crocuses that in Europe are easy in cultivation. These crocuses are mostly spring flowering. On the other hand, those crocuses from low altitudes or from a definite Mediterranean climate seem to adapt well to our Winter with few frosts. All of them both Autumn and Winter bloomers are grown in an open space where they receive cool chilly wind all Winter and this of course helps keep temperatures low. Another surprising change in the last five years of so has been the increasing dryness of the air. This has been a most

pleasant move from rather unpleasant humid soggy conditions during the long warm season we had

before. Now with the current drier air you one can enjoy hot days and most pleasant cool breezy evenings and nights. Another import change is the amazing lack of rainfall for long periods in summer. Some 40 days every summer has no rainfall at all. It is evidently a change towards a Mediterranean climate.

CONTAINERS.

As more and more species were added it was clear that the bewildering asortment of pots of all shorts and sizes was confusing and cumbersome. Therefore we tried to find sources for large containers of the same size and model. This was not easy and several brands sold different models and kinds but the large sized ones were difficult to obtain in numbers. Then a solution was found quite unexpectedly. Used plastic buckets of the kind used almost the world around for selling paint and plaster were tried. They are white (important in a hot sunnny climate), of a considerable size (20 litre, 40 cm/16 in. in height, 30 cm /12 in. in diameter), easy to obtain, and UV stabilized which means they will last for several seasons even in hot fierce sun. Remains of paint in them are easily removed when dry and if any is left it never showed any adverse effect on plant growth. Therefore we have adopted them as the standard container for most of the bulb collection; practically all of the problems we had with containers have been solved since. For smaller bulbs we can use them as community pots in which different species are grown together provided their subterranean organs can be sorted easily when dormant. For instance we could grow Biarum, Crocus, Gladiolus and Scilla in the same pot. Of course their dormancy period must be in the same time of the year.

GROWING MIXES.

As everyone else growing plants around the world, several mix formulas were tried and adjusted over the years. A few proved good but they invariably were troublesome during long periods of rain. None was draining fast enough for our humid air conditions. They did dry rapidly but retained too much water for bulbs. Ingredients were of high quality as fortunately an ample range of

different materials are available here: perlite , gravel in different sizes, peatmoss, compost, volcanic sand, the clay balls known as Seramis, etc.

That was a problematic subject until while reading a highly informative book the following paragraph was found. The name is “Growing Succulent Plants” by Victor Graham: “Desert soils are often poor in humus, but they are rich in minerals, so desert succulents are well fed once their soil is moistened by rain, mist or dew. Some growers prefer to grow trickier plants of this type in a compost made up entirely of grit, sand or other drainage material, and supply nutriment as a dilute feed at each watering ….” Although the paragraph was aimed at succulent cultivation it seemed an interesting solution for the cultivation of difficult bulbs like Lapeirousias, Tritonias, etc, which in nature inhabit arid regions. The first material used for this was a mixed gravel that were sold for filtering wáter of swimming pools. It contained no dust and sizes ranged from half a rice grain to pea size. Regulations for the sale of this product involved treating it with heat and this was very important as this gravel is extracted in regions where soil nematodes are common. Later on crushed granite of several sizes were used, pure, without any other ingredient. This may sound odd to growers accostumed to the usual method of annual repotting of mixes more or less high in

organic matter. But please remember that this method we use has proved the best for our humid air climate in which abundant dew at evenings is a source of daily waterings.

ADDITIONAL FEEDING

Certain high potassium commercial formulas of liquid fertilizers available in Europe have proved good: Phostrogen, Tomorite or ChemPak 4. Experience has shown that the more minute the dose the better are the results. Of course it means more applications and more labor involved. As with all bulbs it is essential that the relation between nitrogen and potassium be ample; little nitrogen or none at all and high potassium. For some thirty years we have been using potassium sulphate in the whole bulb collection. It comes as a grainy poder and it is easily applied. Best results have been sprinkling some grains on the mix surface after a good rain. It is readily dissolved and finds its way downwards to the root área. Grain sprinkling has proved more practical than the tedious method we had used before of applying it as a foliar feeding solution after a hand watering. Potassium is most important in growing

healthy robust plants as it encourages the storage of reserves. Not that bulbs, corms, etc., will grow bigger with potassium fertilizing. But the resuts will be obvious the next season in the vigor of plants and flower production.

OUR SMALL CROCUS COLLECTION.

All are grown in 20 litre plastic buckets where the ample space let corms bury themselves without limitations. Exposure is in full sun for those of the Middle East and lowland locations. Those from higher latitude are exposed to the south (the cold side in this Hemisphere) and in the summer a shadecloth is stretched over the containers to mitigate the effects of summer sun. Two mixes are used, one is 2/3 crushed granite and 173 crushed limestone for lowland species. The other comprises 100% crushed granite for those that grown in colder conditions in nature. So far both mixes are working very well and in the future the limestone/granite mix will be used for more species to see how they react to it.

Our small collection of crocuses comprises mostly autumn flowering species. Not surprisingly these can take the warm conditions here better than alpine spring flowering ones. Autumn flowering species endure the long summer dormancy, grow well making increasingly fat corms, and in a couple of cases have flowered at the beginning of their third cycle of life which is quite short in my experience. Flowering is abundant and perfect.

SOURCES.

Besides the material received from foremost growers received as corms that invariably proved of excellent quality we purchased material from the trade. But after several alarming episodes in which the plants sprouted with evident signs of virosis, we prefer to grow all our plants from seed. The late Jim Archibald, Kurt Vickery, the late Marcus Harvey, Mike Salmon-Jacklands, Oron Peri of

Seeds of Peace had been sources of excellent quality seed, among others. And last but not least the fantastic Seed List of our Crocus Group, brilliantly managed by our friend Wim Boens.

SEED SOWING AND DORMANCY

All of our Crocus seed is sown in autumn in 10 cm. plastic pots with Seramis, with no other ingredient and take to a cool, humid spot. Seramis 2 mm. size has proved the best material we have ever tried. Germination is easy and baby corms grow without difficulty in it. Even in periods of long rains this material has proved superb. We use it for all bulb seed we try. Additional very dilute feeding is provided on a fortnightly basis during active growth.

In a climate with hot summers as this the most difficult period has been the first dormancy of corms, bulbs and tubers. The long hot summers could dry them off and cooler condtions would encourage them to sprout too early with disastrous consequences. So far, the most succesful method has been to keep the pots with dormant bulbs outdoors in boxes directly on the ground and in deep shade. They are covered but the soil around is moist when it rains and this balance has proved a success.

The up to date list of species

C. cambessedessii

C. cancellatus

C. cartwrightianus

C. goulimyi

C. hadriaticus

C. hermoneus

C. hyemalis

C. imperati

C. laevigatus

C. longiflorus

C. malyi

C. niveus

C. ochroleucus

C. oreocreticus

C. pallasii

C. pulchellus

C. robertianus

C. sativus

C. speciosus

C. thomasii

C. tournefortii

Literature that we have used over the years include Brian's The Crocus, Patrick M. Synge's Collins Guide to Bulb, E. A. Bowles' A Handbook of Crocus and Colchicums and others.

Finally I would like to mention the use of formaline solution. We have been using formaline to disinfect pots, tools, and used mixes with great success. I don't remember having any case of fungi or bacteriae breakthrough in decades. Any bulb that is added is kept in quarantine for a couple of months in an isolated spot and burnt at the slightest suspicion of virus presence. Viruses are more easily visible at the foliage tip at sprouting just before the leaf turns deep green. Conversely high nitrogen fertilizer or composts masks virus symptoms by turning the foliage exceedingly dark green.

Alberto Castillo

Sources of information on Crocus

Maggi Young from the SRGC has forwarded to me the descriptions and links to all the articles on Crocus their journal, The International Rock Gardener. Including the descriptions of the new Crocus species. It's a treasuretrove of information and reading. Thanks so much for compiling this list Maggi.

The following issues of IRG contain formal descriptions of new crocus species:

IRG 52 April 2014 Crocus danfordiae Maw and C. chrysanthus (Herbert) Herbert (Iridaceae) and some of their allies in Turkey and Iran- Crocus brickellii, Crocus henrikii, Crocus kurdistanicus, Crocus muglaensis, Crocus uschakensis are described by Dr Jānis Rukšāns IRG 52: 2-31
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2014Apr241398364476IRG52April.pdf

IRG 59 November 2014 Crocus pumilus - status of one Greek species – Crocus laevigatus subsp. pumilus raised to C. pumilus - by Dr Jānis Rukšāns IRG59: 4-15
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2014Nov271417122600IRG59.pdf

IRG 61 January 2015 Crocus gunae, Crocus reinhardii Crocus iranicus are described by Dr Jānis Rukšāns IRG61: 2-26
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2015Feb011422783332IRG61.pdf

IRG64 April 2015 Some New Crocus Taxa (Iridaceae) from Western Turkey and East Aegean Islands are described by Dr Jānis Rukšāns these are Crocus antalyensioides, Crocus antalyensis subsp.nova , , Crocus lycius, Crocus pamphylicus, Crocus dilekyarensis, Crocus kofudagensis, Crocus rhodensis, Crocus sozenii, Crocus zetterlundii IRG 64: 2-36
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2015Apr231429824727IRG64.pdf

IRG 73 January 2016 Crocus duncanii described by Dr Jānis Rukšāns - IRG 73: 2-14
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2016Jan281454019772IRG73.pdf

IRG 76 April 2016 Some new Crocus species described by Dr Jānis Rukšāns – these are Crocus armeniensis, Crocus gembosii , Crocus georgii, Crocus puringiorum, Crocus sakaltutanensis and Crocus stevensii - IRG 76:16-43
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2016Apr281461879792IRG_76.pdf

IRG 89 May 2017 – Crocus inghamii described by Dr Jānis Rukšāns - IRG 89: 3-18

http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2017May251495746846IRG89May2017.pdf

IRG 90 June 2017 Crocus ruksansii is described by Dr Dimitri Zubov - IRG 90: 7-13

IRG 90 June 2017 Crocus harveyi and Crocus seisumsiana are described by Dr Jānis Rukšāns -IRG 90: 14 -28
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2017Jun211498039508IRG_90_June.pdf

IRG 95 November 2017 WHAT IS CROCUS NUBIGENA Herb.? by Dr Jānis Rukšāns Abstract: Epitype for Crocus nubigena Herb. is designated. Its distribution and the features separating it from similar species are discussed. - IRG 95 : 18-28
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2017Nov231511460835IRG_95_November_2017.pdf

IRG 99 March 2018 Crocus yalovensis is described by Dr Jānis Rukšāns IRG100: 2-21

http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2018Mar291522354177IRG100.pdf
(link is to IRG99 – the 100 shown in link above was an error)

IRG 102 June 2018 IRG 102 June 2018 Crocus youngiorum is described by Jānis Rukšāns and Henrik Zetterlund -IRG102: pages 13-23
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2018Jun291530286276IRG102June2018.pdf

Published in International Rock Gardener (IRG 108) December 2018:
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2018Dec241545672053IRG108_December2018.pdf

Crocuses of series Kotschyani Mathew (Iridaceae) with a new species Crocus hatayensis Rukšāns from Hatay Province, Turkey. Jānis Rukšāns,

Dr. biol. h.c. Published in International Rock Gardener (IRG 108) December 2018, pages 20 – 54.

IRG109
http://www.srgc.org.uk/logs/logdir/2019Jan241548361044IRG109January2019.pdf

Some geophytes from Berkara Gorge in Karatau Mountain Ridge (Kazakhstan) and Tulipa berkariensis Rukšāns species nova – an “old” new species of Tulipa (Liliaceae). Jānis Rukšāns, Dr. biol. h.c. IRG 109 – January 2019 pages 26 – 39

IRG 109 page 40 Corrigendum re. IRG #108 – December 2018 : Short note about Eranthis iranica - Jānis Rukšāns, Dr. biol.

Seed and Corm list 2019

It is seed list time!!! Certainly something I look forward to seeing every year is the seed exchange list. Without it, I would not be able to cultivate almost all the Crocus species I currently grow. Thanks so much to Wim Boens, Tony Goode and friends who every year work tirelessly to produce the list and distribute the seed. Below is information on how to send your seed and receive the seedlist.

Dear fellow-Croconuts,

the time has come again to ask for your donations of Crocus-seeds and corm(let)s. The pods are forming already and they promise a good seedset, so I’m looking forward to getting a lot of seeds from many people all over the world…with your cooperation we can share those wonderful gems with each

other, so a big thank you goes out to all donors in advance. Please don't hesitate to send in small amounts of seeds, even a couple of seeds can make someone else very happy! Also, seeds of more common species and cultivars are more than welcome, since they are especially good for starting croconuts and people who want to sow them directly in the garden to get a more naturalised look.

This year, as in the previous years, I will be accepting corms and cormlets in the exchange too. It has shown to be a good formula; many members only want seed, but quite a few like to get young cormlets or some bigger flower-sized corms too. So if you have any corms and/or cormlets to spare, please send them in.

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, 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.

Donors will be allowed to choose from the list first and non-donors will also be able to make a choice from the list and I will take into account what they ask for as well. 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.

Price for ordering seeds is 5 €/order. To be paid with the order, before the 15th of September. Requests for the seedlist should be e-mailed (before the 15th of August) to: seedexcrocusgroup@gmail.com

Donations of seed and corm(let)s can be send to: Donations of seed and corm(let)s can be send 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

Regarding the Nagoya Protocol:

The reputation of the Crocus Group is at risk if we offer seed that has been collected illegally, or that does not have permission for distribution. This could do harm to future attempts to people who want to collect legitimately. The Crocus Group is not able to check every seed submission, so please do not submit seed that would put our reputation at risk. Please also retain documentation giving any relevant permission for as long as possible!

Turkish delights from the Taurus Mountains of Turkey (part 2)

This is second part of my article on last years expedition to the Taurus Mountains of Turkey.

We had a number of Orchid enthusiasts travelling with us who were ardent for them. I had not realized how many species of bulbous species there were. 148 of them!! With 40 being endemic to Turkey. The climate is conducive to the formation of bulbous species. With warm dry summers and mostly cool damp winters. We saw a different species at every stop.

I like to have a bit of fun with my companions. Everybody was mad keen to find a NEW species. At one stage I found a fake plastic flower and positioned it. I elicited great excitement. COME!! See this new species. I have not seen one like this yet.

But on a more serious note. I was concerned about the amount of plastic we found littered around. It was everywhere. Covering meadows of Crocus.

We stopped at the Type locality (where it was first found) for a new species. Crocus henrickii. Yasemin was horrified. A road had been constructed over it! There is a massive amount of infrastructure under development in Turkey. Some of it in discriminant. Fortunately, we found it safely in bloom further up the bank on the roadside.

On many of the higher peaks of the Taurus mountains are vast and extensive forests of the Lebanon Cedar, Cedrus libani. These forests are considered the finest in the world and are certainly a sight to behold. Magnificent and majestic.

The food in Turkey is wonderful and plentiful. I came back considerably heavier than I went. Many of the places we ate in were really novel and lovely. One place was the Ulipinar Botanic restaurant. Which was a restaurant on platforms over a stream with plentiful ducks. Above which, huge Plane Trees soared. On a hot day or night, it would have been delightful to dine on Turkish Cuisine. Shaded by these trees and cooled by the waters of the stream.

One of the last places we stayed at was the original centre of the sprawling metropolis of Antalya. In a lovely hotel that had a really nice courtyard with Citrus in full flower. This area was a rabbit warren of narrow streets where only pedestrians were allowed. It was particularly vibrant at night with many restaurants, bars and cafes. I had a couple of really fun nights with some locals and lots of shots of Raki. Needless to say, the following days were not quite as enjoyable.

A dream came true for on one of our last days. We climbed up to a Cedar research reserve that is closed to all but researchers. No goats allowed. Yaesmin knew the caretaker of this reserve and we were allowed in. We climbed up and up until we were above the tree line. It was a hostile, rocky windswept place. The mountains on all sides were still snow covered. Amongst these rocks and Astralagus angustifolius cushions, we found Crocus baytopiorum in full bloom!! I almost wept for joy. Ever since I first read about them in Brian Matthews THE CROCUS. I have long since wanted to see them in the wild. Here they were in superb ice blue splendour. This area is covered in snow all winter long. The snow melts rapidly in spring and the crocus bloom soon after in intensely bright sun. It progressively dries out over summer. But the altitude and thick covering of rock ensure the soil remains cool and quite dry. These are the conditions they require in cultivation. Particularly the bright sunshine to develop the distinctive colour.

One of the many benefits of travelling with experts is the wealth of knowledge they impart. Osman gave us some lectures on the revision of the genus. So that we would have a greater understanding of the recent changes to the genus. During a discussion about the morphology of Crocus leaves (or the structure), I was amazed to learn that the distinctive white stripe down the centre of many Crocus species leaves is an adaptation that allows sunlight to penetrate deep into the interior of the leaves. Like a light well allowing sunlight into a building. The walls of the stripe are loaded with chlorophyll (the pigment that allows plants to harness the energy of sunlight) Vastly increasing the surface area of the leaf and making it super-efficient. Amazing.

The expedition was a real adventure of a lifetime. I saw so many plants, places, learnt so much and met some wonderful people. It had given me so much more than I ever expected. I gained an appreciation for a wonderful region of the world that is a treasure trove of living things.

I almost wept at our final morning at the beautiful seaside town of Fethiye. I felt so strongly that I want to return and explore more of this wonderful country. I also felt that I had been there before and chanced upon a sculpture of some of the past sultans of the Ottoman empire. One of them strongly resembles me. Don't you think??

Thank you from the bottom of my heart to the AGS and the SRGC for their Travel Awards. Without your assistance, this trip would not have been possible. (Mat Murray)