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CROCUS GROUP BULLETIN NO: 12

Hon Secretary's Notes

No one seemed willing to produce lists of crocuses grown in grass - perhaps no one does, which is a pity. The local rabbits who mow the leaves off in preference to the grass are not doing mine any good, but I suppose it is better than mice which destroy them completely. I do wish they'd stick to C. Tommasinianus though

Roger Poulett has pointed out the C. Longiflo~~us~~ is getting very scarce and difficult to buy. A few corms of 'commercial' stock have persisted here for 30 years, but none of the corms I brought from Malta a few years ago have survived. If anyone has a really vigorous clone of this lovely scented crocus please could they produce some for the Auction?

If any Crocus Group member has reason to come to the Oxford area I'd willingly show them my crocuses if given advance warning - first ones usually appear the first week of September and continue till April.

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PROGRAMME 1984/85

Sunday 13th October 1984

Brian Mathew has offered to show us the autumn crocuses in his private collection - arrive at 10.30 am at:- 90 Foley Road, Claygate, Esten, Surrey. Afterwards he suggests we go on to Wisley, not far away, where there should be crocuses in flower in the Alpine Meadow.

Tuesday February 19th 1985

Crocus lecture by C. D. Bickell the director of Wisley, who has collected many rare crocuses and has a wide practical experience of growing them in his own garden and frames. 6 pm RMS New Hall, followed by an Auction of crocus corms in aid of Crocus Group Funds. Please come and support the group by bringing plants for sale - and buying someone elses.

Sunday 24th February 1985

Dr Jack Elliot has offered to show us his extensive collection of crocuses and other rare bulbs. Arrive at 10.30 am at:- Coldham, Little Chart Forstal, Ashford, Kent (Directions in Yellow Pages). We have been promised a cup of coffee and afterwards Dr Elliot will lead us to the garden of Dr Martin Rix at Grove House, Sellindge, Ashford. He grows a variety of unusual bulbs as well as crocuses and has kindly offered to provide a mug of hot soup and a room in which we can eat our sandwiches. After lunch it may be possible to go and see more crocuses in a garden near by.

Primrose Warburg.

A spring visit this year to the central asiatic Soviet State of Uzbekistan gave myself and Chris Erickell the opportunity to see Crocus alatavicus in flower, mainly in the mountains to the north east of Tashkent. This range constitutes the western end of the great Tien Shan mountains which spread eastwards into China. C. alatavicus is apparently widely distributed through this area and is the only known species to occur within the borders of China. Where we saw it it grew in great quantities flowering not far from the edge of melting snow in rather heavy somewhat sticky soil. The white interior, with its yellow throat, is scarcely variable but the outside markings show a little variation in the density of greyish-violet speckling and there is usually a yellowish background to this flecking on the outer segments. Although we did not see any pure whites without markings, these obviously do occur since a variety albus was described in the 19th century. More interesting to us than colour variation was the method of increase. Most of the specimens occurred singly, although enormous quantities of them, but in a few cases we found great clumps of corms which we took to be produced by cloning of one original corm on the spot. It is just possible that these clumps arose from a whole capsule of seeds which instead of being distributed had germinated together. However on the chance of getting a C. alatavicus which was capable of rapid vegetative reproduction we selected a few corms from several of these clumps and will see how they behave in cultivation. My previous experience of the species is that it is reluctant to produce offspring by vegetative means.

During all my crocus hunting trips I have seen many spectacular sights and, although perhaps not the most impressive, C. alatavicus mixed with Colchicum luteum must rate fairly highly on the Crocophile's creme de la creme !

In other places on the same trip we saw C. korolkowii, obvious from the yellow remains of the flowers but unfortunately too far gone to create any sort of show. This is a much more widespread plant, easy to cultivate and considerably variable. We did not find the two species growing together although a Latvian correspondent, Mr. J. Ruksans, has shown me a photograph which shows them in a mixed colony. Clearly these two are very closely related and might be regarded as variants of one species but I can see little use in altering their status to subspecies, variety or form; as far as I know there are never intermediates, so that you can always state that you have one or the other, and each has a distinct geographical distribution

Crocus goulimyi. The white variant of C. goulimyi has now been described in the new Kew Magazine (1984) as forma albus, a name which will cover all white forms of the species, if others arise. To date all the whites I have seen look much the same as the original which arose in Michael Hoog's nursery. This 'original' is a very vigorous clone and most of the corms in cultivation are vegetative offspring of this. Seeds are produced quite readily as well and a photograph sent to me this year by a friend in Japan shows that the seeds also give rise to albinos although whether this is always so I do not yet know.

Some interesting Saffron crocuses

Two very interesting autumn crocuses have been sent to me this year, both originating in Iraq. One of them came from a dam construction site in the north east of the country in the upper part of the Great Zab river valley and is not unlike C. hadriaticus. It varies from white to pale dingy lilac to a clear lilac and has 3 short deep red style branches and, unlike all known asiatic members of the Saffron group, it has a deep golden yellow throat. I have not seen it in flower yet, these notes being given to me by a colleague who has flowered and photographed it. He remarks that it differs from his concept of C. hadriaticus in having (and I quote) 'far bigger corms (up to 4 cm), 10 to 14 leaves, a long succession of flowers, segments of firmer texture, a different hue of white, and in the pale lilac forms, which are about 50/50, a much dingier, muddier color than in the quite clear lilac form of C. hadriaticus that I have grown from your seed. Flower shape is also more 'open' than in C. hadriaticus, and above all there is just no comparing the vigour. The Iraq plant increases 4 to 1 and sets masses of seed.'

At least some of these remarks could equally apply to the very vigorous clone of C. hadriaticus ("chrysobelonicus") collected by O.E.P. Wyatt in the Peloponnese which is well established in cultivation here and I can only wait until the corms which he has sent me produce flowers for comparison with C. hadriaticus.

The original collector thought that this plant might be of cultivated origin since it grew in great numbers around villages and in fields.

The other Saffron crocus, also from Iraq, was said to be definitely a cultivated one, in villages around Nineveh and called Saffron by the locals. It is lilac with a deep purple centre and according to the friend who has flowered it it has the general

features of classic saffron except for shorter stigma branches and the fact that it is very fertile (the C. sativus clone generally cultivated in various countries, is sterile). It is clear from the photographs I have seen of this that it is not the same as C. sativus and I await the flowering of the corms with great interest. C. adanensis. Norman Stevens (Cambridge Bulbs) has kindly kept me informed of the progress of his collections of C. adanensis from Turkey. Some have turned out to have flowers with pale yellow throats, and a white has turned up, also a tricoloured form with lilac, white and yellow zones. Thus, yet another species has been shown to vary considerably in wild populations, illustrating just how impossibly difficult they are to key out in a simple manner!

C. biflorus subsp. nubigenus. Dr. Thomas Raus of Berlin sent me a specimen this year which I confirmed as belonging to this subspecies. It was collected on the island of Karpathos which represents an extension of the known range.

C. flavus. Another range extension is that of C. flavus, collected by Dr. D. Reid of Kew in the Beynam Forest near Ankara in Turkey. Previously I had seen no specimens from farther east than Bursa in N.W. Turkey.

Dot Maps

One day in the future I hope to publish distribution (dot) maps for all the Crocus species but, as can be seen from the few notes above, new records are coming in all the time and it would be premature to even consider this for the time being. Meanwhile, if anyone goes travelling and can make definite observations, preferably backed up by a specimen pressed at the time (so as to avoid mix-ups in bulb frames later on!) I'd be pleased to receive new records to this end.

BRIAN MATHEW.