

CROCUS GROUP BULLETIN NO:13Hon Secretary's Notes

Regarding crocuses which will grow in grass, I received the following notes from Dick David of Cambridge:-

"I have tried many of them and can report: (a) Very happy in grass, seeding or otherwise increasing - C. vernus subsp. vernus, C. tommasinianus, C. flavus (true sp.), C. nudiflorus, C. medius, C. goulimyi, C. speciosus, C. pulchellus, (the last almost as free-seeding as C. tommasinianus; why is it now so scarce in commerce and so expensive - I haven't seen a list that prices it at less than 95p a corm). (b) Persisting, but either not increasing or removed because considered inappropriate - C. chrysanthus, C. ancyrensis, C. versicolor (wild plant from S. France), C. fleischeri, C. serotinus, subsp. salzmannii ("C. asturicus atropurpureus"). (c) I never tried C. sieberi, or C. kotschyanus, because I don't particularly like them, but they would probably do".

I have found a list I made here in October 1983, the following were flowering and had persisted for 10 years or so:-

Crocus pulchellus  
pulchellus zephyr  
medius  
nudiflorus

speciosus in various forms  
kotschyanus  
kotschyanus albus  
kotschyanus leucopharynx  
salzmannii and the small form that used to be called clusii but is not the true clusii.

Professor Hewer, on acid soil near Bristol, says C. aureus grows well in grass.

Dick David has also supplied the following notes on Crocus longiflorus:-

"As I told you, I am just back from an expedition to Sicily specifically to see this plant. Though we were sightseeing as well as botanising, we came upon at least one substantial colony of the plant on each of the seven days we were there. It is obviously very widespread on the limestones at least to the west and south of Palermo, and I believe it to be equally common round Messina, Etna and Ragusa. The interesting thing is that although it obviously needs dry conditions, it was always, where we saw it, in some shade: If in the open it was always on north-facing

slopes, generally in maquis and often in quite deep shade of pines or juniper. I have had it for years in my garden(s) and it has had a tendency after some time to dwindle. I am now planting it more or less on the roots of birch trees and we will see what happens".

I feel that I made an awful mess of trying to cancel the visit to Dr. Elliot's and Dr. Rix's gardens last Spring - some people turned up in spite of the weather and absence of crocuses. To avoid future disturbance to our kind hosts and hostesses who might, for instance have the flu and not wish to be bothered, could members intending to come either check by a phone call to me that the visit is 'on' or drop me a postcard in advance so I can let them know if it is cancelled.

Crocus Group finances are still in credit but please continue to bring spare crocuses to any meeting but particularly the March 18th Auction. A quick car boot sale in aid of Group funds is an enormous help and also spreads interesting crocuses to interested growers.

Primose Warburg,  
South Hayes,  
Yarnells Hill,  
Oxford.

OX2 9BG

Telephone Oxford 247883

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PROGRAMME 1985/86

Sunday 13th October 1985

Come to South Hayes, Yarnells Hill, Oxford at 11 am - I will produce coffee and show you round. Bring gumboots if you would like to walk round my wood. Bring a packed lunch and a basket if you would like some windfall apples. We are 2½ miles west of Oxford, marked Botley or North Hinksey on maps, and along an unmarked private road at the summit of Yarnells Hill.

Saturday 22nd February 1986

Mr. and Mrs. Gilbert Barrett have invited us to see their collection of crocuses collected in many instances on walking holidays to places the rest of us have hardly heard of. They have offered us coffee at 11 am at 16, Hamesmoor Way, Mytchett, Camberley, Surrey. Bring your own sandwiches for lunch. Afterwards, Mrs. Joy Bishop, well known in the Alpine Garden Society, will lead us to her garden nearby at Wheelspin, 83, Macdonald Road, Lightwater, Sussex. Amongst her extensive collection of alpines there should be some crocuses in flower.

Sunday 2nd March 1986

Meet at 11 am at the entrance to Wisley R.H.S. Garden. Brian Mathew has kindly agreed to take us round - there should be crocuses in the Alpine meadow if nowhere else.

Tuesday 18th March 1986

Crocus lecture by Brian Mathew at 5.30 pm in R.H.S. New Hall, followed by an auction of crocus corms in aid of Crocus Group funds. Title of lecture not yet decided but it is certain to be worth listening to. Please support the Auction by bringing and buying crocuses.

Crocus:- Miscellaneous notes 1985 Brian Mathew

As usual some extra records have appeared and, I suspect, will go on appearing year after year for a very long time yet; there is an awful lot which we do not know about crocus, not least of all the exact distribution of each species.

Crocus versicolor has turned up as a definite modern record in Corsica. Some corms, collected by Mr. Christian Geoffroy in the region of Bastia and sent to Michael Hoog, flowered this spring and showed a mixture of C. corsicus and C. versicolor; I have seen specimens to confirm the identity of the latter. There is an old herbarium sheet at Kew, prepared by no less a person than George Maw himself, of Crocus corsicus collected on Mte Rotundo in 1870. This too is a mixed gathering with C. versicolor. I had decided against recording this in 'The Crocus' monograph since in times past it was quite normal practice to put more than one collection on a sheet to economise on herbarium paper and space; inevitably this sometimes led to mistakes, especially if one of the labels fell off. However, in this case it appears that my caution was unjustified and C. versicolor should, it seems be added to the Corsican flora.

On the Alpine Garden Society's tour of eastern Turkey in May this year I was delighted to see both C. aeris (= C. biliottii) and C. biflorus ssp. tauri in flower. They are very similar in their floral features but an inspection of the corm tunics showed that the former does have a parallel-fibrous tunic not separating into rings at the

base whereas the latter has a papery tunic with definite rings, characteristic of the C. biflorus and C. chrysanthus group. C. aerius was still in flower on 27th May on the Zigana Pass near the melting snow patches. C. biflorus ssp. tauri, in flower on the Kop Dag Pass one day later, showed considerable variation in flower colour and markings and were very tiny specimens representing the last few by the edge of the snow; it is usually much larger.

On the Kose Pass I found a Crocus in seed which is still puzzling me. I think it must be autumn-flowering in view of the advanced state of the seed capsules. The extraordinary thing about it is the very fine foliage, no more than a millimetre or so wide and almost black in colour. The coarse netted fibres of the corm coat suggest that it is related to or a variant of C. cancellatus but until it flowers (hopefully this Autumn) I really have no firm ideas. There is a possible candidate in C. dianthus, described by K. Koch from Bingol Dag to the south of this area, but the type specimen of this was destroyed when 'we' bombed Berlin during World War II so it is difficult to decide exactly what this name represents. From its latin descriptions I had tentatively put this as a synonym of C. cancellatus. So, I am hoping that this 'mystery' collection from Kose Dag may shed some light on the true identity of C. dianthus (which means 2-flowered). A few corms brought back are now in my bulb frame, hopefully due to flower in Autumn 1985. Even if it turns out to be a fairly 'straight' C. cancellatus it will be interesting in that it will be the most northerly locality that I have

have seen for this species in Turkey.

C. cartwrightianus. On page 56 of 'The Crocus' I mentioned some specimens from the Lebanon which appeared to represent C. cartwrightianus. I, wary as always, suggested that these might be the result of mixed labels in the herbarium. Now, Dr Daoud El Eisauri of Jordan has collected some more, obviously representing C. cartwrightianus, from some nearby localities in Jordan. He says that they are always near archaeological sites so this leads to the speculation that the ancients may have carried this Saffron Crocus with them, planting it whenever they established a settlement. Perhaps a distribution map, when it is plotted, should incorporate archaeological sites as well to see if there is any correlation. If this assumption is correct it is doubtful if we will ever know which is the truly original homeland of C. cartwrightianus.

Dr El Eisauri has also collected more specimens of C. moabiticus in several places in Jordan, demonstrating that this is not quite such a rare and local species as was imagined. However, living material from these collections has not been introduced so it is still barely in cultivation. I have one or two corms from a previous year's collecting and these are not thriving. I suspect that this semi-desert species will not take too readily to our damp sunless climate.

It is always good to hear of a Crocus that is thriving. Christine Skelmersdale of Broadleigh Gardens tells me that C. gargaricus has formed a large patch in her peat garden,

spreading by stolons which indicates that this is subsp. herbertii, the variant which is confined to the Turkish mountain of Ulu Dag. I think that this is now being sold by the nursery. Elizabeth Parker-Jervis also sells a very good form of Crocus gargaricus which came originally from the garden of the late E.A. Bowles. This also has stolons. It is surprising how few of the 90 species are offered in the trade.

Another extension of distribution to note is that of C. biflorus subsp. nubigena. It has now been located on Karpathos island in addition to its known haunts in south west and west Turkey, Lesbos Is., Samos Is. and Ikaria. To conclude on a literary note, it is good to hear that our old favourite, the Handbook of Crocus and Colchicum by E.A. Bowles, is going to be reprinted by Waterstone Press, with some colour photographs added. The nomenclature may be outdated but the cultivation notes and countless stories and observations are worth reading over and over again.