

CROCUS GROUP BULLETIN NO.17

Hon Secretary's Notes

Please could members join with me in a campaign to convince people that there are such things as autumn-flowering Crocuses and they are NOT Colchicums? Things are now so confused that garden centres are selling packets of Crocus corms embellished with pictures of Colchicums. When I tried to complain, politely, in a local garden centre, I was told firmly that people in Holland knew more about autumn Crocuses than I did. I still cannot think of an appropriate reply - any suggestions?

Brian Mathew suggests I ask members to write short notes, for inclusion in a future bulletin, about a particular Crocus, its cultivation, pests, etc. So please could you spend a wet afternoon, for the benefit of other Crocus growers.

Primrose Warburg

PROGRAMME 1989/90

Saturday Oct 21 1989

Come at 11am for a cup of coffee and to see the autumn Crocuses at SOUTH HAYES, YARNELLS HILL, OXFORD, the home of your Hon Sec Primrose Warburg - telephone Oxford 247883 if you intend to come. We are two and a half miles west of Oxford, in North Hinksey or Botley on your map, along the private road at the summit of Yarnells Hill.

Bring a sandwich lunch and any interesting Crocuses you have to show the rest of us. After lunch there will be a small auction of crocus corms in aid of Crocus Group funds. Ray Cobb hopes to provide some spare corms from the national collection and any contributions from members gratefully received. All my Crocuses are grown out-of-doors so come prepared for a country walk,

Sunday November 19th 1989

Mr & Mrs Ray Cobb have kindly invited us to see their Crocuses. Arrive at 11am for a cup of coffee and bring a sandwich lunch. Ray Cobb holds the national collection of Crocuses and they are mostly grown in frames, greenhouse etc, so there should be something to see whatever the weather. Telephone beforehand 0602281525 if you intend to come and please bring any Crocuses you have out in a pot at that time. Their address is: 188 BRAMCOTE LANE, WOLLATON, NOTTINGHAM NG8 2QN

Saturday 24th February 1990

We are invited to visit two very different gardens, the first, that of Mr D.F.Lee at Lemsford, just off the Great North Road, at Welwyn Garden City. Complicated instructions and map will be given with the Spring Bulletin. Arrive there at 11am, coffee will probably be kindly provided. Mr Lee works at MAFF and has unusual ways of growing Crocuses.

When we have seen those Crocuses, Mr Lee will lead us to the garden of the Cambridge nurseryman Mr M.Stevens, at 40 WHITTLESFORD ROAD, NEWTON, Nr CAMBRIDGE. Tel.0223871760 where we can eat our packed lunches and afterwards look around the nursery. There should be a few Crocuses for sale.

Tuesday April 3rd 1990

Annual Crocus Group lecture at 5.30pm in RHS New Hall. The speaker I have asked cannot yet guarantee he will be available - book the date in your diaries and full details will come in the Spring Bulletin. Crocus lecture will be followed by our annual fund-raising auction, so please come and 'bring & buy'.

Primrose Warburg
South Hayes
Yarnells Hill
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MAINTAINING A CROCUS COLLECTION

Most, if not all, the approximately 80 species of Crocus are now in cultivation, admittedly only just in some cases. Much time, effort and expense has gone into acquiring them by travelling in out-of-the-way places and clearly it is in everyone's interest to keep them in cultivation so that they are not lost. Although many of the species are in no immediate danger of extinction in the wild it is nevertheless undesirable to go on and on collecting them unless it is to introduce new forms or to contribute in some way to our overall knowledge, such as their range of variability, distribution, ecology, pollination etc.

As everyone who has tried to maintain a large collection of bulbs knows, it is an extremely difficult job to keep them in good health, well-labelled and un-muddled and with all the correct information about locality etc. Botanically speaking it is worse to have a live plant with the wrong information than a dead one with the correct details! However careful one is, sooner or later labels become lost or mixed, or seedlings appear in the wrong place and take over from the original occupant of that particular spot. A short while ago, I saw a collection of Habranthus and

Zephyranthes where the weedy *H. tubispathus* (*andersonii*) had seeded freely into all the other pots, the rarer less easily grown species had died and the result was a row of pots of the common one under several different names!

Another problem which occurs is that of hybridisation. In the wild the species of one genus are often separated physically and there is no chance of hybridisation taking place, but when brought together as a collection in cultivation there might well be all sorts of goings-on, as with, for example, certain groups of *Iris* where it is almost impossible to keep the true species. Fortunately for *Crocus* enthusiasts hybridisation between distinct species is a rare event so that particular problem scarcely arises.

So how do we go about keeping a valuable collection in good condition? I am not sure that I know the answer, and I am partly writing this to try to spark off a discussion through the medium of our Bulletin as to the best methods to employ. I can, however, make a few observations with which you may or may not agree.

Quite a number of *Crocus* species do well in the open ground and for ornamental purposes this is the best place for them. However, if they represent valuable wild source material, there is a risk involved in leaving them out to fend for themselves against cats, mice, birds, and the weather. Growing them individually in pots is a much safer method of keeping track of them but there is very much more work involved and on the whole they do not do quite so well in my experience. Perhaps planting into a bulb frame is the answer. Certainly they mostly thrive, apart from the few which require cooler damper situations but there are still problems! How often one sees messy bulb frames with labels and corms lying around and little hope of sorting them out again, and in the near-ideal conditions seedlings often appear (usually in the wrong place) unless one religiously collects all the capsules before they dehisce. I suppose it is all a matter of availability of TIME - time to repot, fuss over detail, hand pollinate, gather seeds, propagate, make lists and send out to friends, dig up the spares, pack them and post them off - need I go on, since you all know what I mean?!

There is probably no perfect answer but please let us have some exchange of ideas about how to set about maintaining a collection of several hundred separate acquisitions of *Crocuses* without ending up with *Crocus* stew!

BRIAN MATHEW