

## CROCUS GROUP SPRING 1991

This is just a reminder to make sure you have entered these events in your 1991 diary.

### Sunday 17 February 1991

Mr & Mrs Ray Cobb have kindly invited us to see their Crocuses. Arrive at 11am for a cup of coffee and bring a packed lunch. Ray Cobb holds the National Collection of Crocuses and whatever the weather there should be flowers to see in frames, greenhouses, etc. Telephone beforehand 0602 281 525 if you intend to come. Their address is: 188 Bramcote Lane, Wollaton, Nottingham NG8 2QN. On receipt of a SAE they will send you a map.

### Tuesday 19 February 1991

Annual Crocus Group lecture at 5.30pm, in RHS New Hall, will be given by Brian Mathew, on "Mediterranean Crocuses". This will be followed by our annual fundraising Crocus Auction, so please come and 'bring and buy'. Brian Mathew needs no introduction to Crocus enthusiasts so make a large note in your diary.

### Saturday 16 March 1991

Regretfully the visits planned for this date to Mr R Bagnalls garden and Maidwell Hall have had to be cancelled owing to losses in last year's heat.

### Sunday 24 March 1991

Mr & Mrs K & M Dryden have invited us to visit their garden. This is a great honour - Kath's exhibits at shows are legendary! Come at 11 am to:- 'Berries', 30 Sheering Lower Road, Sawbridgeworth, Herts CM21 9LF. Telephone beforehand if you intend to come as we have been offered coffee on arrival. This is a garden where there is certain to be a lot to see and greenhouses etc to shelter in if the drought is over.

Primrose Warburg  
South Hayes  
Yarnells Hill  
Oxford OX2 9BG  
Tel: Oxford 247883

CROCUS CANDIDUS CLARKE AND ITS ALLIES IN NORTH-WESTERN TURKEY

No fewer than five taxa of Crocus series Flavi are to be found north or south of the Sea of Marmora between Istanbul and the Dardanelles. Crocus flavus itself and Crocus olivieri are widespread on both sides of the water. Crocus olivieri subspecies istanbulensis and C. antalyensis are Asiatic only and occur at the east end of the area, the former very locally. Crocus candidus, first found in 1806 on Kaz Dag (Trojan Paris' Mount Ida), appears to be confined to the Troad. (Two further members of the series, Crocus flavus subsp. dissectus and Crocus olivieri subsp. balansae, are near neighbours to the south, but are not to be discussed here).

Taxonomists have been in something of a muddle. E A Bowles, in his Handbook, reports that he received from Van Tubergen a yellow form, var. sub-flavus, of the generally white Crocus candidus, and that 'pale yellow and deep orange forms are now in cultivation, some which produce both white and yellow seedlings'. He also opined that a yellow-flowered crocus collected by Sintenis at Thymbra in the valley of the Scamander, and Herbert's Crocus lagenaeiflorus from Kurchunlu Tepe (the Schliemann site 32 km east of Ezine), were both Crocus candidus. Of the Thymbra specimens (at Kew and in the British Museum) some are white and obviously Crocus candidus, others are yellow and appear to be Crocus flavus, as is the Kurchunlu specimen. As for 'var sub-flavus', Mathew has declared that this is Crocus olivieri, but that Crocus olivieri may hybridise with the closely related Crocus candidus. If this is true, it might account for Bowles' mixed seedlings, though it is not clear whether the two colours provably derived from a single seed-parent or from a mixed population.

The existence of these problems, as well as the undoubted beauty of Crocus candidus and its oddly limited distribution, had for long stimulated my curiosity, and in early 1990 I decided that it was time to satisfy it. On March 6, therefore, having enlisted my ornithologist son-in-law as chauffeur, I flew to Istanbul. The timing of the exercise had given rise to much heart-searching. Mathew gives dates of flowering as follows: C. flavus March-April; C. olivieri February-April, with subspecies istanbulensis March; C. candidus and C. antalyensis February-March. C. olivieri subspecies istanbulensis we failed to find: the Tasdelen Forestry Centre we did discover, but the original recorder's direction - "above Tasdelen, 150 m" - was hard to interpret, for anything "above Tasdelen" was at least 200 m. The other four taxa, however, we saw in great abundance and full flower, though we would want to revise the estimates of their flowering times.

After a night in Istanbul and an anxious half-hour wondering whether we were doomed to drive for ever round the Istanbul ring-road without finding an exit, we got into the route along the northern shore of the Sea of Marmora towards Gallipoli. At 12 Km beyond Tekirdag the metalled road ceases, but we persevered and beside the very rough and hilly track between Kumbag and Yenikoy

we sighted our first crocus, C.flavus, in quantity. At Murefte we were back in civilisation, and on moorland north of Sarkoy the chauffeur received his first reward, a close and leisurely look at an Imperial Eagle - so much better than a Golden!

We crossed the Dardanelles by ferry to Canakkale to find that our pre-booked hotel was under total refit; but the bedrooms were fine, the staff helpful and jolly, and the taverna recommended in place of the closed dining-room was superb - crowded, noisy, but the food incredibly good and wonderfully cheap. An evening recce up the road towards Lapseki brought us Crocus flavus again and a very broad-leaved form of C.olivieri, one flowering plant bearing only a single leaf, a character that, according to Mathew, is 'very rare' in C.olivieri but common in C.candidus.

Next day we found that crocus-hunters in this area are nowadays faced with an unexpected problem. The literature reports that Crocus candidus is commonest about Canakkale and Lapseki; but a new road has been constructed between the two, much nearer the coast than the old one which appears to have been largely suppressed. Maps all contradict each other and none seems to represent the present position. Despite repeated attempts we never succeeded in reaching the appropriate areas or finding the crocus, though C.flavus appeared frequently.

Crocus candidus was, however, abundant to the south and east, around Ezine and beside the road from Canakkale to Can. We saw it in seven distinct sites and in all of them it was on north-facing or north-west-facing slopes, often under pine or oak, and in quite damp, leaf-mouldy but gritty soils. The best of the colonies was 33.5 km along the road to Can and here, while I studied the many hundreds of plants between 155 and 400 metres, the ornithologist got another 'first' in the shape of a pair of Krüper's Nuthatch refurbishing their home against the mating season.

Crocus candidus' preference for north-facing slopes, and the fact that it was in perfect condition while C.flavus and C.olivieri, in their more open sites, were beginning to go over, suggest that some modification is necessary in Mathew's account, both as to time of flowering and as to cultivation. For my two or three collected corms I shall avoid a 'sunny position' and 'thorough ripening' and plant in shade.

While this crocus was not found outside Canakkale province, Crocus olivieri, seen there in three places, cropped up again in Bursa when we moved east, and once more in Bilecik. It is certainly a very variable plant both in flower-colour (from lemon to orange) and in breadth of leaf. One form, seen near Ezine, had leaves as narrow as those of C.flavus and for a moment I thought that we had come upon subspecies dissectus outside its known range.

The complete absence of any 'long brown neck of old cataphylls' persuaded me that what we had found must belong to Crocus olivieri and Brian Mathew has since confirmed the determination. The total opposition between the ecological conditions preferred by the white Crocus candidus and the yellow C. olivieri has convinced me that the two are justifiably ranked as separate species. On the question of hybridisation we could find no evidence either way. I trust that any member of the Crocus Group obtaining white seedlings from C. olivieri or yellow seedlings from C. candidus will report it.

The highlight of the trip was Crocus antalyensis, and this we should have missed had we not been told (correctly?) that the car-ferry from Yalova, by which we had planned to return from Bursa to Istanbul, did not run in the off-season. We therefore drove the long way round via Bilecik and Izmit, and seized the opportunity to follow the direction in Davis' Flora of Turkey: '3 km from Tahtakopru to Domanic, 800 m'. When these coordinates coincided I called 'Stop' and, opening the car door, looked up at the bank beside the road and was immediately hit by a blaze of light purple. It would have been a prime example for the botanist's guidebook that John Raven and I planned but never wrote, and which was to have been called 'You Needn't Get Out'. Crocus antalyensis is indeed a spectacular plant, and was there abundant on a shelf of long grass flattened and dampened by recent snow-lie. It would be a glorious garden plant, and Mathew claims that it is easy to grow; but I cannot think that the Tahtakopru habitat would be easy to reproduce.

R W DAVID