

CROCUS GROUP BULLETIN NO 24

Patron:	Brian Mathew	Summer 1996
Committee:	Ray Cobb	
	Alan Edwards	Members: 117
Seed Exchange:	David Stephens	UK: 100
Secretary:	Ann Borrill	Overseas: 17

The Crocus Group owes its development over the last 21 years to the hard work of Primrose Warburg who, as Hon Sec, President, Treasurer and General Manager has nursed it to its present healthy position. Primrose has decided that the time has come to retire, and we all owe her a debt of gratitude for her achievement in bringing together devotees of the genus.

The opportunity was taken at the Spring Crocus Lecture to present Primrose, on behalf of the Group, with a painting by the late Rear Admiral Paul Furse of various cultivars of *Crocus biflorus*. This was made possible by the generosity of Kath Dryden.

As members who have visited South Hayes know, Primrose has a fine collection of crocuses and has been instrumental in maintaining a number of the rarer species and cultivars including *C. caspius* from the Furse introduction, the white flowered form of *C. longiflorus* and *C. olivieri* *balansae* 'Chocolate Soldier': all without a single pot or pane of glass!!

Primrose of course remains a member of the Crocus Group, and we look forward to seeing her and sharing experiences at the garden visits and other events organized by the Crocus Group. It is of course totally impossible to replace someone like Primrose, so we shall try to struggle through with a team of 5!!! RC

What is the Crocus Group

Historically, a splinter group from the British Iris Society Species Group, the Crocus Group is a very loose assemblage of people with a shared interest in the genus *Crocus*. The Group has no constitution and there is no subscription for membership. There is a joining fee of £5 and the Group occasionally asks members for a donation to contribute toward its modest running costs, which are mainly postal charges. The main activities of the Group are:-

1. Production of a Bulletin and Newsletter.
2. Arranging Spring and Autumn visits to Crocus collections.
3. A sale/auction of Crocus corms.
4. A seed exchange.
5. An award (the Crocus Spoon) for best Crocus in an AGS show.

Group Secretary

Ann Borrill has agreed to handle the secretarial duties of the Group, so any membership issues, copy for the bulletin and other Group issues should be addressed to her at:-

Ann Borrill
153 Lime Tree Avenue
Wymondham Norfolk NR18 0TG UK

The Crocus Spoon

This has been awarded annually since 1991, the recipients were:-

1991	- David King	- 'Bowles White'	- Early Spring
1992	- Rod & Jane Leeds	- pestalozzae	- Early Spring
1993	- Rod & Jane Leeds	- medius	- Sussex
1994	- Dr T C Smale	- vernus albiflorus	- Early Spring
1995	- Maureen Ledgerton	- vernus albiflorus	- Loughborough
1996	- Rod & Jane Leeds	- pestalozzae	- Kent

Rod & Jane now have enough spoons for a tea service, so it is incumbent on other Group members to give them some competition.

Corm Sale/Auction

We have until now held an annual auction of Crocus material to help contribute to Group funds. The more money that can be made in this way, the less need there will be to ask for the occasional donation. We have no annual membership subscription, nor do we wish for one, so the costs of the Bulletin and seed exchange are funded from this source.

Traditionally, the auction has been held in the Spring after the Crocus lecture in the RHS Halls in London.

This is of course probably the worst time to hold an auction of Crocus corms, being in the middle of the growing season.

The more logical time is during the dormant period for Crocus which can just about be extended to October and the Crocus Group Autumn Garden Visit.

Most of us replot sometime during the late summer, and if you keep your spare corms in only just moist peat or similar material, you can bring them along on Sunday October 20th 1996.

We shall also try making it a sale of corms with the donor and the Group taking half the profit each. Any rare or specially desirable corms can still be auctioned.

So please bag up your spare corms now. If you would like to donate corms to be sold, but cannot make it to the Autumn visit, then kindly send to David Stephens, Sherwood, Bunce Common Road, Leigh, Surrey, RH2 8NS UK before 20th October 1996.

Seed Exchange 1996

This year has seen the fifth seed exchange organized by the Crocus Group and as in previous years this has been bigger and more successful than previously. The 1996 seed list saw 60% of all recognized Crocus taxa listed and in the 5 years since the list started 75% of all taxa have been offered. If we carry on at this rate of success, it is foreseeable that seed of most, if not all, Crocus will be listed every year. Certainly, if we could get to the stage where we routinely list seed of the rarer and less common forms in cultivation then this would be a most worthwhile objective to aid conservation by cultivation. Details of how the seed exchange operates will be given in the Spring Newsletter, for the moment, get out the paintbrushes and get set for a full season of hand pollination, particularly of those rarer taxa.

Crocus Notes

1. Dr Kerndorff tells us that he and Erich Pasche have found another taxa in the biflorus aggregate to be called biflorus fibroannulatus.

2. Most references to kotschyanus leucopharynx state that it is of unknown wild origin. I have had it turn up more than once in batches of seed sown from ordinary kotschyanus kotschyanus, so I would suggest that this is how it originated in the first instance, as a routine 'sport'.DBS

NCCPG National Crocus Collections

There are currently three NCCPG National Collections of Crocus:-

Ray Cobb
David Stephens
Wisley Gardens(Gill Skilton)

The NCCPG does not limit how many persons can hold a National Collection, and indeed, the more the better in the interests of conservation by cultivation and distributing correct material. On this principle we would urge more members to seek to become National Collection holders. Of course you already need to have a substantial Crocus collection of your own, and be willing and able to meet some fairly strict criteria imposed by the NCCPG.

If you have the necessary attributes, Ray and David would be happy to sponsor your application and help you build up your collection. Persons who are willing to build and maintain a comprehensive collection, even a partial one (i.e autumn or spring taxa only) can and will keep meticulous records, and will conduct research into the genus should apply.

A Crocus Trip to Turkey Spring 1996 by Ray Cobb

Although I had seen a number of crocus species flowering in the wild I had not until this spring seen a golden yellow species. An opportunity to rectify this was provided by a brief trip to SW Turkey with David Stephens in March. Weather conditions, which can profoundly affect the success of an expedition, were ideal. We arrived, shaken but not stirred, high on Goktepe to find *C. gargaricus gargaricus* in splendid condition flowering just below the snow. The plants were growing on a rocky slope which had been deforested recently, and elsewhere at woodland margins. At a lower altitude than *C.gargaricus* we found a complex population of *C.biflorus* some of which appeared to be *C.b.isauricus* in both blue and white forms with yellow anthers, with or without grey connectives. Among these were plants with black anthers again in both blue and white forms variously striped and feathered and these would key out as *C.B.nubigena*. Some other individuals had greyish anthers and could not be allocated to either subspecies. Two other species were also found, *C.chrysanthus* in a pale yellow form was rather scarce, perhaps past its flowering time. Also there was a fine form of *C.fleischeri* generously blotched with purple on the outside.RC

Crocus cvijicii and *Crocus pelistericus* in Greece by Alan Edwards

Lunchtime on May 8th this year found my wife and I in an idyllic setting at c.2000m+ on a ridge of Mt Vermion, above Tri Pigadia in NE Greece. We were enjoying a picnic adjacent to a dense patch of *C.cvijicii* roughly the size of a tennis court, with a bottle of the local Naousa wine chilling invitingly in a nearby snowdrift. A gentle sun-warmed breeze wafted the fragrance from uncountable thousands of golden chalices in our direction whilst squadrons of bumble-bees pursued their pollinating activities with great enthusiasm. For years I had imagined *C.cvijicii* might be found in small patches at the edge of melting snow. The reality was to find entire mountain sides on Mt Vermion tinted orange, rather like the effect created by gorse in bloom on a Surrey heath. All morning we had walked among millions of *C.cvijicii* expecting to find some variation in colour, but surprisingly there was none, save that we were lucky enough to find just three albinos with purple-stained tubes. From the top of Mt. Vermion one can look down on a vast expanse of beech forest which in early May was in leaf up to c.1000m but still bare above that level with snow lingering among the trees on the north facing slopes. Away to the north our gaze became focused on another montane area, the snow capped Voras Range which effectively marks the frontier between the Greek province of Macedonia and the Republic of Macedonia in the southern part of former Yugoslavia. The Voras Range for years out of bounds for military reasons is now accessible and it was there just two days later that we came upon the holy grail of Crocophiles, the legendary *C.pelistericus*. As with *C.cvijicii* I had contemplated the possibility, if we were very fortunate, of finding this species in very modest numbers among the melting snow. Instead we stepped out of our car at 2300m after an arduous drive up a gravel road and within a few yards found ourselves at the edge of a purple carpet stretching for approximately half a kilometre along both sides of a placid stream which flowed between snow-streaked mountain flanks. Without the crocuses we could have been in a glen in the Scottish highlands. I recall vividly, standing mesmerised for a time as I came to terms with the sight of a *Crocus en masse* that I had never seen previously, except for the fine water colour rendering in Brian's monograph. The beauty of *C.pelistericus* defies adequate description. The shapely deep purple segments were open just enough under a slight overcast to reveal that some specimens had white and others had orange-yellow styles. The segments possess a reflective sheen which is further enhanced by the drabness of the surrounding vegetation - mainly bleached tussock grass and carex which had just emerged soggly from a mantle of snow. One cannot genuflect too long before *C.pelistericus* if one wishes to avoid sinking rather rapidly into the surrounding slough and photography at close quarters has of necessity to be conducted very swiftly indeed. The companion vegetation which for example contained a pinguicula species, indicated that this was a habitat that remained wet throughout the growing season. The grass-like foliage of *C.pelistericus* which lacks a white median line, persists for many months until falling temperatures lock up any available moisture for the duration of the severe Balkan winter. The seed capsule is borne on a c.10cm stem to maximise distribution among the dense grass and carex and during our visit we found vast quantities of last

season's seed lying everywhere like miniature garnets. Much of it was just starting to germinate. In cultivation the species is best grown on a moist peat bed or kept in a pot standing in a saucer of water through the summer. *C.veluchensis* was also present in great abundance, but showed a marked preference for the comparatively drier ground around the periphery of the *C.pelistericus* drifts. In places the two species were separated only by the stream, but invariably *C.veluchensis* was to be found on the side with a southerly aspect.AE

Note. Jim Archibald, Norman Stevens and Robert Rolfe were at the same location as Alan exactly one month later, and they report that *C.pelistericus* grows in vast numbers at higher altitudes which were still snow covered when Alan was there. By seed from these trips it is hopeful that we shall see *C.pelistericus* become well established in cultivation in the near future. Now we understand that it grows in waterlogged bogs we stand a better chance of establishing it. Alan is not joking when he says the pot should be stood in a saucer of water for the summer.DBS

Crocuses in Crete by Peter Bird

In the company of Mike Salmon and Chris Lovell, I spent the last two weeks of April 1996 on Crete and one of our many intentions was to search out the species of *Crocus* that occur on the island. For those not familiar with the geography of Crete it is long and thin, about 300km from east to west and at its widest is no more than 55km. Three great mountain blocks rise steeply to heights of 2453m, 2456m and 2148m and this rapid change in altitude offers many varied habitats for species of *Crocus*. We found *C.laevigatus* all over the island from virtually sea level up to around 1300m, some of which may well have been *C.boryi* but without seeing the flowers it is not easy to differentiate between the two. *C.tournefortii* was restricted to the eastern end and to around 400m. Mount Psiloritis, the central peak of the three, provided some interesting results. It is possible to drive up this mountain along a paved road for about 20km starting from the village of Anogia. Within a few hundred metres we found *C.laevigatus* and they continued up to at least 1250m where they mingled with *C.sieberi*. At a height of 1500m a further examination revealed no *C.laevigatus* but instead, *C.oreocreticus* was mixed with the *C.sieberi*. The Omalos Plateau at around 1100m provided both *C.laevigatus* and *C.sieberi*, more often than not growing together. However, our most rewarding experience concerned *C.cartwrightianus*. We knew from reports that it existed on the Akrotiri peninsular to the east of Chania and we duly found several populations without difficulty at around 100m. Our travels then took us further west and we found this species on five further sites. Of these, three were at the expected altitude of around 100m but the other two were at 500m one being fairly close to the sea, the other well inland. From this experience it would appear that *C.cartwrightianus* occurs all along the north coast of the island westwards from Chania and further expeditions may well prove this correct.PB

Sunday 20th October 1996

come to the National Crocus Collection held by David Stephens where also the crocuses grown by Alan Edwards will be on display, then on to the Crocus Collection held at Wisley Gardens and then we will hold the corm sale.

1100 arrive at David Stephens
Sherwood
Bunce Common Road
Leigh Surrey tel.01306 611420

then we go on to Wisley Gardens where Gill Skilton will meet us at 1300 at the front gates and take us behind the scenes.

Sunday 9th February 1997

you are welcome to return to the gardens visited in the autumn to see the Spring Crocuses. Details and times are the same.

Sunday 16th February 1997

come to the other National Crocus Collection held by Ray Cobb.

1030 arrive at Ray Cobb
188 Bramcote Lane
Wollaton Nottingham tel.0115 928 1525