

Crocus Group Bulletin No 25

Summer 1997

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	Alan Edwards	Overseas	31
Secretary	Ann Borrill		
Editor	David Stephens		

Millennium

As far as can be gleaned from the records and memories of founding members, the millennium year 1999 is also the 25th anniversary of The Crocus Group. Although Bulletin No 1 (written by Brian Mathew when a mere seedling) was issued in Autumn 1975, Primroses Crocus Group journal shows that the seminal moment when the words 'Crocus Group' were used to define a distinguishable unit (taxon!) within the British Iris Society Species Group was actually in Autumn 1974.

The Committee had the thought that it would be fitting to try to organize something special to mark this anniversary. We do not know what type of event, and it will take a lot of organizing, but what about a Crocus Group trip to somewhere of interest to Crocophiles. If we can arrange a long weekend or a short trip of one week maximum at a reasonable price, how many of you would be interested in going. We may even think of a venue and each make our own way there, which would allow our overseas members to participate. What about spring Crocus in Turkey, or autumn Crocus in Spain, the possibilities are endless.

If this is going to happen we need to get an idea of those members who would, in principle, like to join us (most of your committee will almost certainly go along) If you think you would like to join in, then write to **Ann Borrill, 153 Lime Tree Avenue, Wymondham, Norfolk, NR18 0TG.UK**

Primrose Warburg - a memory from an old friend

On returning from a holiday in Crete, the first message on the answerphone was Primrose congratulating me on organizing a lecture and the manner of my thanks to the lecturer. It could equally well have been Primrose commenting that my thanks was as long as the lecture !!

It was in December 1964 whilst travelling from Beirut to Damascus that I saw some pink flowers. Later, a dried specimen was shown to various people including Chris Brickell, but no name was forthcoming! I was despatched to see Heff Warburg at South Hayes, 'ah yes, it is Crocus', no problem.

The next spring Heff died and in due time I received a typical Primrose response to my condolences, after which we became friends. Heff had been the botanist and gardener but Primrose was to grow a far wider range of plants, adding climbing and old fashioned roses, salix, snowdrops in abundance, fritillaries and all manner of other rarities. They were fed on fresh pony manure, given endless kindness and responded with glorious abandon in flowering.

I have a feeling that most of the Crocus were planted by Heff and that is why Primrose was devoted to them. Certainly the naturalized autumn crocus had been planted by him, and in Autumn 1996, after nearly forty years, they were as dense as any wild stand.

Primrose, whilst appearing initially brusque or seemingly hostile, had immense kindness which showed itself to the individual visitor, the old and infirm, and although intensely fond of her family I half suspect that even they could be treated a bit like some of the visitors!! **R.D.N**

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Recognized taxa in the genus *Crocus*

Since Brian Mathew published his monograph of the genus *Crocus* in 1982, new taxa have been discovered and described. No serious challenge has been made to Brian's treatment of the taxonomy of the genus in the intervening years, so a list of recognized taxa at specific and subspecific level at the current time would consist of those recognized in the monograph (with two qualifications) plus the addition of those new taxa which have gained general acceptance. The two qualifications are:-

boisseri - which continues to elude rediscovery

hermoneus palaestinus - which is doubtfully separable from the type

The new taxa are:-

biflorus albocoronatus/biflorus fibroannulatus/biflorus wattiorum
gargaricus herbertii/kerndorffiorum/mathewii/paschei

There are therefore 123 recognized sp. and ssp. in the genus *Crocus*. David B Stephens August 1997

1 abantensis	42 caspius	83 nudiflorus
2 adanensis	43 chrysanthus	84 ochroleucus
3 aeriis	44 corsicus	85 olivieri balansae
4 alatavicus	45 cvijicii	86 olivieri istanbulensis
5 aleppicus	46 cyprius	87 olivieri olivieri
6 almebensis	47 dalmaticus	88 oreocreticus
7 ancyrensis	48 danfordiae	89 pallasii dispathaceus
8 angustifolius	49 etruscus	90 pallasii haussknechtii
9 antalyensis	50 flavus dissectus	91 pallasii pallasii
10 asumaniae	51 flavus flavus	92 pallasii turcicus
11 autranii	52 fleischeri	93 paschei
12 banaticus	53 gargaricus gargaricus	94 pelistericus
13 baytopiorum	54 gargaricus herbertii	95 pestalozzae
14 biflorus adamii	55 gilanicus	96 pulchellus
15 biflorus albocoronatus	56 goulmyi	97 reticulatus hittiticus
16 biflorus alexandri	57 graveolens	98 reticulatus reticulatus
17 biflorus artvinensis	58 hadriaticus	99 robertianus
18 biflorus biflorus	59 hartmannianus	100 sativus
19 biflorus crewei	60 hermoneus	101 scardicus
20 biflorus fibroannulatus	61 hyemalis	102 scharojanii
21 biflorus isauricus	62 imperati imperati	103 serotinus clusii
22 biflorus melantherus	63 imperati suaveolens	104 serotinus salzmannii
23 biflorus nubigena	64 karduchorum	105 serotinus serotinus
24 biflorus pseudonubigena	65 kerndorffiorum	106 sieberi atticus
25 biflorus pulchricolor	66 korolkowii	107 sieberi nivalis
26 biflorus punctatus	67 kosaninii	108 sieberi sieberi
27 biflorus stridii	68 kotschyannus cappadocicus	109 sieberi sublimis
28 biflorus tauri	69 kotschyannus hakkariensis	110 sieheanus
29 biflorus wattiorum	70 kotschyannus kotschyannus	111 speciosus ilgazensis
30 biflorus weldenii	71 kotschyannus suworowianus	112 speciosus speciosus
31 boryi	72 laevigatus	113 speciosus xantholaimos
32 boulosii	73 leichtlinii	114 thomasii
33 cambessedesii	74 longiflorus	115 tommasinianus
34 cancellatus cancellatus	75 malyi	116 tournefortii
35 cancellatus damascenus	76 mathewii	117 vallicola
36 cancellatus lycius	77 medius	118 veluchensis
37 cancellatus mazziaricus	78 michelsonii	119 veneris
38 cancellatus pamphylicus	79 minimus	120 vernus albiflorus
39 candidus	80 moabiticus	121 vernus vernus
40 carpetanus	81 nevadensis	122 versicolor
41 cartwrightianus	82 niveus	123 vitellinus

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Crocus Notes

In the Spring Newsletter Ray Cobb had a short piece about a speciosus xantholaimos form which has white anthers and speculated on the origin of this. Erich Pasche wrote in to explain that as the plants in question had been grown from his seed it is highly likely that the plant is a cross between speciosus xantholaimos and pulchellus which grow in close proximity in Erich's greenhouse. I know several people who grow this plant and I and they will vouch that it is no worse for being a cross and is a very satisfactory plant which will likely grow well outside. **DBS**

Status of the National Collections As most of you will know, there are three collections of Crocus in the UK which are recognized as having National Collection status by the NCCPG. The NCCPG has its own criteria for this status, but suffice it to say that the three collection holders (two owners and one custodian) have the primary intention of maintaining as comprehensive a collection of the genus as possible and co-operating with each other to keep that intention by sharing material. We are fostering a fourth collection which will achieve full status in a few years when that collection is more mature. The three collection holders submit the following reports regarding their respective collections:-

Ray Cobb - who has been collecting Crocus for over forty years and has the oldest and most venerable of the collections writes:- Mine consists of some 74 sp. and 50 ssp though these numbers are influenced by the validity of some of the names given to certain taxa. In addition there are at least 7 primary interspecific hybrids and, of course many colour forms and geographical variants of horticultural if not botanic significance. Of the 'missing' taxa, most of these have been grown at some stage in the past and have been passed on to other collections. The philosophy here is to concentrate on producing seed of rarer taxa rather than to try to maintain a comprehensive collection. As a result of this policy seeds have been produced of cc. almehensis, biflorus artvinensis, hartmannianus and michelsonii. The only taxon which is urgently needed is biflorus wattiorum. Seed production is an important part of conservation. Of the plants grown here in bulb frames only the autumn flowering taxa set seed reliably. The spring flowering taxa require alpine house treatment with hand pollination. Vegetative increase of clones which do not normally divide remains one of the main problems of crocus cultivation.

Wisley - custodian Gill Skilton writes:- The collection now comprises 873 accessions of 115 sp. and ssp and 68 cultivars. The collection has expanded considerably over the last few years and we get closer to the target of maintaining a comprehensive collection. The following taxa are 'missing' :- almehensis, antalyensis, autranii, biflorus ssp albocoronatus, artvinensis, punctatus, stridii, fibroannulatus, boulosii, flavus dissectus, graveolens, hartmannianus, hermoneus palaestinus, kotschyanus hakkariensis, mathewii, moabiticus, pallasii haussknechtii, scardicus, sieberi nivalis, sieheanus, speciosus ilgazensis.

David Stephens - who writes:- my collection now comprises 1218 accessions and only two taxa are totally missing. These are two of the recently described biflorus ssp namely albocoronatus and wattiorum. I have made a serious effort during this years repotting to discard from the collection any material which is not of known provenance or is not 'special' for other reasons. It is hard work maintaining a comprehensive collection so a decision had to be taken as to what will be allowed admittance. My criteria is influenced by the fact that should any scientific work be done on plants then it is imperative that the origin of the plant should be known so that valid conclusions can be drawn about plants in the wild, therefore only plants of known wild provenance will be admitted. Like Ray I am striving to produce seed of the rarer taxa for distribution in the hope that this will help to take away the demand for wild collection of corms in commercial numbers.

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Annual Sale/Auction of Crocus Corms

As you all know, the Crocus Group does not have an annual subscription. The need for money is very limited and consists mainly of stationery supplies and costs of postage. What little money we do need is raised in two ways. Firstly we have an annual sale/auction of members spare corms which should be brought along to the autumn visit on Sunday 26th October 1997 at Ann Borrill's place(details below). You will all have probably either finished or be close to finishing repotting so keep your spares dry and cool and bring them along to keep the Crocus Group afloat a bit longer. The second method is rarely used, but if we get seriously low on funds we have a direct appeal to members.

Seed Exchange

As I write this the annual effort involved in the seed exchange is just ending and members seeds will be posted with this bulletin. This is the fifth successive year of the seed exchange and it has got so big and successful that I shall probably need help in future years. This year there were well over 200 seed accessions of nearly 65% of the 123 recognized taxa including such rarities as biflorus sspp punctatus and stridii, gilanicus, mathewii, michelsonii, pelistericus, sieheanus and veneris. Seed which used to be rare such as abantensis, adanensis, antalyensis, alatavicus (I'll stop with the 'a's') are now quite commonplace in the seed exchange, which is ample proof of the fact that our intention of getting all known taxa of Crocus into cultivation whilst not supporting commercial collection of wild corms is working. Would all members please make an effort to donate in future, it is difficult to get seed set on a lot of Crocus but keep the paintbrush in use and who knows, particularly if you grow some of the rarer taxa .

Garden Visits

Autumn - where the corm Auction will also take place, so bring your spares

Sunday 26th October 1997 - we have been invited to visit our Secretary Ann Borrill at:-
153 Lime Tree Avenue, Wymondham, Norfolk - telephone her on 01953 605709 if you intend to go and to get directions. Do not forget your packed lunch. Arrive at 1100.

Spring

Sunday 22nd February 1998 - we have been invited to visit the gardens of Rod and Jane Leeds and Chris Grey-Wilson. Arrive at 1100 at Rod and Jane's at 'Chestnuts' Whelp Street, Preston St Mary, Sudbury, Suffolk - telephone them on 01787 247627 if you intend to go and to get directions. We will eat our packed lunches there and then go on to arrive at 1400 at Chris Grey-Wilson's at 'The Black House', Fenstead End, nr Hawkdedon, Bury St Edmunds.

Greece in late April - 1997. Steve and Val Keeble

Our 1997 trip was planned around re-visiting sites found during an autumn trip five years previously, and also around various walks, which we found in 'Trekking in Greece' by Marc Dubin ISBN 0-86442-159-1. The weather was unstable, fine but never clear days alternating with rainy and misty ones.

We first headed for the Mani, taking a detour to drive to above the ski centre on Mt Menalo, where we noted sparse *Crocus chrysanthus* growing along with *Anemone blanda*, which was variable and included some good dark blue forms. The spring flowers on the Mani were superb - annuals, scrub (Euphorbia, Salvia) and orchids. Despite knowing various crocus locations only one substantial seed collection was made, this being from a large colony of white *Crocus niveus* beside the concrete track leading down to Charoudas, S of Pirgos Dirou. We were surprised at the amount of development, particularly in that the many ruined tower houses had been renovated. Next on to Monemvasia, where we re-located the site of *Crocus goulimyi* var. *leucanthus*. The site was not easily recognised, scrub surrounding it having grown. The population was much reduced, factors being the scrub, herbicide on the verges, and possibly more efficient cultivation of the field formerly containing the majority. This field contained a rough crop of barley, which made the situation difficult to assess. Consequently only a few seeds were obtained. The widespread use of herbicide nearby, (identified as Gramoxone from discarded containers) suggest that the site may be doomed.

Our next destination was the footpath up to the refuge on Mt. Taygetos. Our way was barred by deep snow half way along, but we did find *Crocus sieberi* ssp. *nivalis*, very few were in flower. Also vast quantities of *Cyclamen repandum* just beginning to flower. Hardly any evidence of the previous seasons flowering on the *Galanthus reginae-olgae*. From here we went on to Stemnitsa, from where we followed the dramatic walk down the gorge of the Lusios river. No crocus but nice pale pink *Anemone pavonina* and lots of *Cyclamen hederifolium*.

We particularly wanted to find *Crocus sieberi* ssp. *sublimis* var. *tricolor*, so had included a visit to Mt. Killini (Ziria). We stayed in the village of Ano Trikala. Our attempt to find the path failed and we spent some time exploring dense forest before escaping by climbing up to a high point and taking a compass bearing onto a visible patch of track. In the forest we found the crocus, mixed in with *C. oliveri*. Both were flowering beside patches of melting snow along with interesting purplish forms of *Anemone blanda* and unidentified species of *Romulea*, *Ranunculus* and *Fritillaria*. On reaching the track, we followed it up to the lower mountain refuge. Plenty more of both crocus beside the track, which is quite driveable (check the small print on your hire car agreement first). We found it surprising that the *C. sieberi* *tricolor* was all very pale compared to the cultivated form, and that the white band was so variable in width. Some were so pale that the white band was not evident and a few albinos were present. Some had no white band at all and a few had darker tips.

Finally we went on to Evvia (Euboea), staying in the delightful mountain village of Ano Steni. The weather here was much more comfortable. The strenuous and indistinct path from the village up to the refuge on Mt. Dirfis revealed quantities of an autumn flowering crocus, but the best sight of all was near the refuge itself. Acres of *Crocus sieberi* var. *sublimis*, again flowering beside the melting snowdrifts. *Helleborus cyclophyllus* was in flower here too. Fortunately it is possible to drive up the track to the refuge. The breakdown of the hire car deterred us from further exploring Evvia. We attempted the path up to Mt. Xerovouni from Kambia but the path petered out, but not before revealing *Cyclamen hederifolium*, *Helleborus cyclophyllus*, good *Anemone pavonina*, *Paeonia mascula* var. *hellenica* and more of the autumn flowering crocus.