

# Crocus Group Newsletter

## Spring 1999

<b>Patron</b>	<b>Brian Mathew</b>	<b>Members</b> 177
<b>Committee</b>	<b>Ray Cobb</b>	<b>Home</b> 140
	<b>Alan Edwards</b>	<b>Overseas</b> 37
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Its been a funny old growing season so far, certainly in SE England anyway. As Alan says in his comments below, we've had some very warm days, scarcely any frost of significance and the spring *Crocus* are very early. But, what about the rain. It seems that almost since Xmas I've needed wellington boots just to go into the garden. Whilst the plants are actually doing quite well this year, *Crocus* really need a bit of sun to give of their best, otherwise the flowers never properly open and expand, and sun has been a bit of a scarce commodity. For those of you into showing, lets hope that by the time the spring shows start there will be pans of *Crocus* left to put on the bench. This newsletter is a bit of a first for the Crocus Group. It contains photographs ! Not colour photographs of course, just some black and whites. Its not that we are mean, just that as a group with little or no income, the cost of colour is beyond us. However Steve Keebles great shot of *C. hartmannianus* shows yet again the variability to be found in most taxa. I hope you all have a good season with your plants and are successful with the paint brush and pollination to produce loads of seed to ensure yet another good seed exchange, details of which you will find within. **DBS**

### Some thoughts on *Crocus sieberi* by Alan Edwards

This note was penned on 9th January 1999, a day of phenomenal winter warmth in the UK which brought Brimstone and Peacock butterflies out to enjoy the sunshine ( 14 deg C in Westhumble and 15 deg C in London, a level unsurpassed since 1841 ). The sustained mildness of recent weeks has encouraged my winter and vernal *Crocus* to be more precocious this year to the extent that today I was able to record a total of 23 taxa in flower in the greenhouses and 5 in the garden.

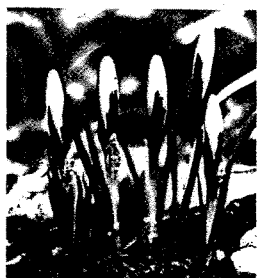
Among those in pots were representatives of the tribe of *C. sieberi* including a curious form from Didima in the NE of the Peloponnese which manifests an ability to commence flowering in the third week of November and continues intermittently until mid January. My corms of this eccentric were raised from seed collected by Melvyn Jope in 1993. On a subsequent autumn visit to the site he found plants in flower but in cultivation his material flowered in the spring.

I have examined the flowers but can find no trace of pubescence in the throat which suggests that it is a form of subsp. *nivalis* which normally should not extend much further north than the outliers of Mt. Taygetos. However, I have also just examined some *C. sieberi* collected on Mt. Kerketion, west of Trikala in N. Greece ( in the heart of subsp. *sublimis* territory ) which also lack pubescence in the throat so I am thoroughly confused and leads me to question the validity of separating the two subspecies by the presence or absence of throat hairs or even on the basis of geographical range.

During a visit to the Langada Pass between Kalamata and Sparta in late May 1998 we discovered that the woodland floor of the towering and vast forests of Black Pine that clothe this northern section of the Taygetos range was full of presumed subsp. *nivalis*. I found it intriguing that this subsp. can also be seen in a totally different environment only a few kilometres away to the south among the melting snows and screes of the summit slopes of Mt. Taygetos ( Prophitis Ilias ) at 2000m. In the conifer forests of the Langada Pass subsp. *nivalis* has adapted to life not only under a canopy of trees but also bracken. Having such a robust and ubiquitous companion calls for some very precise timing in the process of maturation. This was exemplified by finding plants with near ripe seed capsules just as the new seasons bracken shoots were emerging and expanding. **Alan Edwards**

I certainly sympathise with Alan's comments above, as I too have been examining the throats of *sieberi* taxa for pubescence with mixed findings. Looking at representatives of subspecies *atticus*, *nivalis* and *sublimis* from many different collections and sites I am beginning to wonder whether throat pubescence is variable in all these taxa. Mind you, these hairs are difficult to see even with x15 magnification. **DBS**

## Crocus in Cyprus, 1998 - By Steve Keeble



C.cyprius



C.hartmannianus



C.veneris

Our first trip of 1998 was to Paphos, during the first week of February, this being chosen to coincide with the flowering of *Crocus hartmannianus* which we successfully located near its type locality, east of the Troodos mountains. They were very sparingly dotted around a steep, moist area amongst *Cistus* scrub. The variation between individuals was striking, ranging from a broad purple/black stripe to almost completely dark outer petals, even one strongly feathered one. The ground colour was always a pale mauve with an orange throat and the black anthers confirmed the plants identity.

*C.cyprius* was found flowering near Platres at around 1,200m situated in grassy forest clearings. The summit region, where it would flower weeks later, was at this time under several inches of snow (friends tell us that this extended to much lower levels during unseasonably inclement weather that March). We arrived late in the day and did not see the flowers open, but the reverses all had a very dark stripe, which did not extend to the petal tips. Variation in flower size was evident, as was a range of ground colour from near white to a clear mauve. The orange throat previously observed in *C.hartmannianus* appeared to be confined to the tube only, at least from the outside.

Plants found flowering at lower elevations on the rugged, wild and beautiful Akhamas peninsula included *Cyclamen persicum*, several *Muscari*, *Anemone coronaria*, *Barlia robertiana*, the occasional *Orchis* and *Ophrys* with many more orchids promising flower later. The most prolific area for seeing most of these was the coast path westwards from the 'Baths of Aphrodite'. We knew that the autumn flowering *Crocus veneris* grew in the areas we visited but its foliage remained undiscovered. This, along with several sightings of *Cyclamen cyprium* foliage encouraged us to return at the end of the following November. This time *Crocus veneris* was easily located at several sites within 3km of Droushia. *C.veneris* has a small, starry white flower, with fine black lines running from the yellow throat down the tube. Some strongly growing individuals had 5 or 6 leaves, defying one of the features separating it from *C.aleppicus*. It was always in open grassy situations and never amongst exposed rocks, seeming to have a suicidal liking for tracks, particularly bearing in mind the recent tarmacing of many local ones.

We revisited the locations of *C. cyprius* and *C. hartmannianus*. Unsurprisingly they were not in evidence but the real surprise was the presence of a *C.veneris* form (not expected to be found on igneous rocks) at the site of the latter, this time with a fine purple line down the length of the outer segments. Climatic differences from the previous year were evident by the desiccated condition of the *Cistus* and the sodden state of the soil, perhaps promising a more prolific flowering in 1999.

The aforementioned coastal path again proved worthwhile, with good populations of *Narcissus serotinus*. The nearby Adonis Trail provided *Narcissus tazetta* and a sighting of *Spiranthes spiralis*. Other bulbous plants encountered on the Akhamas peninsula included *Scilla autumnalis* (profusely), a *Muscari* along with the *Cyclamen cyprium* which rarely carried more than a couple of flowers and usually none at all. Following a 3 hr drive to Troodos a circuit of the easy 1800 metre altitude summit path revealed several interesting but mostly non-bulbous alpine endemics awaiting the snow. Along the south coast and most dramatic were the huge populations of *Narcissus serotinus* within Episkopi garrison - no stopping or photography (or goats) allowed here.

Several non-botanical interests were indulged in - wonderful walking country varying from easy strolls to assault courses through gorges and prickly scrub (I should admit that many tens of miles were walked without seeing any interesting plant life, but the scenery was so good that it didn't matter), exceptional local food, archaeological sites - we will have to go back in April to see those orchids we missed!

Essential reading : Cyprus - The rough guide - Marc Dubin ISBN 1-8528-182-2

Walking in Cyprus - Donald Brown (A Cicerone Guide) ISBN 1-85284-195-8

Discover Laona - Adrian Akers-Douglas - buy this in Cyprus

Well, I have to say that seeing the plant wild in three different stations has left me with a totally different impression from my previous ideas, which were based on the old commercial clone(s). Firstly, the plant is large and vigorous. On first sight I thought I was looking at colchicum as I whizzed past them in the car. Then I realised this wasn't quite right and got out to look more closely. Until you look very closely, the similarity to *mudiflorus* is striking. Long naked stems up to 25 cm topped by large purplish goblet shaped flowers with huge multi branched orange stigma is the general description. They were mainly growing in sparse grass on woodland edges at no great altitudes, and were in quite dense populations with closely spaced plants, although as usual with *Crocus* they grew as individuals and did not form clumps. Flower size and colour variation was quite significant, and none of them looked anything like the commercial clone(s). The plate in Brian's monograph is actually very well observed in all details, particularly if you envisage it as being very large.

Although seemingly confined to one Italian province, the evidence is that it is fairly common in quite a number of stations with no apparent threat to its continued existence. The few corms I took have luckily formed seedpods and now I know where to find them I shall one day return for a large enough seed collection to share with the Crocus Group to enable us all to grow the real thing. In the meantime the few seeds I hope to have available will be in the seed exchange. **DBS**

### ***Crocus olivieri* by Ray Cobb**

*Crocus* growers are well aware that we have more species, subspecies, formae and cultivars in cultivation than ever before. The pot of *Crocus pelistericus* which I have before me today would, ten years ago, have been one of my less conceivable aspirations. *Crocus paschei* was unknown then, but is now proving a very amenable species. *Crocus mathewii*, with its willingness to set abundant seed, must surely soon appear in commercial bulb lists.

However some species which were formerly common in cultivation seem to be in danger of becoming rare. In the interests of garden plant conservation we must try to ensure that these do not slip through our fingers. One such species is *Crocus olivieri*. *Crocus olivieri* subsp. *olivieri* used to be readily and cheaply available and I used to be able to rely on having several pots full of its cheerful orange flowers. Now I find I have but few corms, partly due to my attempts (unsuccessful) to establish it in the open garden. Do other growers find that it is becoming more difficult to maintain and increase? And has any member of the Crocus Group grown or ever seen the pale lemon yellow-flowered plant referred to by Brian Mathew as forma *balcanicus*? Another butter-yellow coloured plant used to be available commercially as *C. suterianus* 'Jamie'. I have "advertised" for this plant but with no response and I fear it must be lost to cultivation.

And what about subsp. *balansae*? It used to be readily available from bulb nurseries but has disappeared from many (but not quite all) of the lists. I have only once had access to corms of known wild origin and they grew in the open garden without difficulty. This was a good deep orange form found by Dr. J.R. Marr. Subsequently an even more striking form carrying the cultivar name 'Zwanenberg' became briefly available. I still treasure two remaining corms of this. But why do we not see more of this highly garden-worthy plant?

Finally we have subsp. *istanbulensis* which was the subject of an article by Andy Byfield in Crocus Bulletin No. 21. I do not know whether this has ever been in cultivation. Plants so named have been offered commercially in the U.K., but those I received were certainly not the true subspecies. Though it is a very rare *Crocus* in the wild, one must hope that, through the efforts of the Turkish Indigenous Propagation Project, material will be made available to skilled growers.

**Ray Cobb**

### **Seed Exchange 1999**

Another season, another seed exchange. I don't need to tell most members that our seed exchange is one of the best of all those run by single genus specialist groups. There is indeed no other way to get hold of some of the taxa we have distributed over the years. It is also one of the easiest to join in.

Rule 1. If you are going to be a donor, send seed to me before 31.7.99

Rule 2. If you are not going to be a donor but want a seed list, send a SAE to me before 31.7.99,( overseas, an IRC )

That's it. Obviously, this is a seed exchange, so donors always get first choice and very rare seed in short supply goes to them. However, non-donors always receive a fair proportion of what they ask for and always get a good deal. As some of the plants that used to be rare become more available the chances of non-donors have improved dramatically. It is pretty certain that our seed exchange has significantly added to the general availability of more taxa of *Crocus* so keep it up. **David Stephens, Sherwood, Bunce Common Road, Leigh, Surrey, RH2 8NS. UK**

## NCCPG National *Crocus* Collections

Tony Goode has been granted full National Collection status and we wish him well. To clear up any misunderstanding, being a National Collector Holder does not imply anything other than that you have made a commitment to try to the best of your ability to collect and maintain as comprehensive a collection as possible of your chosen genus, and that you will try to advance knowledge and help others. Somebody once asked me how should he apply for a National Collection and how long did the NCCPG take to deliver the plants!! Wouldn't that be nice. **DBS**

### The *Crocus* Spoon

This has been awarded annually since 1991 to the best pan of *Crocus* at an AGS Show alternating between spring and autumn, the recipients were:-

1991	-	David King	- 'Bowles White'	- Early Spring
1992	-	Rod & Jane Leeds	- pestalozzae	- Early Spring
1993	-	Rod & Jane Leeds	- medius	- Sussex
1994	-	Terry Smale	- vernus albiflorus	- Early Spring
1995	-	Maureen Ledgerton	- vernus albiflorus	- Loughborough
1996	-	Rod & Jane Leeds	- pestalozzae	- Kent
1997	-	Terry Smale	- oreocreticus	- Horsham
1998	-	Alan Edwards	- malyi	- Early Spring

### *Crocus* Group Bulletins 1975 - 1982

If anyone is interested in history, I am willing to provide a photocopy of the first ten bulletins issued by the *Crocus* Group from No. 1 in 1975 to No. 10 in 1982 for a subscription of £5 payable to the *Crocus* Group. These early bulletins contain several articles by Brian Mathew before he wrote '*The Crocus*' and it is interesting to see how his ideas were formed and changed. As indeed they are today, these early bulletins were pretty amateurish and often contain hand-written notes and corrections. **DBS**

### *Crocus* Notes

I know that most members of the *Crocus* Group have interesting facts or tales to relate. Jot down a few paragraphs and send them to me for inclusion in our next bulletin. **DBS**