

Crocus Group Bulletin No. 34

Summer 2006

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Hon. Sec. Notes

The *Crocus* Group sometimes issues one, sometimes two publications a year. The main Bulletin, which has a sequential issue number, is sent out in the summer each year. The spring newsletter, which does not have an issue number, is sent out in January to UK members only, as a reminder for the spring visits and seed exchange. Sometimes, as this year, a spring newsletter was not issued as no spring visits were arranged.

Seed exchange 2006

Rule 1. If you are a donor, send seed to me before 31.7.2006

Rule 2. If you are not a donor but want a seed list, send a SAE to me before 31.7.2006

Obviously, donors always get first choice and very rare seed in short supply invariably goes to them. However, non-donors always receive a fair proportion of what they ask for and always get a good deal. **David Stephens, Green Hollow, 76 South Terrace, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2AQ.**

Crocus from seed

Every year in August I sow the annual batch of *Crocus* seed. This can be from a variety of sources, i.e. from my seedbank, from collections that year by friends, my own collections and from cultivated plants. I normally sow somewhere between 80 – 150 pots of seed each year, and after about the third year have had a succession of flowerings each year thereafter. Normally I would expect to wait 3 – 4 years to see the first flowers from these sowings. The quickest I have had are *Crocus gilanicus* that produced one flower in a pot of 20 seedlings in the autumn of two years after sowing, i.e. 27 months, and a flower in a pot of seedlings of *Crocus gargaricus* that came 18 months after sowing. **S**

Crocus Group @ the Fritillaria Group meeting 2006

We have a standing invitation to attend the autumn meeting of the *Fritillaria* Group. This year it is at the **Hillside Centre Wisley** on **Sunday, 15th October 2006** starting at 0930. We are invited to bring flowering *Crocus* for a display table. See you there, and please bring plants for the table and any spares for sale or auction. **S**

Crocus Group @ the Cyclamen Society Show 2007

We have an invitation to attend the spring show of the *Cyclamen* Society. Next year it is at the **Hillside Centre Wisley** on **Saturday, 3rd February 2007** starting at 0930. We are invited to bring flowering *Crocus* for a display table. See you there, and please bring plants for the table. **S**

Articles required

Would members please put pen to paper and let me have some articles for future bulletins. Just a few paragraphs will suffice if you don't think you can manage a page length. Any type of article will do, as long as it has *Crocus* as a theme. Would particularly welcome articles from overseas members. Post to **David B Stephens, Green Hollow, South Terrace, Dorking, Surrey, RH4 2AQ** or e-mail to thecrocusgroup@hotmail.com. **S**

Crocus ahoy! by Brian Mathew

HMS *Crocus* may sound as if she might be part of a Gilbert & Sullivan opera but was in fact a successful World War II Corvette, built for anti-submarine work. Along with numerous other ships named after plants (several bulbous ones including *Fritillary* and *Narcissus*), and collectively called the Flower Class of corvettes, K49 was built just at the start of the war, quickly and cheaply for a specific purpose. The keel of HMS *Crocus* was laid on 26 October 1939 in Glasgow, she was launched on 26 June 1940 and commissioned on 20 October 1940! For those with an interest in things nautical, her displacement was 925 tons, she had a top speed of 11 knots and there was a crew of 85; armaments consisted of one 4" gun, one 2 pounder AA and four 303 AA guns.

By 1942 the Battle of the Atlantic was well under way. From an article about the exploits of the ship in The Northwest Evening Mail it appears that on October 7th 1942 HMS *Crocus* detected by radar a surfaced U-boat (U333) and went to the attack, ramming the submarine twice and causing considerable damage. Although it did not sink, U333 had to be coaxed to a safe port for refitting; no doubt this took it out of action for a good while. After the war HMS *Crocus* took part in the film The Cruel Sea starring Jack Hawkins and Stanley Baker under the fictional name of HMS Compass Rose. She was sold in 1946, became a merchant vessel, the Annlock, and was eventually scrapped in Hong Kong in the 1950s.

November in south– west Anatolia by Peter and Penny Watt

Many of the world's finest *Crocuses* grow on what is a single geological unit largely composed of karstic limestone mountains which starting in Italy runs through Albania, Greece and Crete to end as the Taurus mountains in south-west Anatolia. Between these mountains and the coast the climate is typical Mediterranean with the first significant rains of autumn beginning in November. Visitors travelling near the end of October are likely to miss the best of the *Crocuses* and those *Colchicum* sp. which flower at low altitude. We are uncertain as to how the falling temperatures interact with the dampening of the soil to stimulate *Crocuses* into flower. Most certainly the first flowers are to be found at altitudes around 1000m. and in dry seasons *Crocus cancellatus* and *C. mathewii* can be found in flower prior to the initiation of root growth. At around 1800m. the autumn rains fall as snow and the ground remains frozen during the day; *Crocus* in flower are rare.

Round Antalya

Inland from Antalya, a sprawling ugly city on the coastal plain, the countryside is dominated by a limestone plateau. Just northwest of the city this plateau comes down close to the sea and there is good access to Tahtali Dag and Ak Dag. Here is ideal *Crocus* country.

The common autumn flowering *Crocus* in the Antalya region is *Crocus cancellatus*. This can grow at altitudes ranging from 100m to 1500m among limestone rocks, in open pine woods and in attractive scrub land composed of myrtle's, *cistus* and *arbutus*. A typical plant has 4 to 5 leaves with narrow off-white perianth segments that are veined and stained yellow on the outside. The throat is white and the much divided style yellow to soft orange red. Search any large population and you will find *Crocuses* with all white perianths but they are nothing very special. Some populations are much more attractive with broader perianth segments of a clear or creamy white colour, again with an all white throat. *Crocus cancellatus* subsp *lycius* is described in The *Crocus* as having a deep yellow throat and a deep orange-yellow to red-orange style, and in the Encyclopaedia of Alpines as orange throated with striking orange styles. In five visits to Lycia when *C cancellatus* is in flower we have yet to discover such plants; the nearest to a yellow throat found was only 5% of the perianth segment length. We are uncertain if *Crocus cancellatus* subsp *lycius* is a very localised plant or whether the description needs to be much broader.

Crocus pallasii subsp *pallasii* is also common round Antalya. Most typically this grows on the open plateau at altitudes around 1000m in terra-rossa or alkaline clay soils among rocks of karstic limestone. The flowers, sometimes scented, typically have perianth segments of a non-descript mauve-blue made less attractive by intense veining. The three-branched deep red styles are the showiest feature. In the wild this *Crocus* is of special interest to us since it grows over such a vast region that isolated colonies have the opportunity to evolve independently. Most typically the style divides at about the level of the anthers with branches less than half the

length of the perianth segment. Our favourite extreme variant was found on an open plateau between Korkutelli and Elmali. In this population the style divided at the very base of the perianth segments with the style branches appearing as a deep red ball below the anthers. At the opposite end of the spectrum, inland from Antalya near the village of Urgulu, we found a population where the styles protrude out beyond the closed flower: most certainly equal in length to the best forms of *C. asumaniae*. Variation in the perianth segment size and colour is quite common. Some forms, for example on Honaz Dag, have perianth segments indistinguishable in size and shape to *C. pallasii* subsp. *dispathaceus*, and like this *Crocus* have short pale styles. However there are clear differences in flower colour, corm structure and leaf size. A population of white flowered *C. pallasii* was found growing further north near to Afyon however the aesthetic effect was spoiled by the veins on the perianth segments. Some twenty years ago on beyond Elmali near Sinebeliki Gec we found a much superior white form. To our untutored eyes this looked different from *C. pallasii* and with the pure white flower, intense red style and white filaments we felt we were transported to Greece and were looking at *C. hadriaticus* growing on Mt. Parnassos. Most certainly in the Antalya region the locally abundant companion plant – *Biarum pyramii*, outclasses both *C. cancellatus* and *C. pallasii*. This has large glossy, bullate leaves, a bronze purple inflorescence (both spathe and spadix can measure 30cms in the wild) producing an overpowering stench mixing rotting meat with sweetness. What more can be asked of a tuberous plant?

In the mid 1980's we wandered up the Kesme river valley from Kemer admiring the outstanding *Cyclamen graecum* among the limestone rocks; on the higher rocks grew *Galanthus peshmanii* while on the cliffs was a particular favourite, *Verbascum spodiotrichum*. Even among these fine flowers a deep blue, twin flowered *Crocus* stood out. This was growing at the trackside most commonly in the crevices of limestone rocks or in the stony ground between the rocks; the soil was humus rich at around pH 6.5. Given the black anthers we wondered if this could be an autumn flowering form of *Crocus biflorus* subsp. *nubigena* or a relative of the Greek *C. biflorus* subsp. *melantherus*. However the dramatic long red style seemed quite distinctive. Brian Mathew splendidly described this Kemer *Crocus* as *Crocus biflorus* subsp. *wattiorum* subsequently upgraded to *Crocus wattiorum*. Now the narrow rough track up from Kemer has been widened to a minor road destroying the rock faces where *C. wattiorum* grew. A few plants can be found on the accessible rocky slopes. Andy Byfield has rediscovered this *Crocus* growing several kilometres away. Here the *Crocus* grows at altitudes from 100 to 700m. always in crevices of large limestone rocks, under the rocks or in tight cracks in the stony ground. Again the soil is humus rich and slightly acidic. Typical habitats have the appearance of a limestone pavement or where a substantial cliff fall has produced a boulder strewn slope preventing the growth of trees and shrubs. The companion plants include *Galanthus peshmanii* and *Cyclamen alpinum*. Despite examining hundreds of plants at several sites we have not seen significant variation in this *Crocus*. We have heard rumours that *Crocus wattiorum* is virus infected. This seems to us unlikely since in the natural habitat the *Crocus* must propagate by seed and we have found no evidence of attack by sap sucking insects.

From Lycia to Caria.

The rough track up Baba Dag is jeepable, we walk. At an altitude of some 600m. white *Crocuses* of the 'saffron group' appear, these are identical to ones seen a few years earlier on the road beyond Elmali. Needless to say the subsequent publication by Kerndorf and Pasche (1992) describing a new *Crocus* species *C. mathewii* provided a satisfactory name for these plants. However the substantial population of *C. mathewii* growing at lower altitudes on Baba Dag is composed entirely of white and pale mauve plants, no purple throat to be seen. The only variants being eight petalled mauve monsters. At altitude of a 1000m plus *C. mathewii* is common on Baba Dag. Here the populations are a mix of white flowers, pale mauve/ blue and purple throated plants. In some stands purple throated plants are scarce in others predominant. Most certainly *C. mathewii* is among the elite autumn flowering *Crocuses* and grows here with the equally splendid *Colchicum sanguicolle*. Certainly Baba Dag is just as exciting in November as in spring.

The original description of *C. mathewii* by Kerndorff and Pasche reported populations where plants lacking a purple throat were extremely rare. Such populations exist growing on terra rossa at altitudes of 1000m. on the road beyond Elmali to the coast at Kalkan. In these

populations there is some variation in the size and intensity of the purple throat. Our most dramatic find to date had a purple throat covering 40% of the perianth segment length. Sadly we have failed to find a good blue-mauve form with an intense purple throat.

Recently a second Turkish autumn flowering *biflorus* *Crocus*, *Crocus nerimaniae* has been described (Yuzbasioglu and Varol 2004.) It is difficult to improve on the detailed description given for this *Crocus*. Last year we explored the population at the site of the Milas- Geyik dam. Typically the *Crocus* grows on alkaline serpentine soils in open pinewoods. The *Crocus* disappears where the woodland is dense or the rock formation changes. The characteristic features include white to soft mauve perianth segments with an intense yellow throat, purple perianth tube and blackish maroon anthers. Unlike *Crocus wattiorum* the leaves are hysteranthous and the flower lacks the dramatic red style. Should you seek to naturalise *Crocus nerimaniae* in your garden we recommend copying nature. Simply underplant *Arbutus unedo* (at Geyik simultaneously in flower and covered in crimson fruits.) with *Crocus nerimaniae*, *Cyclamen mirabile* and *Spiranthes spiralis*. Looking at this picture in the wild we could not help wondering what plant hybridists and garden makeover experts have really achieved. We searched this substantial population of *C. nerimaniae* for variants including any with a deep red style. Despite multiple false sightings we failed to discover such plants. Difficulties arise because *C. nerimaniae* grows among an outstanding form of *C. pallasii*. This has a short perianth tube, broad almost pure blue perianth segments with the inside heavily veined to give the appearance of a purple throat. The style was quite dramatic and the flower scent outstanding. We shared the view of the local bees that this was an exceptional *Crocus* and awarded it the honorary epithet "*Crocus pseudomathewii*"

Pamphylia to Cilicia.

Upgrading the road to Akseki involved much felling of pine trees and blasting of rocks. What a splendid exercise in ecological enhancement this has proved to be. Beyond the turn to Gundogmus some road edges are carpeted with *Cyclamen cilicium* intermixed with *Crocus cancellatus* subsp *pamphylicus*. Most of the woodland is far too dense for *Crocus* to thrive. The best stands we have seen grew among phlomis and cistus in rocky openings in the woodland at around altitudes of 400m. *C. cancellatus* subsp *pamphylicus* is a splendid plant with white to pale blue perianth segments and an intense yellow throat. Some plants are beautifully veined on the outside of the perianth segments. The white anthers set off the style that in the best forms is much divided and deep crimson. A serious contender for the *Crocus* with the finest styles award. We can never decide whether this is our favourite of the *C. cancellatus* group or that award goes to those *C. cancellatus* subsp *mazziaricus* with a purple throat which grows on parts of Honaz Dag.

Searchers for *Crocus asumaniae* at Akseki will be rewarded if they follow the golden rule of bulb hunters in the Eastern Mediterranean i.e. "first try the village rubbish dump, failing that, the cemetery." However *C. asumaniae* populations seem so much more attractive in the natural setting among limestone rocks in oak scrub below the Cakilgedik pass (1100m.) The clean white to soft blue perianth is enhanced by the spectacular style that divides into three red branches above the base of the anthers. In the most dramatic forms the style exceeds the length of the perianth segments but forms with style branches comparable in length to *C. pallasii* and *C. mathewii* are not uncommon. Incidentally the number of leaves (up to 13) on large multiflowered corms of *C. asumaniae* greatly exceeds the quoted range of five to six. Presumably such corms are programmed to divide next year.

The road from Gulnar to Silifke is splendid *Crocus* territory. Exciting areas include Kandil Bogazi (700m) and where the road winds up to altitudes of 1000m plus. On the limestone rocks grows one of the world's elite chasmophytes *Alkanna aucherana*. Sadly when this is at its best in early May both *Crocus reticulatus* subsp *hittiticus* and *C. graveolens* growing among the rocks are long over. Return in November and you will find *C pallasii* subsp *dispathaceus* and *C cancellatus* in full flower. Although of a typical wine red the forms of *C pallasii* subsp *dispathaceus* growing here are of a rather disappointing washed out colour. Much better forms grow on beyond Gundogmus on the road to Adincik. Here *C pallasii* subsp *dispathaceus* grows at altitudes of 700 to 1000m in terra rossa soils among limestone rocks with oak scrub and somewhat tatty olive trees. The area is overgrazed by goats. Nevertheless the *Crocus* looks superb with a perianth of the deepest wine red, one of the most impressive of all *Crocus*

colours. To our way of thinking *C. pallasii* subsp. *dispathaceus* is among the most distinctive taxa in the "saffron group". The corm is huge (2 to 3 cm) with a long fibrous neck and the leaves are the longest of any *Crocus* (30cms plus). Combine this with the wine red, narrow perianth segments and the short off-yellow style and you have an instantly recognisable *Crocus*.

Final comment

Much as we appreciate those polished show pans somewhat overfilled with cloned bulbs and neatly top dressed with grit we do not seek to emulate them. As we build up a collection of *Crocuses* we wish them to represent population variations seen in the wild. Our ideal is to replace named clones with their offspring. Perhaps it is too much to expect *Crocuses* in cultivation to enjoy a setting of the same aesthetic qualities as plants in the wild; perhaps more realistic top dressings (a mix of pine needles, broken limestone and goat droppings is ideal) would be a step forward. With some *Crocuses* we repeatedly fail to reproduce the perfection of colour and form of plants seen in the wild. The blue of *C. baytopiorum* and the deep purple of *C. pellistericus* and *C. pallasii* subsp. *dispathaceus* are examples. The finest imperial purple coloured *C. pallasii* subsp. *dispathaceus* we have ever seen stood guard over a hidden cache of raki bottles and liberally top dressed with the remnants. We postulate that raki is the key ingredient for their culture and we returned from our last visit with sufficient bottles to undertake a controlled study. A positive outcome is predicted given the reports that gin enhances the flowers of *Narcissus papyraceus*.

Brian Mathew (1995): An interesting new autumn-flowering *Crocus* from Turkey. *The Plantsman* 2:182-184.

Helmut Kerndorff and Erich Pasche (1994): *Crocus mathewii*: a new autumn-flowering *Crocus* from Turkey: *The New Plantsman* 1:102-106.

S. Yusbasioglu and O.Varol. (2004) A New autumn flowering *Crocus* from SW Turkey *The Plantsman* 3:104-106.

***Crocus* in Israel by Oron Peri**

According to Flora Palestina and the later, Analytical Flora of Israel (Feinbrun & Danin) there are eight species and one subspecies of *Crocus* growing in Israel. No corrections, nomenclature work or scientific research of the genus has taken place since the two books were published. The aim of this article is to give information about the species, their habitat and where they can be found, and also to invite botanists, to conduct research into the correct identity to some of the forms. If someone decides to do so, I will give all the help needed to organize a field trip.

All *Crocus* found in Israel are autumn flowering, season starts in October and finishes by the end of December early January. Peak time is mid November where one can see the majority of species in flower. Most of the species do not depend on first rains in order to flower. This is especially so in the case of *C. cancellatus* ssp. *damascenus*, which grows in the Negev desert and flowers in some years two to three months before it gets rain, with temperatures that can still be above 30 c. during the day. Interestingly all *Crocus* share habitat with one or more of the eleven species of *Colchicum* growing in Israel and in some localities, especially on Mt. Hermon you can find up to seven species from the two genera flowering all together at the same time, a really beautiful sight.

C. aleppicus

This species can be found in northern Israel. It grows abundantly in the Golan Heights; on Mt. Hermon up to 1300 m., and upper Galilee usually above 300 m. Often found in company with *C. ochroleucus*, *C. pallasii*, and *C. cancellatus*. Flowering from November to the end of December, the flowers are pure white, often with a black stripe on the exterior. It grows in open ground, in meadows and can be found beneath trees and even in crevices (Mt. Hermon), mainly on terra rossa with limestone or on volcanic soils. There is a very interesting population of this species found in a narrow band between the Mediterranean coast and Mt. Carmel from Maagan Michael to Atlit at 0 - 15m. The habitat is highly influenced by the coast. Extremely dry in summer and exposed to dry salty winds in winter. This form has different characteristics: flowers are slender and much narrower than the common form with blushes of dark purplish colour on the exterior petals. It grows in crevices in sandy rocks or open firm sand often under *Pistacia lentiscus*. This population depends on the first rain in order to flower.

In my opinion this form should be studied further and probably should be upgraded to a ssp. or at least a variety.

C. cancellatus

This is a robust plant. It can be found growing on the Golan Heights and Mt. Hermon along with *Crocus pallasii*, mainly on volcanic soils. The corms are 15 - 20 cm deep in the ground, probably to protect itself from the harsh weather conditions, temperatures often close to 40c in summer and freezing, snowy conditions in winter. Populations growing in the centre and south of the Golan are quite uniform in flower size and colour while in the north of the Golan Heights and on Mt. Hermon there are forms that look intermediate with *C. pallasii* and *C. hermoneus*.

Flowers November - December.

C. cancellatus damascenus

This *Crocus* is described in Flora Palestina and Analytical Flora of Israel as a species: *Crocus damascenus*. There is a discussion still today about this form, some of the botanists in Israel suggests this form to be separated to a new species and renamed *C. ramon* (or similar) after the name of the area where it is found. There has been no chromosome check or published study of this taxon in Israel.

This is a beautiful species, growing in the high altitudes of the Negev desert above 950m. Usually it is the first *Crocus* to flower (in some years *C. hermoneus* starts earlier), usually around mid October, flowering season is very short only about two weeks. (Probably due to high temperatures)

The best place to see it is on Mt. Ramon and the entrance to Borot Lutz just off the road.

This *Crocus* is completely isolated from other species; the nearest is *Crocus hyemalis* that can be found more then 100 km to the north.

In the last few years it seems that populations have started to decline due to the growing number of porcupines in the area that feeds on corms during the hot summer months, when fresh growing plants are very hard to get.

C. hermoneus

As the name given, this species grows on Mt. Hermon 1500-2600m. In some years it can be found starting to flower by the end of September but usually mid October is the peak time. It grows abundantly, usually in large populations.

Colour and patterns of the flowers show large variation from almost greyish white to dark bluish with stripes but always with the typical long and many-branched yellow style. Style and stamens are the same colour. The leaves of this species appear much later, depending on the weather but rarely before mid April when snowmelt is complete.

It can be found growing in the company of *C. pallasii*, *C. cancellatus*, and *C. ochroleucus* with *Colchicum tauri*, in open ground or between stones on terra rossa often under trees.

In this area there are many forms that looks like intermediates of the three species mentioned.

***C. hermoneus ssp. palaestinus* Feinbrun**

The status of this ssp. is not very clear.

Prof. Feinbrun found a population between Jerusalem and Ramalla in the Judea Mountains, and some botanists suggest upgrading this form to a species (*C. palaestinus*) but again research has not taken place. Also this area is situated in occupied Palestine and is not very safe to visit. Another population is found in the south of the Golan Heights around Mevo- Hama, but it is really hard to say if it is the same ssp. According to Feinbrun the difference between the ssp. are that the style of the latter ssp. is shorter then the stamens, leaves appear before flowers die off, and tunic of the corm stretches up to 2 – 3 cm above the corm.

In 2005 I went a few times to this area but since there was no rain there until the end of December, I couldn't find even one flower.

C. hyemalis

This is the most common *Crocus* in Israel, it can be found in many areas where in some localities it can be seen by the thousands, but not at high altitudes. It grows from 0 - 750m, in open ground as well as in shady forests and scrub, under trees, in different soils from sandy to heavy soils rich in organic matter.

This is the only species that depends on the rain in order to flower; it can start in October and can be found until January. One cannot confuse it with other sp., being the only species with black anthers.

A few years ago I found a population on Mt. Coach in Galilee, where plants are very robust, flower and leaf size can reach up to three times the size of the common one, I suppose this is a tetraploid form but this population should be further investigated.

C. ochroleucus

This is the smallest species in Israel, and in the books it is described as a rare species. However, it can be seen growing abundantly on Mt. Hermon (with *C. hermoneus*) and in the centre and north of the Golan Heights. It is also in upper Galilee in the area of Mt. Meron and Dalton. It is often in the company of *C. aleppicus* and *C. pallasii* in the Golan and upper Galilee. This species makes small clumps sometimes with dozens of plants and pure albino forms are not uncommon. It prefers meadows at high elevations but it thrives also in different conditions. It flowers from October to December, dependent on elevation, in some areas like in the case of *C. hermoneus* leaves appear in spring after snow melts.

C. pallasii

This is undoubtedly the showiest species in Israel. It grows above 700m, in the Golan Heights (Yaar Odem), on Mt. Hermon, and in upper Galilee where it can be seen in its thousands on Mt. Meron; it is extremely rare in the Judea Mountains.

This species, is like *C. cancellatus* a robust plant, having corms deep in the ground, each corm produces several flowers. Variation of colour is considerable, from almost completely white petals with darker veins to dark purplish blue. It flowers in October-November; mature plants tend to flower over quite a long period producing new flowers every few days.

On Mt. Hermon it can be seen growing in company of *C. hermoneus*, and in some cases it seems there is an intermediate form between the two species. It grows in the open in full sun and in the shade of trees although the flowers look nicer in full sun.

C. graveolens

The story of this species is a mystery to me and I will explain it.

In the books mentioned above, the only Yellow *Crocus* to grow in Israel is *C. vitellinus*.

Prof. Naomi Feinbrun described this sp. from plants she found in the eastern north part of the Galilee, close to the border with Lebanon. She even sent a few corms to Brian Mathew in England.

According to Brian Mathew in 'The *Crocus*' this species is a true *C. graveolens* although N. F. describes that the flowers lack the characteristic smell of this species.

Sadly this species is probably extinct from Israel; it has not been seen or recorded in at least three decades. I personally have searched for the last seven years at risk of getting shot in the name of science.

In 1982 during the Lebanon - Israeli war, a few plants were brought in from south Lebanon, from just a few km north to the Israeli border. These plants still thrive successfully in two private gardens. As described by Feinbrun they don't have any scent at all.

They flower from mid November to December; most of them have seven leaves, flowers dark yellow, plain or with some maroon markings on the exterior.

Oron Peri lives in Israel, he is a garden designer and a grower of many geophytes especially Cyclamen. He also writes about geophytes and gardening in different journals in Israel and abroad. S

Filling a Gap by Roger Holland

2004 was the 50th anniversary of the death of E A Bowles. In view of his great interest in *Crocuses*, The E A Bowles of Myddelton House Society decided the genus must figure in the events held to commemorate the occasion. As it's Chairman, I contacted David Stephens and persuaded him to come along and talk to us on the subject. It went down very well and by the end of the afternoon I was enrolled as the newest member of the *Crocus* Group.

A few weeks later David emailed me, remarking that there was currently no National Collection of *Crocus chrysanthus* / *biflorus* cultivars. This was a group on which Bowles had done a lot of work, producing a series named after birds as well as a number of others. David suggested that, in view of this, our society might consider taking up the challenge. It was a project I found very appealing and the committee agreed it would be a very appropriate subject for us to work on. The scene was set, now to find the plants...

At the time the Plant Finder listed 35 cvs but getting hold of them was a different matter. Some suppliers seem to return the same list to the compilers each year, continuing to put forward names they no longer stock. In the trawl of autumn 2004 we rounded up 44 stocks representing 25 names. All we had to do was check them for trueness to type. In the case of this particular group, David referred me to an invaluable tool: a paper by Jacobsen, van Scheepen and Ørgaard (1997, *New Plantsman* 4: 6-38). It was the product of an exhaustive search through the literature and currently available material and gave clear descriptions of around 55 cvs, mostly with photographs. Armed with this I was able to confirm that we had 19, possibly 20, correctly named cvs. The remaining ones were wrongly named duplicates or mixtures.

The question then was how to proceed further. I had two pieces of great good fortune. A Plant Finder supplier who did not have the requested material referred me to Janis Ruksans in Latvia. He turned out to be a great fan of E A Bowles' writings and he rounded up 30 stocks that he kindly sent us gratis. Some were duplicates of material we had already but most were very desirable additions. Then Ray Cobb put me in touch with Niels Jacobsen in Denmark. He gave us a further 26 stocks, including a number of old cvs now very difficult to get hold of. We also received several others from individuals in this country. This brought us to a total of 60 names in autumn 2005. Having flowered these we have 45 cvs confirmed as correctly named, with a further 19 on which positive identification is still to be completed.

Application has recently been made to the NCCPG for registration as a National Collection. The local collection's coordinator has visited and is satisfied but there is a requirement that a collection must have been in existence for at least three years. We hope to qualify in all respects next year. Watch this space!

Much remains to be done. The collection will never be "complete": there are so many names in the literature, and some of these may still be hanging on in the hands of fanciers somewhere. Having flowered so many for the first time this year, I was delighted with some that aren't doing the commercial rounds any longer. I wondered why such appealing plants have been sidelined but have been told by several suppliers that *Crocus* fanciers are only interested in species, not cultivars. You don't know what you are missing! For example, 'Warley', named after Ellen Wilmott's garden, has slender flowers, the outer segments purple with creamy margins and a strong, fresh scent unlike the honeyed perfume of most of the others. Another very appealing plant is 'Moonlight', mentioned by Bowles in his book on *Crocus* and *Colchicum*. It is very floriferous, with slender, pale yellow flowers and a brownish basal blotch to the outer segments. There are also some matters needing further investigation. 'Ladykiller', still commercially available and with an AGM, has distorted perianth segments on most flowers. This applies to all the stocks I have seen and there is speculation that it is due to virus. I have found one or two plants that appear intact and it may be possible to rejuvenate the cultivar from these. If not, is the AGM still justified? This cultivar is to be included in a *Crocus* trial at Wisley next spring so no doubt the matter will come up for consideration then. 'Uschak Orange', one of the earliest to flower, poses a different question. There is variation within stocks, implying they consist of more than one clone. Among other things, in the two stocks I have stigma lobes can be pale yellow or deep orange and there seems to be variation in intensity of the perianth colour. I am splitting the stocks according to these characteristics to ensure they are maintained within individual plants. If so, what is the real thing?

I must add one postscript. For us 'E A Bowles' has so far eluded capture and has become something of a Holy Grail. All the material I have seen masquerading under this name has turned out to be 'E P Bowles'. However, a few weeks ago I heard from Elizabeth Parker-Jervis that she found something closely resembling Bowles' description of it in her garden. Pressed flowers and colour records were sent to Chris Brickell who checked it against records of a Wisley *Crocus* trial in the 1960's. He thinks it may be the real thing. Material of Elizabeth's stock will be included in next year's *Crocus* trial at Wisley and I for one shall be glued to the plots.

A great deal of thanks to Roger for taking up the challenge and doing the research to ensure the stocks he is curating are 'true'. The ideal of course would be that in the fullness of time, Roger will help others to set up duplicate collections so that these cultivars, which until relatively recently were still available, are not lost. If you have any biflorus / chrysanthus cultivars you think will interest Roger, please let him know. S