

Crocus Group Bulletin No. 36

Summer 2008

Patron	Brian Mathew MBE VMH	Members	184
Committee	David Stephens	Home	148
	Alan Edwards	Overseas	36
Hon. Sec.	Tony Goode		

Retiring Hon. Sec. Notes

A goodly portion of *Crocus* related articles from overseas members make this a very readable bulletin. Offerings come from Australia, Tasmania, Germany and Israel. There is also another well observed and amusing piece about Greek *Crocus* from Peter & Penny Watt.

This is the last bulletin I will edit as Hon. Sec. I have been doing it for 12 years since the summer of 1996 when I took over from Primrose Warburg and feel it is time to hand over to someone younger. Who better than Tony Goode, who already runs a *Crocus* website and is also a *Crocus* National Collection Holder. I have enjoyed doing this pleasant task through which I have met so many new friends and ask members to forgive my unconstitutional and idiosyncratic way of carrying it out over the years. Ann Borrill who has served as our membership secretary for a similar period of time is also stepping down and we thank her for her service and enthusiasm. **David Stephens**

New Hon. Sec. Notes

David has been threatening me with more responsibility for the *Crocus* Group for some time now. I think he sees it as some kind of macabre reward for my enthusiasm and commitment over the years! I am sure we would all want to thank David for his work over the last 12 years. While I recognise what he means by unconstitutional and idiosyncratic I do not offer any changes in those departments as I think David has served us well. David has agreed to continue to manage the excellent seed exchange for the time being. As I take over as Secretary, I hope that I can continue the tradition of this unusual 'club'. I have been growing *Crocus* (and a range of other dwarf bulbs and alpines) for about 20 years. I have two daughters (aged 5 and 11) and a full-time job. These responsibilities have combined to squeeze my gardening time in recent years to the extent where I am now in the process of pruning my collection of 'Pets in Pots' to a more manageable level. Many of the *Crocus* that I have been growing for years have begun to decline in vigour and there is evidence of virus in some. So I am culling many of the older clones and passing some material on to other *Croconuts*. The collection here is constantly being renewed by seed and generous gifts from people like yourselves (!) so it still has a healthy future.

As David refers to above I am responsible for the *Crocus* Pages web site. This was a labour of love produced before the arrival of my younger daughter and is long overdue attention. Unfortunately the time commitment required is likely to be beyond me for the foreseeable future. However there are other places on the internet which provide great resources for *Crocus* enthusiasts. Most notable is the Scottish Rock Garden Club forum www.srgc.org.uk which has a section dedicated to *Crocus* and the moderators have agreed to allow us a *Crocus* Group thread. This will open a specific channel of communication for all the members of the group. I plan to publish selected articles from the group newsletters, past and present, there. The *Crocus* section has attracted contributions from people all around the world, including several who are able to publish pictures of plants in their wild habitats. It contains a wealth of information and images. I would urge every *Crocus* Group member to visit the forum as it contains much of interest. You do not have to be a registered user or an SRGC member to do this but I would recommend both.

e-mail

In this day and age of increased cost, postage has become a significant expenditure. Most *Crocus* Group members probably have an e-mail address and it will be a lot cheaper to e-mail rather than post the Bulletin to you. Would all members please let us know your e-mail address by dropping an e-mail to thealpinehouse@fsmail.net If you are in the non IT age, don't worry, you will still get your bulletin by snail mail (post).

Seed exchange 2008

Rule 1. If you are a donor, send seed to me before 31.7.2008

Rule 2. If you are not a donor but want a seed list, send a SAE to me before 31.7.2008

Obviously, donors always get first choice and very rare seed in short supply invariably goes to them.

However, non-donors 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.

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 the main theme. I would particularly welcome articles from overseas members.

Post to: Tony Goode, 3 Woodland Road, Hellesdon, Norwich, Norfolk, NR6 5RA or

E-mail to: thealpinehouse@fsmail.net

Crocus Spoon

Originally donated by the *Crocus* Group, this has been awarded annually since 1991 to the best pan of *Crocus* at any AGS Show; the recipients so far are:-

1991	-	David King	- <i>sieberi</i> 'Bowles White'	- Early Spring
1992	-	Rod & Jane Leeds	- <i>pestalozzae</i>	- Early Spring
1993	-	Rod & Jane Leeds	- <i>medius</i>	- Sussex
1994	-	Terry Smale	- <i>vernus albiflorus</i>	- Early Spring
1995	-	Maureen Ledgerton	- <i>vernus albiflorus</i>	- Loughborough
1996	-	Rod & Jane Leeds	- <i>pestalozzae</i>	- Kent
1997	-	Terry Smale	- <i>oreocreticus</i>	- Horsham
1998	-	Alan Edwards	- <i>malyi</i>	- Early Spring
1999	-	Bob & Rannveig Wallis	- <i>kosaninii</i>	- Loughborough
2000	-	Alan Edwards	- <i>biflorus melantherus</i>	- Sussex
2001	-	John Richards	- <i>tournefortii</i>	- Newcastle
2002	-	Robert Rolfe	- <i>dalmaticus</i>	- Caerleon
2003	-	Terry Smale	- <i>cvijicii</i>	- Early Spring
2004	-	Robert Rolfe	- <i>dalmaticus</i>	- South Wales
2005	-	Maureen Ledgerton	- <i>vernus albiflorus</i>	- Kent
2006	-	Robert Rolfe	- <i>serotinus</i> 'El Torcal'	- Loughborough
2007	-	Jim McGregor	- <i>kotschyanus</i>	- Autumn South

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 own seed bank, from collections that year by friends, my own collections and from cultivated plants. I normally sow 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 michelsonii

In the 2007 seed exchange I sent out *Crocus michelsonii* seed (kindly donated by Leonid Bondarenko) to about 50 members who requested it as part of a germination experiment.

I have never had much success germinating *Crocus michelsonii* in the past and was interested to hear other member's experiences and methods.

My own experimental seeds were planted at my usual time of early September. This time round I chipped some of the seed and can report that these seeds germinated better than the unchipped ones.

Would any member who has not yet reported back please let me know their findings with information about time of sowing and methods used. **S**

Some notes on Crocus biflorus

I travelled through Turkey (and Iran) in the years 1994 to 2000 regularly to look for bulbous plants (especially *Fritillaria* species) and their distribution. So I can tell everybody, if you drive from the western end far to the east you can see that there are no clear frontiers between most species.

I saw *Crocus biflorus* forms, which when I brought them with me and planted them separately in a pot

could easily be described as new taxa. I found one *C. biflorus isauricus* on the north side of the Pergamom acropolis near Bergama with clear sky blue flowers without any stripes. Of course there were plenty normal forms, too. I discovered many *C. biflorus nubigena* but no one like that which Mr. W. Kletzing gave to me ten years ago. Inside it is dark lilac blue but on the outside it is creamy brown with an oval white blotch. A remarkable fine form, not very big but quite different from the normal type. I looked for *C. biflorus punctatus* at the classic side near the road crossing of Korkuteli where it grew together with *C. pallasii turcicus*. But I found this subspecies in the grassy hill meadows on my way to Yesilova (where you can find *Fritillaria serpenticola*) without any points / pointed markings. *C. biflorus taurii* grows in the Taurus Mountains at Anamur near the coast with white flowers and dominant red stripes on the outside. But what kind of *C. biflorus* did I found between Akseki and Seydisehir in the hot hills without green vegetation? Here in bare earth bloomed only *C. biflorus* with nearly black flowers! On my way through the eastern half of Turkey I got problems with military forces and was arrested near Bingöl for a day in 1995. In spite of that incident I managed to reach the great lake of Van. Of course I stopped some times at the roadside to look for bulbous plants like *Sternbergia colchiciflora*, *Iris reticulata*, *Iris galatica*, and *Fritillaria crassifolia* and of course *Crocus biflorus*. In the highlands near Mus (with huge fields used to cultivate potatoes) I found millions of bluish *Crocus* flowers. Most of them had yellow anthers and yellow styles but I found a few with whitish, nearly transparent styles which I called at that time *C. biflorus leucostigmata* (now probably *C. biflorus leucostylosus*). But this form did not grow separately. It was mixed with thousands of normal *C. biflorus* with yellow styles.

So I think that it is only a mutation but no subspecies. Of course we need a determination key and a botanic system. But in my opinion drawing clearly separated frontiers and invention of further more subspecies seems to be doubtful and uncertain. **André Schilke, Germany**

Crocus pests in Tasmania

I have a problem which UK members definitely won't be able to help me with. I live about 3 miles from and in sight of Hobart city centre and I have occasional visiting raids from a very large Bennett's Wallaby. This boy stands about equivalent to above my waist and can jump out of sight in about 3 bounds - and he has taken a passing interest in my *Crocus* which he will graze to the ground. I have tried scaring him with lights, glittery paper, bad smells, like blood and bone, and I even travelled the length of the State to collect a "Roo Trap" with which to try and catch him in. He won't go near the bloody thing even when I bait it with the very best money can buy. I tried Comice pears, young succulent carrots, Royal Gala apples and even sticky doughnuts! I rang the State wildlife management authorities to ask for their help and advice and most discouragingly they appeared more interested in me treating him as welcome addition to the landscape than a bloody pest that was in the wrong place. After some discussion they did relent and gave me the name of a local pest control guy who is appropriately named Mr. Wolf. I think his title was a trifle misleading for he had only one trick up his sleeve and that was to shoot the offending beast - not an appropriate move in view of the fact that next door neighbours' on both sides are card carrying 'Greens' with small children - you can image the local newspaper headlines if they got involved -- OBSESSED PLANT COLLECTING NUTTER GOES BERSERK IN WILDLIFE BLOODBATH -- not a good look. The blood and bone works reasonably well for a while and has cut back this creatures nightly forays but the backyard has the redolence of an abattoir and local packs of stray dogs have joined in, attracted like magnets to the promise of a nice smelly meal. Where will it end - I am almost at the point of returning to my ancestral past, smearing myself in clay, making ritual paintings of my prey and lying in wait with a very big stick. Maybe you could use this as copy in your bulletin? I'm sure there are many growers out there with sad or silly stories about trying to grow *Crocus* and the rocky path that besets them. It might kick off a semi-regular spot? **Marcus Harvey, Tasmania**

Crocus crazy in Australia

I can remember looking at my very first picture of a *Crocus* and going WOW... I want that!! It was a close up picture of *Crocus vernus* "Pickwick" To this day it still remains amongst my favourite flowers. It was the beginning of my *Crocus* craze that has now lasted nearly 20 years and is still at fever pitch.

One of the first things I found when I became interested in *Crocus* is that they are relatively unknown in Australia. The reason why this should be is because there is a perception that they are difficult to grow in all but the very cool areas. So very few people have tried them, consequently they are as rare as hen's teeth here.

My first corms I purloined from a garden (shame on me, I was only a boy!) I lived a little north of Sydney and was visiting a garden in the mountains to the west of the city. I saw them and had to have them! I was too shy to dare ask. It was *Crocus tommasinianus*. Luckily for me this species is probably one of the easiest growers of them all. It did very well for me in the balmy climate of coastal New South Wales. My

next acquisitions (legally bought this time from a bulb supplier) did not fare so well, *Crocus chrysanthus* cultivars simply never did much at all. My beloved *Crocus* "Pickwick" was also a dismal failure. However *Crocus pulchellus* and *Crocus speciosus* did very well. So I discovered that the *Crocus* that came from warmer areas, or flowered in autumn or winter did MUCH better in the very mild winter climates on the coast. All to do with length of growing season and time of flowering, which was something I discovered as I got into growing so many other cold climate bulbs. *Tulips* etc... Spring was simply too short to allow later flowering ones to get enough growth on them before they went dormant. So they never flowered, if they found the strength to come up at all after a long hot summer.

I began to concentrate on growing all the autumnal flowering *Crocus* I could get my hands on. Which were VERY few... until I stumbled across the Alpine Garden Society, who had a members list with a few local members on it. I contacted them and was so grateful when they began to share their knowledge and even better their plants. I mentioned I found the autumnal flowerers MUCH better suited for my climate. But I also discovered that where they came from originally was an even better indication. Low altitude in the Mediterranean was what I began to look for in wild source notes.

I grew all my original plants in pots, almost all from seed. In Australia at that stage the only way to get anything good or a bit different was to bring it in as seed. (Still the case today)

Years passed and I finally moved up to mountains west of Sydney. They are called the Blue Mountains. It's a really beautiful area and had a climate that was conducive to grow almost any of the bulbs I coveted. I TRULY went crazy here. We have cold winters with occasional snow. But the days are usually bright and sunny. We get frequent hard frosts but very few long term freezes. The elevation also means cooler summers, particularly at night. The rainfall is spread throughout the year. The one draw-back is the soils are very poor; sandy and skeletal. It was just a matter of pouring a LOT of organic matter and fertilizers in. I was able to grow so many things here that I only dreamed about. The conditions are great for so many bulbs that I hear growers in Europe and the UK have difficulty with. *Frits* that I hear are difficult; *Rhinopetalums* etc are relatively easy for me. I can grow almost any of the *Crocus* species I can get my hands on with a little care. But I must admit my previous lowland autumnal species do not grow as well up here as they did on the coast. I still grow my seedlings and most treasured bulbs in pots. But as soon as I am able I try and get them into the garden. I don't have lots of time for mucking around with masses of pots and I find most plants prefer to be free in the garden. I plant them in spots that emulate as best as I can their natural conditions. It's hard when there's so little information freely available. The *Crocus* by Brian Mathew is my "bible"

I began to work for the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney as a horticulturist. This was to prove a goldmine for me. I was granted a scholarship and went to work at Kew and Edinburgh R.B.G and Wisley for a very short period of time. I went to my very first AGS spring show. I was so excited; I kept walking round and round looking at plants I had only dreamed of. I met Ray Cobb and Kit Grey Wilson at that first show. They were amongst my "idols" They told me of this wonderful organization called "The *Crocus* Group" and that it was free!!! I was astonished. Ray joined me up immediately. Since then I have never looked back. The group and its various members have been EXCEEDINGLY generous with their seed and information. David Stephens, Alan Edwards, and Ann Borrill have been really great!!! Two local growers are also bulb "stars" Otto Fauser and Marcus Harvey. Both have given me a wealth of plants and knowledge and many years of enjoyable friendship. It's still hard to get our hands on some of the "forms" or newer cultivars available to you lucky lot in Europe. But, slowly they find their way here. Or through raising them from seed we find our own lovely forms.

Several times I have travelled overseas to see *Crocus* and collect seed in the wild. There are big patches of *Crocus vernus* "Pickwick" which is about to flower as I write this in my backyard. I try to encourage anyone I can to try to grow *Crocus*. I have given lectures to many horticultural organizations. Plants are given freely to anyone who I think would like them. There's no need to pinch from me!!

I love them and plan to continue to grow these beautiful and occasionally challenging plants for as long as I am able. I look forward in great anticipation as the days cool and the first *Crocus speciosus*, *Crocus kotschyanus* or *Crocus vallicola* flower. And feel sad as the last *Crocus vernus* passes over. But eye off happily the seed pods that are developing to spread and propagate the plants that make me go CRAZY!

Mat Murray, Australia

Crocus moabiticus

Since there is very little written about this species and also photos are hard to find I have decided to go and find *C. moabiticus* or what is left of it in its natural habitat in Jordan.

Last year I have asked Brian Mathew if he knew of specified locations or sites where this species might be found or have been seen in the past. It wasn't long until Brian kindly gave me indications of sites that

were visited at the end of the Seventies and mid Eighties, about some sites he wasn't positive if they still exist, I was also sceptic about some areas since I know that the growing population in Jordan and with that the ever increasing demand for land for agriculture and construction, mainly in the areas of Amman, Madaba and the Jordan valley do not leave any chance for untouched habitats. It seems that there aren't any rules, or license required to build a house, construction is everywhere.

The sites mentioned by B. Mathew were seen in flower in different dates from 13 October to 13 November at the Dana reserve [50 km south of Amman] and 18-22 December in the Madaba and Makawer area in the Moab Mountains. I suppose rainfalls or elevation might cause the differences. I have decided to go and visit the area of Madaba and Makawer, area that I have visited in the past, hoping that still isn't overpopulated, also, due to geographic conditions, the area to the east is mountainous and not indicated for agriculture.

I left for Jordan on 14 December 2007 for 3 days, from where I live [Tivon, in north Israel]; it takes only 3 hours by car to get to Amman and so by midday I had already checked at the hotel and rented a small car, heading to Madaba which is approximately 45 minutes drive south of Amman.

I went first to look for a site of which the only indication was that it is found 20 km south of Madaba, where a good population was recorded in 22 December 1986, well, since than human population has grown and many new roads have been made and so I spend two hours driving through houses and fields that where ploughed for sowing wheat looking for untouched areas. Very few possible sites where found but no signs of *Crocus* and no sign for rain or germination, all the area was completely dry.

I got back to Madaba and decided to try another direction, toward Makawer situated east of the city, a beautiful area facing the Dead Sea and the mountains of Hebron in the Palestinian territory, knowing there is only about an hour left before it starts to get dark. Getting out of the city towards the East I felt immediately that this is a better area, open hills much less disturbed and not crowded. Germination was evident; it rained in that area two weeks before I came.

Well it didn't take a long time till I have noticed a few *Crocus* just by the side of the road, practically 50 meters from a house; I stopped the car and just couldn't believe my eyes. The flowers were stunning in their beauty and filled me with happiness that I will never forget. One doesn't expect to find such a jewel in the middle of the desert, so colourful and precious. There where about 20 plants at the site of which I took many photos, since it started to get dark I head my way back to Amman with the intention of going back to that area next morning.

The second day after another stop at the same site, taking some measures of the plants I heeded farther to the East on the Madaba - Makawer road, just a few km farther I have noticed other *Crocus* just to the side of the road. There were literally hundreds of *Crocus* in flower on an exposed, bald hill.

I must say although *C. moabiticus* is very colourful it is hard to be noticed in its natural habitat, somehow it manages to blend very well with the colour and structure of the soil.

The areas level is at about 850m, consists of dry clear chalky soil with plenty of small limestone, slopes about 30%-50%, bald with very little signs of perennial vegetation, some of the area has firmed soil covered with lichens, *Crocus* were growing in the open ground, often coming from under or beside a small rock or crevice, facing mainly south, S. East and East side of the hill.

There was very little germination of other plants at that spot, there is also grazing of black goats in the area and so there is very little left, the whole area is very dry and exposed to winds, quite cold in winter mainly at nights and backing hot in summer probably above 40c during the months of July and August.

For the record, *Crocus* from that area were identified by Brian Mathew as *C. moabiticus* but considered by Jordanian botanist Dr. El Eisawi as *C. cartwrightianus*. Seeing the flowers and mature leaves, there is no doubt that at least the population I describe here is a true *C. moabiticus*.

Mature plants have 1-3 flowers rarely four, most have two flowers, the contrast of colours is stunning, petals are pure white thin at the base to become much wider in the middle with different levels of veins coloured with deepest violet some are darker than others.

Style has three very long branches widening at the end to form a lancelet shape, dark red orange in colour, disproportionate to the flower size, often exerted out of the flower in a circle. The reason for that

might be to avoid self-pollination. Filaments are short bearing elongated dark yellow anthers that curl back when flower matures.

Leaves start to appear with the second flower, wrapped firmly with the bracts that arise a few cm above the soil level, the reason for that is probably in order to protect the plant, mainly the leaves from being eaten by insects since there is very little fresh nutrition in that area at that time of the year. The tip of the leaf has a stiff, white claw 1-1/5 mm long almost thorny again to prevent from being eaten by an insect. Leaves are many, from 11- 17 in mature plants, mostly 13-15 in number, colour is gray olive green, measuring up to 1 mm in width, with whitish creamy line in the middle that is becoming hard to notice when leaves mature. When flowers are over leaves prolonged, bracts dry and crack to create a perfect rosette on the surface of the soil.

Corm is buried only about 7 cm deep in the ground, corm tunic is fibrous. It was a bit of a surprise to see that corm isn't robust and quite small in size and also not covered with many fibrous layers in order to protect themselves from the extreme drought as in the case of other species that grow in the desert. While digging to check the corms I have noticed new seedlings germinating from seeds, half way down, a fact that made me think that it might be that some of the seedpods mature under ground level, but that is to be confirmed yet.

From that site I continued a few km until I have noticed from both side of the road many plants of the very rare and not yet clear, *Colchicum schimperi* in flower, when I stopped to take photos I had a big surprise. I have noticed a *Crocus* I have never seen before in our area, slender, pure white, the flower is similar in form to the one of *C. veneris* or the form of *C. aleppicus* that is found growing near the coast line in Israel. This form, from my knowledge was never described before, at first I thought it might be a form of *C. aleppicus* knowing that this species was never reported growing in the Moab region. The first thing to hit me was a very powerful perfume that reminds the one of *Hyacinthus orientalis*, very strong perfume to such a small plant, the smell even attracted meat flies.

I have seen only three plants of this *Crocus* in that area. Though it looks more like *C. aleppicus* on first impression I have arrived to the conclusion that this might be a new subsp. of *C. hermoneus* or even a new species. That is due first, to the corm, which is the same to the one of *C. hermoneus*, only that it is smaller and more elongated, secondly, the bright yellow anthers with same colour of the multi divided style. The 3-5 capillary leaves of about 1/2 mm are the reason for me to think of a new species since the leaves of the other two species are wider.

Flower description:

White flower with an almost invisible dark thin stripe on the exterior, dark stamens 1 mm wide, 1.1 cm long [almost black], contain bright yellow pollen. Outer petals 2.2 cm long, 4 mm at the widest part, Inner petals 1.7 cm long, 3.5 mm at the wider part.

Style is divided above stamens level; its base is white to become bright yellow.

It is divided to three parts at stamens level. Each part is again divided to three and at the top of each part divided for the third time to three. [Similar to the *C. hermoneus*]

Leaves growing upright, 3-5 in number grayish green, less than half a millimeter wide. I have made many photos of the flower, close up of its parts and the corm. **Oron Peri, Israel**

Autumn in Laconia

Laconia, the southern most province of mainland Greece comprises most of Oros Taygetos, the western slopes of Oros Parnon and the Mani and Malea peninsulas. Famed for the displays of autumn bulbs no tourist should miss the olive groves filled with *Sternbergia lutea* at Nicandrio, *Crocus goulimy* at Diros and Fotia and *Galanthus reginae olgae* plus *Sternbergia sicula* in the Langarda gorge. We particularly enjoy the numerous banks of olive groves covered with *Cyclamen graecum* or *Cyclamen hederifolium*. For the bulb enthusiast not exclusively focused on *Crocus* there is much of interest. The insignificant mauve-blue flowers of *Scilla autumnale* are everywhere in the Peloponnese, travel south to Cape Tenaro to see *S. autumnale subsp. latifolia*. At flowering time this has an adpressed rosette of near glaucous leaves and a much larger flower spike. In the late afternoon the air of the Cape is scented by countless *Narcissus serotinus*. These vary from small single flowered plants to much larger forms with two, three or rarely four flowers. Just maybe this daffodil should be renamed *Narcissus miniatus* for it matches all of the criteria used in the recent creation of this exclusive Spanish species. Some five or more species of *Colchicum* flower at this time often complementing the stands of *Crocus*. Perhaps our favourite is the beautifully scented *C. cupanii*. On the Malea peninsular this varies from the typical form with overlarge glitzy leaves to

much smaller neater plants with deep green ciliate leaves. Around Monemvasia grows the tiniest *Colchicum* we have ever seen. This has rich pink flowers set off by bronze-purple anthers. The three or more synanthous leaves are deeply channelled and only 2mm wide. A mini *Colchicum pusillum*?

The locations of various *Crocus* in the Peloponnese are very well documented and their detailed description beautifully presented by Brian Mathew in *The Crocus* and two update publications. Of course this information presents us with a challenge; can we find plants which differ from the norm?

Crocus goulimyi subsp goulimyi is widely dispersed on Mani; those sites where it occurs in profusion are the exception. Should you visit such sites at peak flowering time perhaps, like us, you will kneel among them. How better to appreciate the subtle variations, deeper forms, near bicolours and some with clear white styles. This *Crocus* is gently scented but search and you will detect an element of chocolate in some plants. To see ***Crocus goulimyi subsp leucanthus*** in full flower at Fotia must rate among any *Crocus* enthusiasts finest experiences. These neat plants have attractively shaped globular flowers white but with the slightest tinge of ice-blue. These *Crocus* dominate the stony banks of several fields and the sparsely wooded slopes. Between Fotia and the coast on the sloping banks of farm fields we came across stands of much more vigorous *C. goulimyi subsp leucanthus*. Indeed the tallest *Crocus* we have ever seen grew here; height from ground to flower 30cms, leaf length 60cms. We have always spurned those overfed, overlarge *Crocus* produced by wholesale growers for the garden centre trade. Now we suggest they represent the future for some *Crocus* as the overspill from heavily fertilized agriculture fields impacts on their growth conditions. Sites where *C. goulimyi subsp leucanthus* occurs in a pale lilac form have been well described and photographed by Krause. Search any such site and you will find a range of colours extending from occasional plants of as deeper blue as any *C. goulimyi subsp goulimyi* you are likely to find near Ariopolis to pale lilac blue forms and the common form with the inner perianth segments white and the outer three shaded blue. Although relatively common we suggest the darkest forms deserve recognition but can only suggest the obvious title *C. goulimyi subsp leucanthus* “*The Malea Blues*”.

Crocus niveus is one of our all time favourites; easy in both a pot and the garden. Common round Areopolis we particularly enjoyed a large stand mixed with the odd *C. goulimyi* and *C. cancellatus* growing under the medium sized oak *Quercus macrolepsis*. This oak has grey-green tomentose leaves and in autumn is covered in the most extraordinary large spiky acorn cups. In the wild *C. niveus* varies from white through bi-colour forms to a soft mauve. Occasional plants can be found lacking a yellow throat but these seem to have a defect in pigment production as the style branches are a dirty white. In his *Crocus* update Brian Mathew states *C. niveus* shows much variation in the degree of style branch division. We have seen this taken to extreme with the degree of style branching equal to any *C. cancellatus*.

Crocus hadriaticus is widespread in southern Greece and somewhat variable in its characteristics. We most enjoy the typical form seen growing around Sparta. This has an intense bronze perianth tube, large white to cream perianth segments enhanced by a deep yellow throat and dark red style branches which vary from shorter than to just exceeding the anthers; all this plus an exceptional scent. Brian Mathew wonders if the division of *C. hadriaticus* into infra-specific taxa is sustainable. We have yet to visit Vasileios to see the all mauve *C. hadriaticus subsp parnonicus* but certainly this is not universal on Mt. Parnon. On the western slopes we have only seen typical white, yellow throated forms. The most variable stands of *C. hadriaticus* occur on the southern side of the Taygetos at altitudes of around 1000m; here they flower alongside *C. boryi* and *Colchicum bivoniae*. In these populations white flowers predominate but mixed with mauve forms. The yellow throat varies from prominent to virtually undetectable. Most variable is the length of style branches. These may be so short as to be hidden by the anthers and in occasional plants long enough to out-perform *C. asumaniae*. We have measured style branches at 3.5 to 4cm. incidentally should you visit this area in early spring do push on to the summit region of Prophitis Ilias. Here stands of *C. sieberi subsp nivalis* occur in tricolour format. These *Crocus* have small neat flowers of a deep violet blue and are surely more attractive than *C. sieberi* ‘tricolour’ of trade.

Crocus biflorus melantherus occurs in scattered colonies throughout the central region of the Peloponnese. The best stands we have seen were in the Tripoli region growing alongside *C. hadriaticus* and *C. cancellatus* in terra rossa soil between the limestone rocks of goat grazed fields. At flowering time the leaves were scarcely visible thus exposing the dramatic deep purple-bronze feathering of the external three perianth segments to best advantage. In all flowers seen the perianth segments were white with a yellow throat and the anthers, streaked black to grey, overtopped by the red style branches. Yellow anthered forms have been described. The differences in anther colour in *C. biflorus melantherus* are less

dramatic than is seen in *C. biflorus subsp crewei* once confused with the Greek *Crocus*. On Honaz Dag in the Taurus (now subject to Turkish military rule) stands of this typically twin leaved *Crocus* can be found where flowers with large jet black anthers are mixed with equal numbers of flowers having the same sized anthers of the clearest yellow.

Crocus boryi with its large globular flowers has for us the most aesthetically appealing shape of any *Crocus*. The most outstanding forms are common in the Areopolis area. The round creamy-white perianth segments are set off by an intense yellow throat which in turn enhances the attraction of the white anthers. In many flowers the much branched style is yellow and more or less equal in length to the anthers. We seek out those flowers where the style branches are deepest orange and considerably longer than the anthers. On most of Mani *C. boryi* is more variable in flower sometimes with the outer perianth segments veined purple; occasionally this can extend to cover most of the external surface. Other forms with rather narrow perianth segments are less attractive. A recent distribution map suggests *C. boryi* is absent from the Malea peninsular but this *Crocus* can be found growing north of Monemvasia. Here they were seen alongside the uncommon, small *Allium ritzii*. This has small pinkish green striped flowers; surely another candidate in our ongoing search for the *Allium* with the most inconspicuous flowers. Current leader is a member of the *Codonoprasum* complex from the Taurus. Here on a 60 cm stem is an umbel of minute flowers muddy brown streaked dirty green; completely invisible except close up.

Crocus Series Laevigati grows south of Monemvasia on the eastern coast of the Malea peninsular in stands of the most variable forms. On exposed stony hillsides we have seen hundreds of these plants growing in close proximity. These varied from typical *C. boryi* shaped flowers all white or feathered exteriors to *C. laevigatus* like flowers with narrower segments. Most of these had three violet stripes and the exterior segments with limited yellow or bluish staining. Most common was *Crocus* showing a whole range of intermediate characters. Perhaps it was at such a site in the Peloponnese Brian Mathew describes digging in the rain to find corms with coats matching either *C. boryi* or *C. laevigatus*. For us, though, an essential adjunct to growing *Crocus Series Laevigati* is the two-sided label; for these Malea *Crocus* one side of the label claims *C. boryi* the other *C. laevigatus*. We reverse the label whenever we change our minds. This system came into being to cope with *C. tournefortii* on Rhodes. Typical *C. tournefortii* is extremely common on Rhodes but at some sites the flower size and shape matches that of *C. boryi*. Most attractive are those with the exterior of the perianth segments near white. In their prime these aristocratic flowers hide their sexual parts from nocturnal marauders by closing the flower at sundown.

Finally on rare occasions we look at the most confusing of *Crocus* in *Series Laevigati* and wonder if we should not upgrade our system; but then where can we obtain a three-sided label?

Peter and Penny Watt

Matthew, Brian L (2002) *Crocus Update* The Plantsman 1: 44-56 and 93-102

Krause, Paul J (2004) *Autumn Bulbs of the Peloponnese* The Alpine Gardener 72: 367-384

Tan, Kit and Iatrou. G *Endemic Plants of Greece* The Peloponnese. Gads Forlag 2001