

NOTTINGHAM AUTUMN CROCUS *Crocus nudiflorus* AND NOTTINGHAM SPRING CROCUS *Crocus vernus*

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MOST RECENT UPDATE: August 2004

➤ CURRENT STATUS

Nottingham autumn crocus *Crocus nudiflorus* is an autumn flowering bulb, native to Southern France and Northern Spain, especially the Pyrenean area, where it is found in meadows and open woodland. Nottingham spring crocus *Crocus vernus* is a native of the Balkan region of the former Yugoslavia. In Nottingham, both species of crocus are regarded as ancient introductions, as the plants become naturalised before 1500. Both species have a wide but scattered distribution in the UK. They were probably introduced for medicinal or culinary reasons, and the distribution of both is strongly associated with former Monasteries. It is believed that one use of the plants was to treat malaria, which was endemic in Britain at the time, especially areas of extensive wetlands such as the Trent Valley.

In Nottinghamshire both species were abundant in meadows alongside the Trent, particularly in the Wilford and Dunkirk areas. Due to development in the late Victorian and early 20th Century, many of these meadows were lost. Both species now occur in small-scattered populations, within the cemeteries, parks, golf courses, meadows, old gardens and public open space in this area.

The Nottingham autumn crocus is unusual for species of crocus in that it has underground stems along which new corms are produced. This feature allows identification of the autumn crocus in the non-flowering state. The tall purple flowers are produced in mid August to September, hence its name the autumn crocus, with the leaves appearing the following spring. Flowering decreases as the density of corms increases and therefore, the number of flowering spikes is not a reliable indicator of actual population. It is poisonous to livestock.

The Nottingham spring crocus is genetically variable and the flowers of the naturalised populations are often composed of a range of different colour and combinations of white through to purple. In horticulture, it is known as the Dutch crocus and a number of named varieties have been bred.

➤ THREATS

The main factors affecting these species in Nottinghamshire are:

- Destruction of remaining colonies through development of the sites.

- Destruction of remaining colonies through landscaping schemes, cemetery alterations, golf course management, provision of facilities on public open spaces.
- Changes in land management on sites, such as use of herbicides, relaxation or intensification of cutting regimes.
- Planting of cultivated Crocus species in existing colonies of Nottingham Crocus, which increases both competition and the risk of dilution of the local gene pool through hybridisation.

➤ **CURRENT INITIATIVES – EXAMPLES**

- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust have organised field visits and training days for volunteers. These help to familiarise volunteers with the existing colonies and how to identify the plants, and have led to important new colonies being discovered.
- Some landowners have been already been made aware of Nottingham crocus on their land and actively take steps to conserve them.
- Nottingham City Council's planning department has insisted on the protection of existing colonies when a development may affect colonies of Nottingham Crocus.
- Nottingham City Parks have expressed positive support for a reintroduction programme into green open space within the City.

➤ **TARGETS**

- Collate current information of extent of known colonies and produce a report on their distribution by the end of 2005.
- Provide landowners with advice in an attempt to bring all current sites into appropriate management by 2006.
- Establish re-introduction programme, possibly in association with large scale habitat recreation along the Trent in Greater Nottingham. Identify suitable sites and programme by 2010

➤ **PROPOSED ACTION**

Site Safeguard and Management

1. Protect all known sites supporting colonies of Nottingham Crocus from development
ACTION: Local Authorities (LAs).

2. Determine ownership of all known sites for either species and inform landowners of their conservation importance. Provide advice to landowners on suitable species.
ACTION: NWT, LAs, NBGRC.

3. Monitor existing colonies on a routine basis and produce a five yearly report regarding the status of Nottingham Crocus

ACTION: NWT, NBGRC.

4. Seek to establish re-introduction programme into former range.

ACTION: LAs, NWT, BTCV.

Communication and Publicity

5. Promote, by publicising the unique relationship with man and the long historical association of these plants in Nottingham, especially the living link with the Medieval Period and the famous Crocus Meadows.

ACTION: BAG, NWT, LAs

➤ WHAT YOU CAN DO

- Report any sightings of Nottingham autumn and Nottingham spring crocus
- Attend Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust training days where sites are visited and monitored.