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Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 47.....24th November 2021



Narcissus, Galanthus and Crocus



Narcissus features this week because every day over the last few weeks more of their flowers open and that will continue throughout the next six months of winter, spring and sometimes into early summer. There are also a few Galanthus and if you look carefully you can see a few *Crocus laevigatus* flowers just peeking through trying to get noticed among the mass of Narcissus leaves.



With the seasonality of flowering times among the different genera I have to become reacquainted with the many flowers, like meeting with old friends after a long period of absence.

I have often written, in these pages, about trying to pin this unruly bunch of flowers down to a specific name but now after many years I am resolved it is like trying to herd cats. Looking in detail at the subtle differences between the flowers keeps me occupied for hours and while I can detect some diagnostic features it is obvious to me that growing so close together in our bulb houses they interbreed freely. The majority of flowers in

the cover picture relate to ***Narcissus romieuxii* var *mesatlanticus*** which has been cultivated for many years and was one of the first forms that we received forty years ago. It is my belief that this form is itself a hybrid, possibly between *Narcissus albidus* and *romieuxii* which are also involved in the parentage of many generations of our seedlings.



I took advantage of the exceptionally mild few days we enjoyed last week to water the bulb houses with the hose pipe however the forecast suggests we are going to get freezing conditions with the chance of snow so it is now time for me to turn off the outside water. For the rest of the winter I will have to carry watering cans back and forward from the house but it gives me the opportunity to feed the bulbs by adding a liquid tomato-type fertiliser at around 1/3 strength to each can of water.



When I am checking the sand beds I am constantly on the lookout for grass which is easiest to spot when it flowers –getting the grass out before it sheds that seed prevents it taking over but I must always miss the odd one because it persists.



For the most part the hoop petticoat Narcissus are not difficult to grow provided that you understand their basic needs. They grow in the winter which is when they need watering and feeding. I follow a very simple system of watering them on 1st September, then again on 1st October; after that I only water when the pots look to be a bit dry and then it is in proportion to the amount of growth. The initial feeding should come from the potting mix but that will diminish after about a month so I supplement with dilute liquid feeding. Around February/March when the majority of flowers start to fade I will add potassium in the form of Sulphate of Potash.

Around May they will start to show signs of going dormant so they are then allowed to dry out and left dry through until September. It is during the summer dry period that I will re-pot those growing in pots. If your Narcissus are not flowering, breaking down into lots of small bulbs, that is a sure sign that you are not watering and feeding them enough during their winter growing period.



The cream and white flowers seem to dominate this flowering period so I am always delighted to find a nice yellow seedling flowering this early.



This early flowering yellow form of **Narcissus romieuxii** contrasts with the white **Narcissus albidus ssp foliosus**.



A few years ago when I thinned out some of the smaller bulbs in the 'U' shaped sand bed I planted some in this overflow area until they flowered when I could see what I was removing.

Just as well I did because I have rescued a few treasures from them.

One of the seedlings that I named **Narcissus 'Craigton Chorister'** stands out from the crowd in the overflow bed and I can confirm the identity from one of the reference pots where the first flower has just opened. Typically I find the Narcissus flower a week to ten days earlier in the sand beds than the exact same clone does growing in a pot.



Narcissus 'Craigton Chorister'



I had a mishap with my pot of another selected seedling that I named Narcissus 'Craigton Challice'. Just when the number of bulbs in the pot had increased enough to distribute a few among other growers the mischievous sparrows pulled out the label so when I came to repot and found

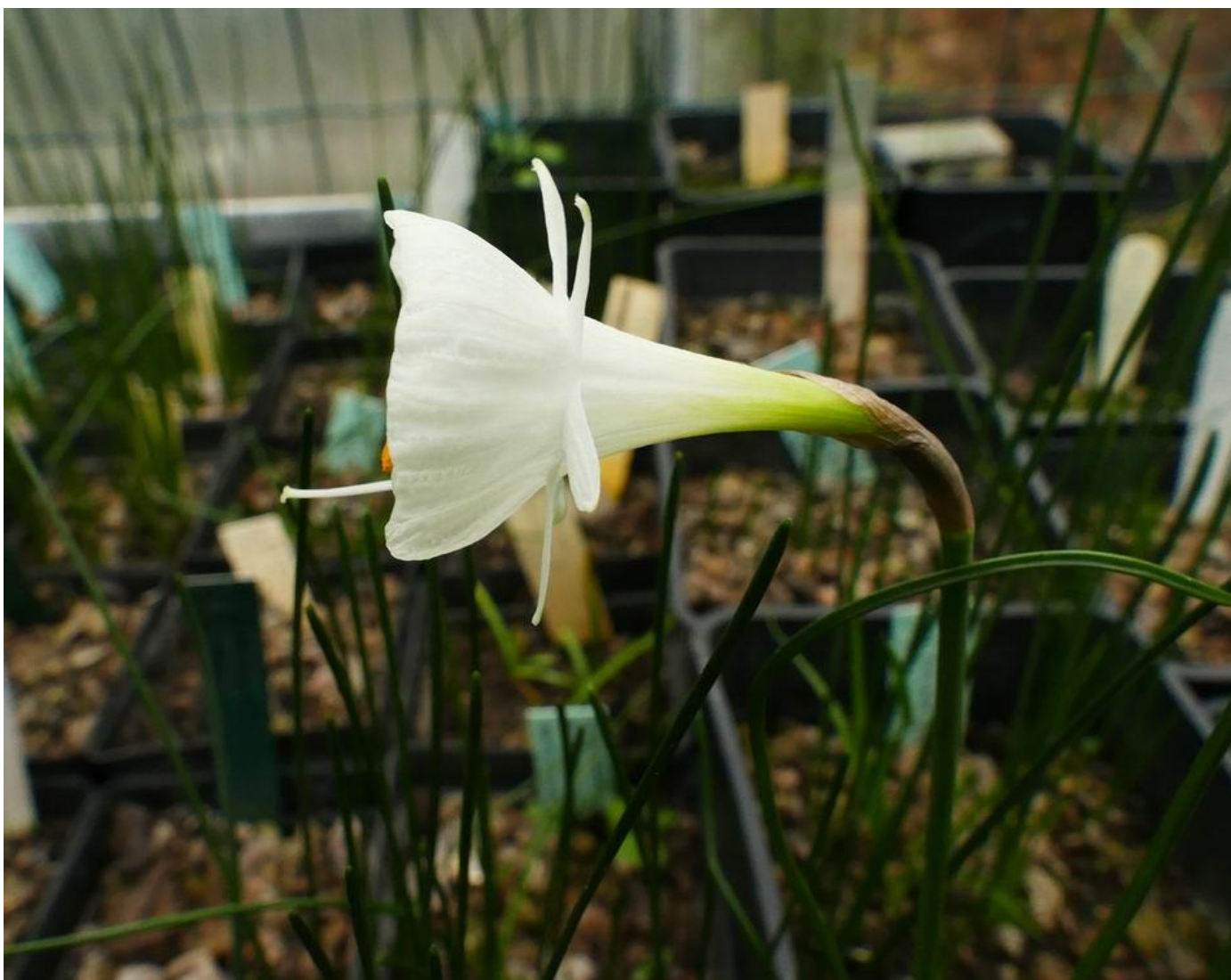
this pot with no label I decided to plant the unidentified Narcissus bulbs into the sand beds only to discover when they flowered that was my only pot of Narcissus 'Craigton Challice'. I had to carefully mark the various positions of the bulbs in the sand so I could lift them and get my potful back. Last year some of the bulbs in the pot flowered so I could confirm their identity so I carefully removed them when they were in full flower then I had to make another pot of the non-flowering bulbs until they could also be confirmed so I have two pots this year.



As the flower matures the corona gradually takes on the distinctive shape that makes Narcissus 'Craigton Challice' stand out from the crowd.



When the flowers of **Narcissus 'Craigton Challice'** first emerge they are a creamy colour but they turn pure white as they unfurl. The petals are slightly shorter than the distinctive corona and while the style sticks out a long way, the anthers when ripe are bunched together and just level with the mouth.





Among the features we look at in the flowers to identify between the species or forms include the length of the petals, where the style and anther sit in relation to the corona, contained or exerted, the colour of the flower at maturity as well as the overall shape - the length of the pedicel is also relevant.





Narcissus albidus* ssp *foliosus

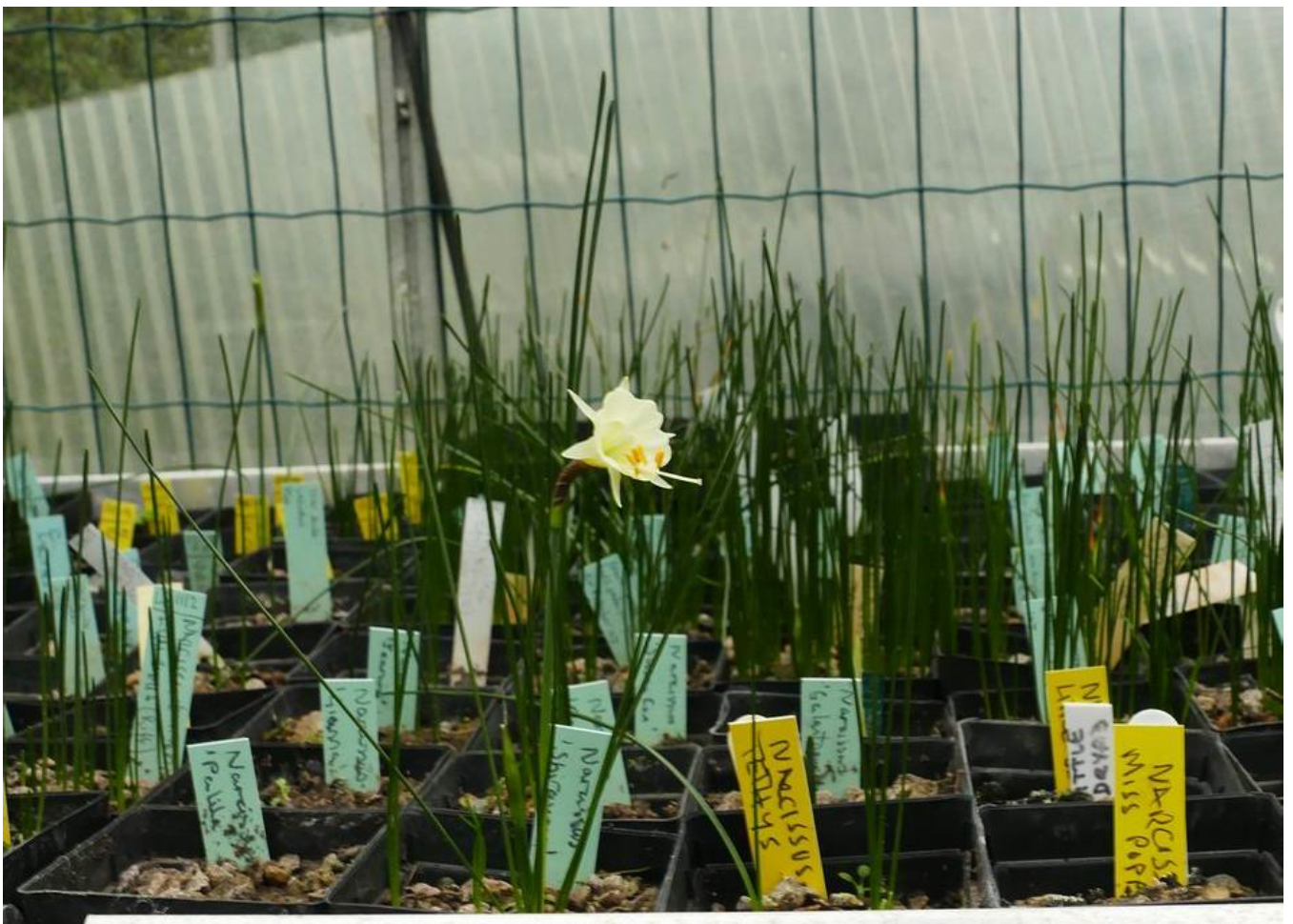
The anthers are well contained in the corona and the stigma is longer but still within the corona also the pedicel, which is the individual flower stem that sits on top of the main stem or scape, is the longest within the group.





Take a moment to enjoy and study a range of flowering forms at different stages of maturity in the next sequence of images.





Narcissus 'Shiraume'

A recent gift from a kind friend is a seedling raised in Japan now flowering for the first time for us.



Narcissus 'Shiraume' has a relatively small flower, long petals, lobed corona with very exserted stamens and style.





This white flowered Narcissus seedling growing in a sand bed has a flanged corona and while the style is exserted the anthers and petals are the same length as the corona.





I love the way the light illuminates this **Narcissus Craigton Challice'** flower



A reminder that it is most important to keep the bulbs watered while they are actively growing.



The planting is less dense in these sand beds with a wider range of bulbs but it also received a soaking.





The small **Crocus laevigatus** is one of my favourites and different forms will flower in the sand beds all through the winter and as you can see below it will even grow outside where it is rarely warm enough for the flowers to open however for two days this week Aberdeen was the warmest place in the UK reaching 17C, enough for these flowers.



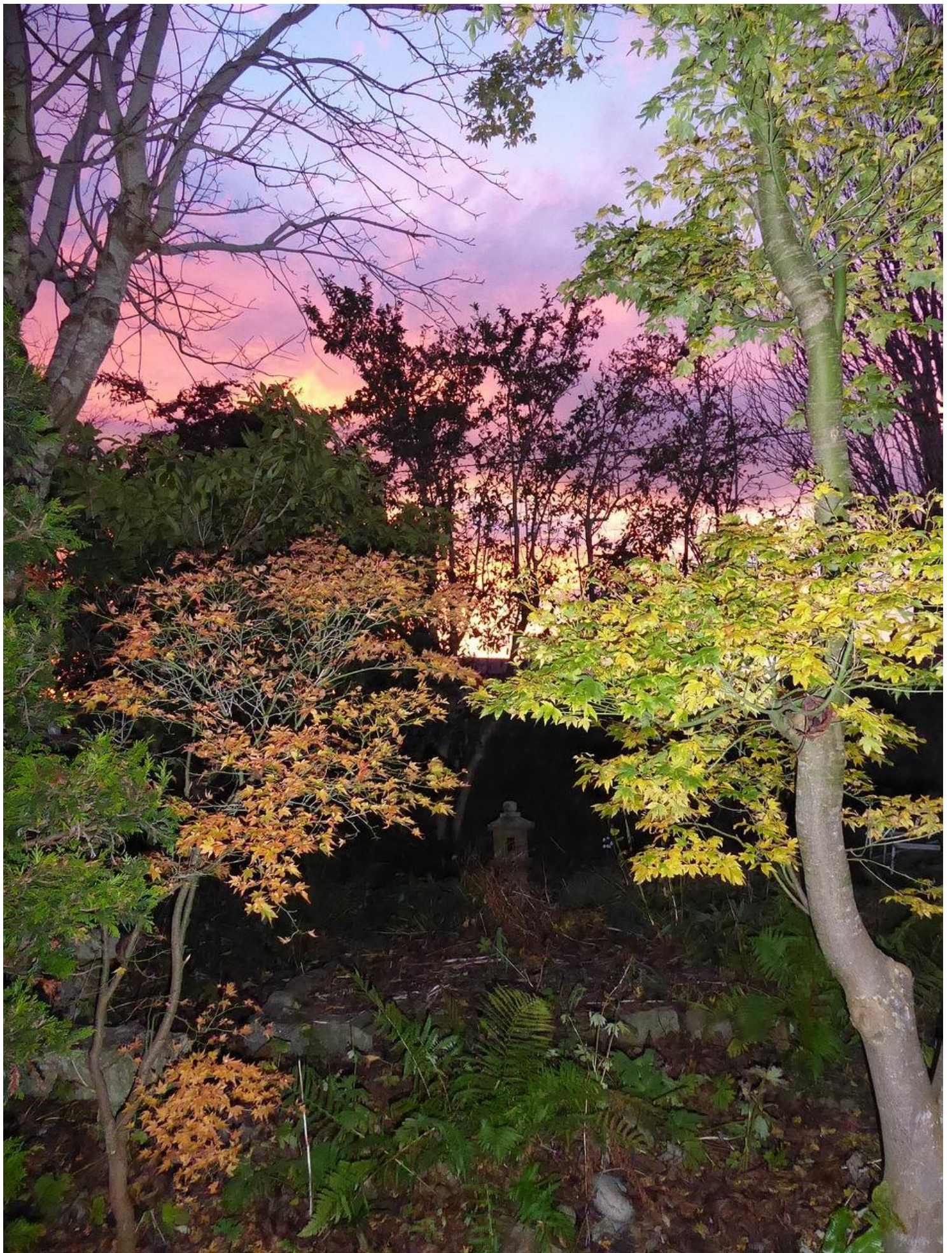
Crocus laevigatus



To complete the set shown on the cover we can see these *Galanthus reginae olgae* from the sitting room window.



Galanthus reginae olgae



My parting image is one of the stunning sunsets seen from the garden that have also been enjoyed across the country this week.....