



BULB LOG 01.....5<sup>th</sup> January 2011



**Narcissus romieuxii seedling**

For the ninth time I start on bulb log 01 - my first log went on in January 2003 if I had numbered them all consecutively and not reset at the start of each year this would be log 417. What more can I say to interest you, dear readers? My philosophy has been if it interests me it will hopefully be of interest to others and so my log will continue to feature both what is in flower at any time of the year, my tasks and growing methods as well as an extract of the miscellany of thoughts that go through my mind.....



**Narcissus 'Camoro'**

How dull the winter could be without the bulbs that cheer us up by flowering throughout these cold and dark months and at this time of year it is mostly the various forms and cultivars of *Narcissus romieuxii* such as *Narcissus 'Camoro'*.

Plants that put on all their growth and flower during the winter do bring their own challenges and I will be returning to that in next week's Bulb Log.



### **Narcissus 'Camoro' Seedling**

I will of course continue to promote the great delights and rewards that come with raising your plants from seeds. An obvious benefit is lots of plants at virtually no cost but my prime reason is the variability in both form and constitution. This seedling from *N. 'Camoro'* has a wider flare to the corona and is to my eye an even more beautiful form than its seed parent.

## **Narcissus 'Camoro' Seedling**

The side view of the same flower shows how widely flared the corona is – the flower is as wide as it is long.

Compare this profile to the one below:-



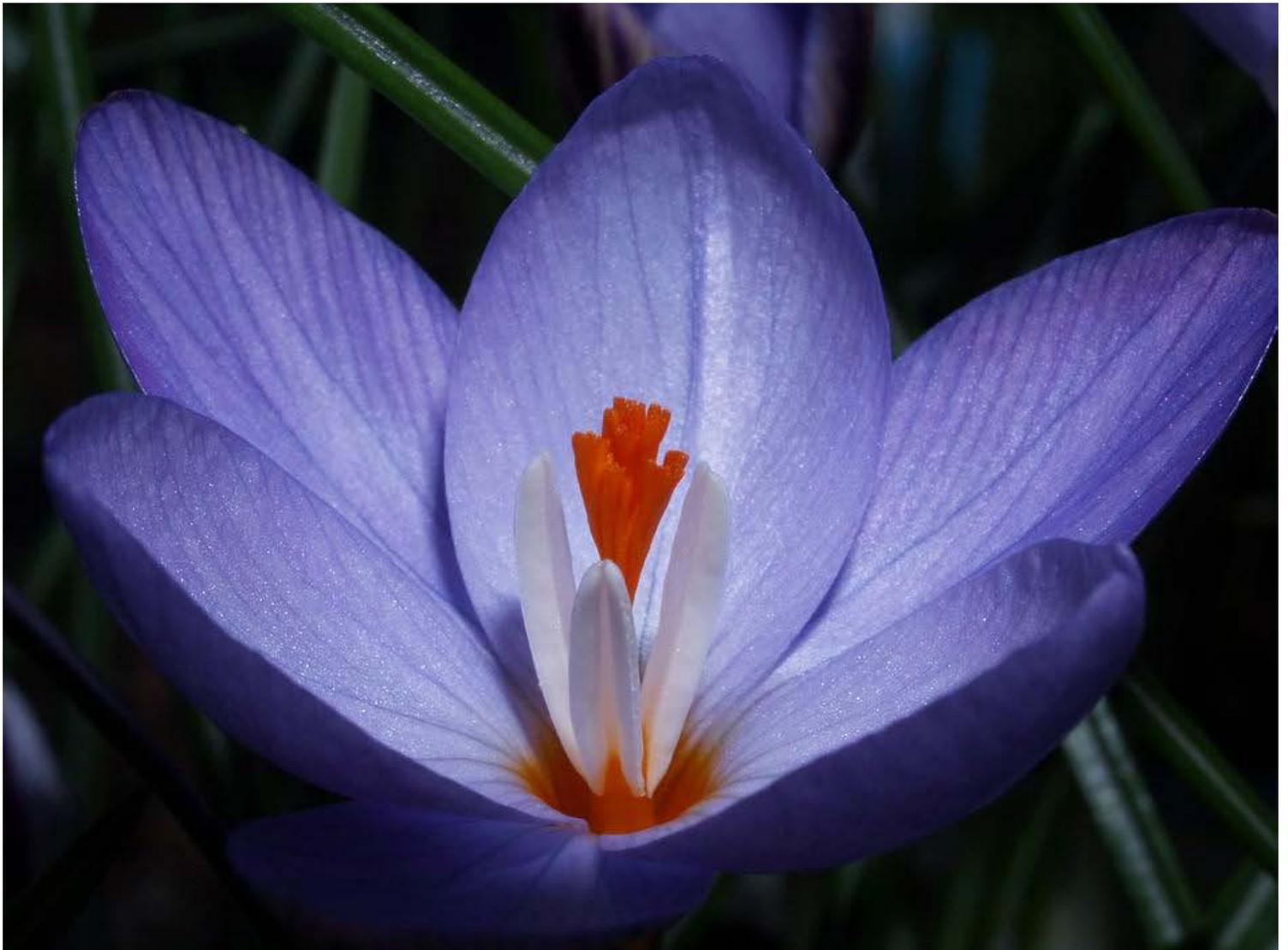
## **Narcissus cantabricus foliosus**

*Narcissus cantabricus foliosus* is a species that has a very long elegant profile. Some of the features that are used in identifying the different species are best seen from the profile of the flower. These include the position at which the petals join the corona – whether the corona is constricted at that point or not and what is the length of the pedicel (flower stem) if indeed there is one at all. The pedicel is the individual flower stem that joins the flower to the scape which is the main flower stem. The pedicel is best illustrated in multi-flowered *Narcissus* where a number of flowers share a scape – each is connected by its individual pedicel.

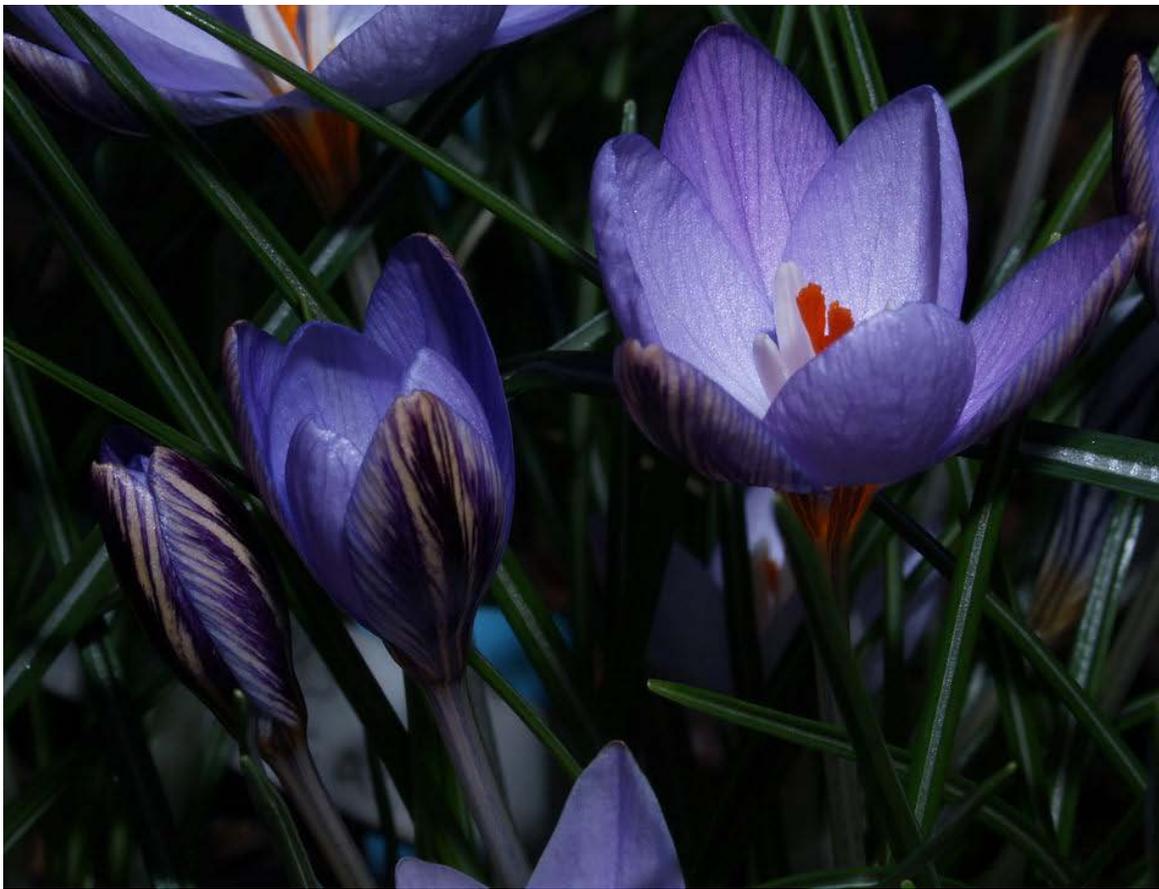


## **Crocus laevigatus**

We have had just enough warmth and light to open some of the Crocus laevigatus flowers releasing their delightful scent.



**Crocus laevigatus**



## ***Crocus laevigatus***

Most *Crocus* species have evolved a strategy to protect their anthers and style by closing their flowers when it is too cold and dark.

*Narcissus* have evolved a different strategy of holding their flowers facing either sideways or downwards to prevent them filling up with water and so they can remain open all the time.



## ***Fritillaria lusitanica* shoots**

The first signs of above ground growth have now appeared in the *Fritillaria* house in the form of these young *Fritillaria lusitanica* shoots, the first to break through this season - I do not think they are big enough to flower this year.



**Spring bed**

Now the snow has gone we can see how much work we have to do before the spring bulbs start to emerge and fill these beds with their colours. The matted stems and the leaves need removing to the compost heap. I also need to do something with the bright red *Arisaema* seeds that no bird or other foraging wildlife in our garden wants to eat. I do not want them to germinate where they are as there is already a forest of *Arisaema* there.



**Fallen leaf mat**

The thawing of the snow also reveals the dense mat of wet leaves that covers some of the beds. While we are happy to leave them to break down naturally in some of the shrub beds I like to lift them from the other beds, especially the bigger leaf forms, such as *Acer* 'Crimson King' that form a dense blanket that will inhibit certain seeds from germinating.



**Leaf pile**

Each year I start a new leaf pile to allow the leaves to break down into a valuable source of humus and nutrients for our potting mix as well as to enrich the beds when we lift, split and replant clumps of bulbs. Over the next few weeks, weather permitting, we will pile all the leaves into a heap, weigh them down with a wired grid and some stones and let nature break them down.



**Leaf Mould**

The contents of last year's leaf pile has now broken down and is ready to use in potting mixes after being crumbled through a one centimetre grid. Our heaps will produce a useable leaf mould in time for the summer re-potting.



### **Broken trough**

Despite the long cold month of December we still have a long way to go before winter releases us – January and February are often our coldest months. Assessing what damage might have been caused by the frost I discovered that this hyper-tufa trough has been completely split apart.



Looking down you can see that it has been completely split on all corners by the heaving of the frost. I have not used the hyper tufa mix for many years for this very reason. I was requested to demonstrate how it was done at a workshop about four or five years ago and I am surprised that it has lasted this long. The first signs of failure are when the surfaces start to crumble. This breakdown is as a result of moisture held in the peat that forms part of the hyper tufa mix which expands and contracts every time we get a period of freezing condition. Eventually the trough just disintegrates. If you experience cold winters I recommend you do not use the hypertufa mixes. There are those who have had good results with them over many years but we have never succeeded with these troughs.



### **Fish box trough**

The method that I use is to surround a polystyrene fish box with a sand cement mortar mixture and to date that has proved extremely strong and resistant to frost damage (See bulb log 3808). The only set back of my mix is that the surface weathers that bit more slowly, with lichens and mosses taking a bit longer to give the troughs an aged look but that will eventually come.





### **Lichens**

We do have plenty of mosses and lichens around the garden and it is only when I look at them that I appreciate what an important part of the overall picture they are. As the lime and other chemical salts in the cement of the troughs gradually breaks down the surface will get colonized by these lovely lichens.



### **Mosses**

Once the lichens come the mosses can get a hold and they too will cloth the troughs giving them a very natural and aged look and I have the reassurance that they will not break apart in the frosts. This leads my on to one of my pet hates – power washers. So many of these are pushed on the public by the DIY and Gardening stores as something you cannot live without. Of course power washers can be handy for some applications but when people (mostly the men) get them home they start to look for anything they can blast with that high power water jet.

Once they have cleaned the car(s) and drains they start to look for another target, blasting everything in sight, cleaning all the lovely moss and lichens that have taken years to establish from every surface they can reach destroying that delightful aged character and leaving behind a boring bear rock or clean cement surface that could be brand new. I am the other way around I cannot wait for the cement slabs to acquire that aged look or for the walls of my troughs to get colonized by lichens and mosses. While I am on this subject can I also dispel the myth that is so often stated of applying a wash of yogurt or animal manure to the surface as this will speed the aging

process. I have experimented with this over and over and I can tell you that this constantly repeated advice is nonsense and a waste of time and yogurt.



**Wall**

In my view there is nothing better than an old characterful wall like this covered in mosses and lichens and not only does it look good but I occasionally find some ericaceous seedlings germinating in the moss patches.





**Mushroom with moss and lichens**