



BULB LOG 10.....9th March 2011



Bulbs in the Prop house

This very colourful view shows the bulbs flowering in the prop house – called this because this used to be our propagation glasshouse with mist unit where we propagated many other alpine plants. That was until the bulb collection expanded so much that we had to requisition the space to accommodate them. The shallow aluminium trays on the right were where we hardened off the rooted cuttings prior to putting them in to outside frames.



Sternbergia pots

It was never intended for bulbs and that is why they have suffered so much damage in the recent cold winter but the damage is not so extensive and tragic as I first feared and reported a few weeks ago.



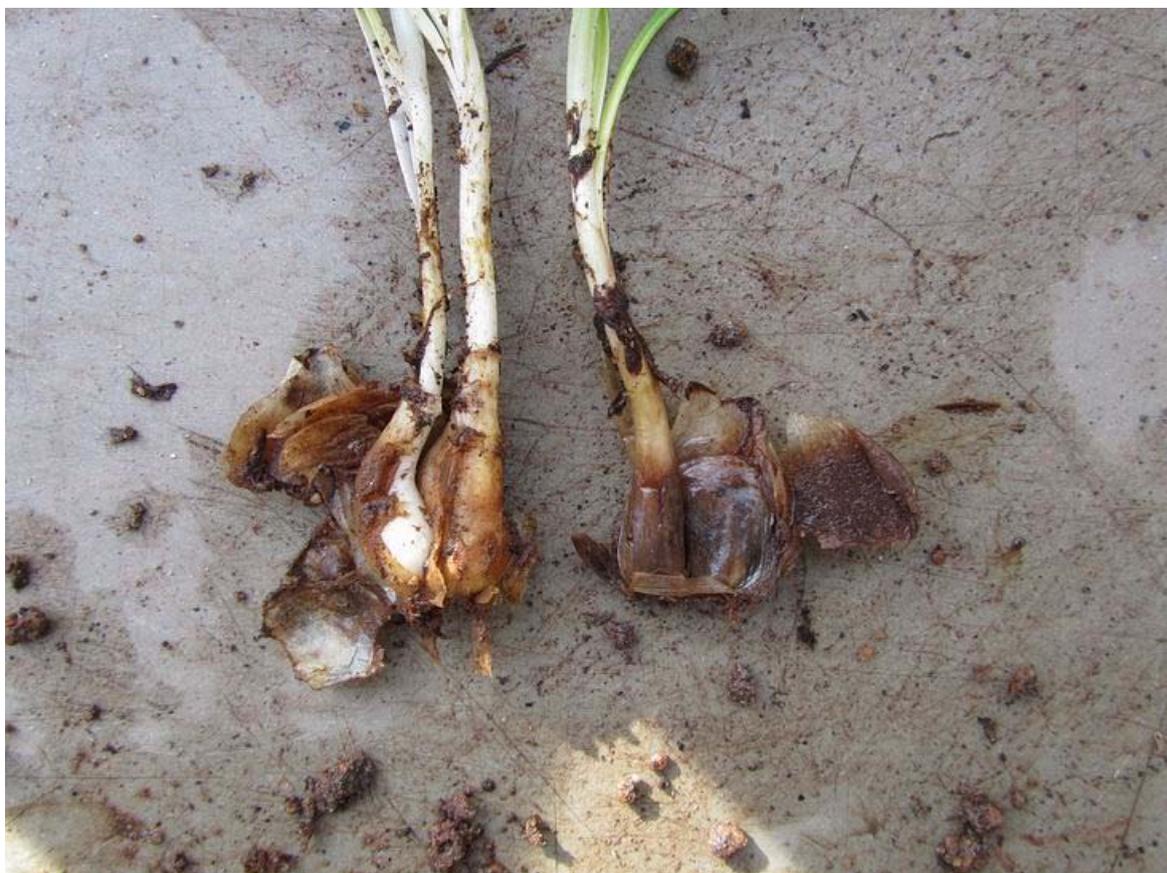
Sternbergia sicula

Having lost one pot of *Sternbergia sicula* completely I decided it was time to take action to see how extensive the damage was and what could be saved. I carefully tipped this pot of *Sternbergia sicula* out and the first thing I observed was that there was no sign of living roots so I then exposed the bulbs.



***Sternbergia sicula* bulbs**

The roots had been killed off completely and were turned into a soaking wet mess – in fact the compost was very wet considering that I had not watered it for some time. All the moisture that was on the roots had returned to the compost and as there was no activity from the plants the water was just sitting there causing further damage.



***Sternbergia sicula* bulbs**

The danger with this situation is that even though the leaves remained green and will do for some time, the plants' activity from below has stopped and the bulb is being attacked by wet rot moving up from the dead roots. I removed all the roots from the bulbs and laid all the otherwise firm and clean bulbs to one side so I could inspect the rotten looking ones more carefully. By peeling back the scales I was able to rescue some which had not rotted all the way through to the centre by removing the rotten layers (left above) – others like the one above right were rotten all the way. Once I had cleaned up the bulbs I repotted them into dry sand which I will not water so as to let the bulbs go into a premature dormancy as the leaves die back. Some forms like Sternbergia 'Dodona Gold' seem to have survived with only some minor damage to the roots.



Sternbergia greuteriana

This pot of Sternbergia greuteriana shows similar damage to only some of the roots around the edge next to the pot and of course the ones that had extended out of the bottom of the pot have died back. With careful restricted watering I now hope that I will be able to rescue at least some of these pots.



Arum creticum

Not such good news for this pot of Arum creticum -the tips of the leaves were only just showing through the compost and were looking a bit shriveled. A gentle tug confirmed my fear that the tubers had been killed by the freezing.



Narcissus pots

I have high hopes that these pots of Narcissus on the same aluminium tray have not been killed as they are continuing to flower freely. The browning of the leaf tips that has appeared does indicate that some damage has been done to the roots but enough must have survived to allow the flowers to open normally. Again careful watering for the rest of the season is needed, supplying just enough to prevent the plants collapsing but not enough to allow wet rot to attack the damaged roots.

7cm pots

The former mist unit is now filled with 147 mostly 7cm pots and shows how you do not need a big area to grow a wide range of bulbs. These are mostly looking very healthy as they are sitting on a good 15cms of sand which contains a soil warming cable.



Potassium feed

As many of the bulbs in these pots are flopping - over a sign that they are drying out - I decided it was time to water them. Because I have to water the plastic pots so much less often than I used to water the clay pots I am very aware that this means that I have fewer opportunities to give the bulbs their feed of potassium so I did just that. I sprinkle some sulphate of potash on each pot before I water and then it will wash down to the roots. Not only will this help build flower buds for next year but it will also help boost the plants immune system and help them recover from any damage that has been caused by the cold.



Crocus biflorus* ssp *weldenii

The other week I said that I do not like moving pots out to photograph them and here is the perfect example of why I take that stance. I decided that this pot with a single surviving seedling of *Crocus biflorus* ssp *weldenii* would have plenty of compost and so was unlikely to have roots extending far into the sand plunge. Wrong – who would have thought that not only would the roots be exploring the sand but that a fat brittle contractile root seeking to drag the corm deeper into the ground would be sticking out like this. Obviously I handled it very carefully and after I had taken the picture I returned it to the plunge poking a hole with a pencil to accommodate the fragile root extension and watering it in well to ensure that the sand and root were in good contact again.



***Crocus biflorus* ssp *weldenii* and *Crocus heuffelianus* ‘Carpathian Wonder’**

Crocus biflorus ssp *weldenii* is distinguished by having a white and not yellow throat and Janis Ruksans’ very beautiful selection *Crocus heuffelianus* ‘Carpathian Wonder’.



Crocus in bulb house

Across in the bulb house there are a number of Crocus species putting on a display and filling the air with scent.



Crocus 'Hubert Edelsten'

I have many favourite Crocuses, in fact there are few if any I can say that I do not like: Crocus 'Hubert Edelsten' a cultivated selection from Crocus sieberi is a great plant. I remember it used to be quite common and for a time it appeared in the garden centres' autumn bulb sales at a few pounds for a pack of ten. Not any more I cannot remember when I last saw it on offer in bulk and only a few specialist bulb sellers offer it. This is the way with many bulbs – for a while they are immensely successful and raised in great numbers by the major growers until something wipes out the entire stock - it could be rots, diseases or weather conditions.



Crocus sieberi ssp sieberi

The variation within a single sub species is fascinating and *Crocus sieberi ssp sieberi* is no exception to this. The style is variable from a relatively simple three branched split to the wonderful frilly affair seen above. The other main variable in this subspecies is the wonderful markings on the outside of the floral segments



Crocus sieberi ssp sieberi.

Ever since I got a few bulbs of this subspecies from the late Harold Esslemont in the mid 1980's this has been a great favourite of mine and, as it is not the most hardy, somewhat of a challenge. Now after several seed generations I seem to be getting some good results – I hope that I am not speaking too soon.



Crocus 'Hubert Edelsten' and Crocus sieberi ssp sieberi

An interesting observation is that these two close relatives close and open at slightly different temperatures. These two pictures were taken as the afternoon sun dipped in the sky and 'Hubert Edelsten' closed some time before sieberi sieberi even though they had exactly the same exposure to the fading light.



Crocus x jessoppiae

This pretty little hybrid is of uncertain parentage and we are told it arose in some seedlings that EA Bowles had passed on to his neighbour Mrs Euphemia Jessopp.



Crocus laevigatus

The last of our *Crocus laevigatus* flowers are just going over, some six months after the first flowers of this species opened for us. It is certainly the species that can come to flower over the longest time period from autumn to spring as long as the conditions are favourable.



Crocus kosaninii

Of the many crocus species in flower *Crocus kosaninii* is a member of the vernus group and I find it is quite easy to grow although I have not tried it outside yet. I am keen to get as many bulbs as I can growing outside as well as under glass and I will make a big effort to achieve this when I am next repotting them. I will plant them into the new sand bed I showed last week. So often we struggle to grow a bulb in a pot giving it all the protection we think it needs only to find that many of them will grow much better in the garden.





Crocus cvijicii

On the other hand I do grow most of our *Crocus cvijicii* in open frames or the garden as it does much better in the cool moist summer conditions. I do keep a pot or two of seedlings inside to be able to enjoy the flowers away from the ravages of the weather and the attention of slugs - when I remember I place the pots outside for the summer.



Crocus olivieri* subsp. *balansae

This is a good time to remind all *Crocus* lovers to buy Janis Ruksans new book 'Crocuses- a complete guide to the genus'. I reviewed it in Bulb log 5110 and would recommend that you get hold of your copy before the edition sells out, as I am sure it will, and becomes as difficult to get hold of as the other great work on this genus 'The Crocus' by Brian Mathew.



Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'

My final pictures for this week are of my troughs of Eranthis 'Guinea Gold' which are really enjoying the sunshine filling the air with the most wonderful scent of honey. As there are few flowers in many gardens at this time of year they are attracting the bees from miles around and are an important source of food for this most valuable group of pollinators



Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'