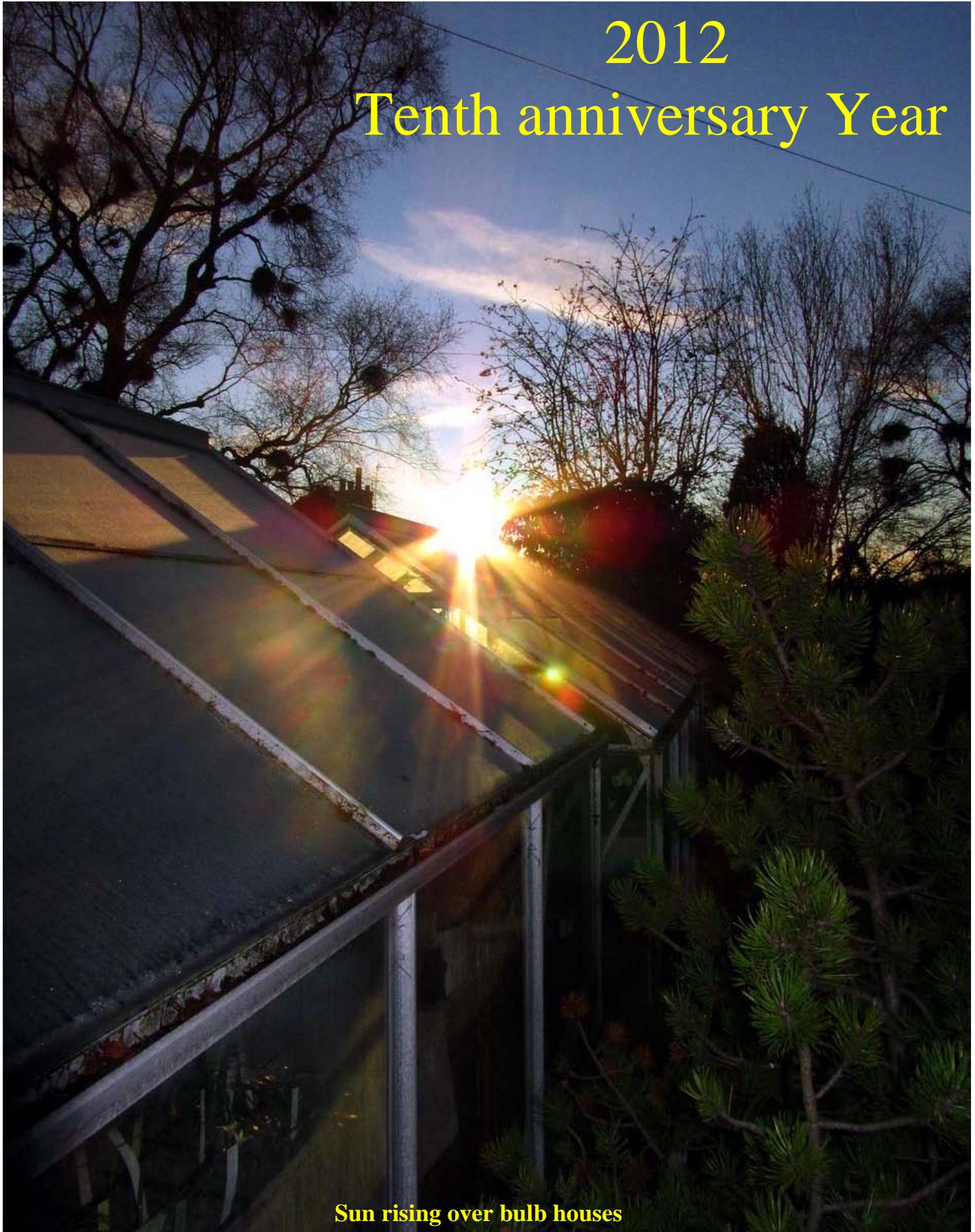




BULB LOG 01.....4th January 2012

2012 Tenth anniversary Year



Sun rising over bulb houses

Year ten starts much like every other year but while the garden, bulbs and I follow basically the same path there are always variations some minor some major. Judging from the forum and emails we have received from our friends in the northern hemisphere this is far from a normal season. Very un-winter like mild weather has dominated, tempting many plants into early growth and some are just ridiculously out of season.



Meconopsis betonicifolia



With the absence of any prolonged freezing the side growths of the Meconopsis (above) have just kept on growing producing a rather sad looking flower.

Hepatica nobilis

Not so far removed from its normal season this pinkish form of Hepatica nobilis has released a few flowers from its fat resting bud.

The rather chewed nature of these flowers shows that it is not just the plants that take advantage of mild winter conditions as slugs and snails are also still foraging.



Snowdrops

I showed a picture of this clump of Snowdrops in Bulb Log 0311 when they were slightly more advanced than shown here. Considering the big freeze we had during November and December 2010 it is a surprise that these *Galanthus* are not that far ahead of last year's timing leading me to think that there many different factors that come into play which affect when a plant will grow and flower – it is not just temperature.



One thing for certain is that **'white fever'** has started extra early especially down south where some specialists had 50 named cultivars in flower to pick for the Christmas table.



Galanthus 'Ramsay'

I have to own up to having just a few of the wee white flowers and I even grow some in pots including this really compact form 'Ramsay' which flowers on very short stems making it ideal for troughs, raised beds and other associations with compact rock garden plants.



Galanthus 'Wasp'

We just got a bulb or two of 'Wasp' last autumn and I find that bulbs that are planted or started late often come into flower sooner than they would if planted on schedule.



Colchicum kesselringii

On sunny days the temperature in the bulb houses increases enough to open the flowers of this rather early flowering *Colchicum kesselringii*.



Ipheion sessile

Both the *Colchicum* above and this *Ipheion sessile* are early flowering bulbs normally but this year they are at least four weeks ahead of previous years while other plants such as *Crocus michelsonii* seem to be behind what I consider is the average scheduled flowering period.

It is these sorts of variations in the flowering periods as well as the variations in the plants' looks that keep my interest going year after year. Raising your bulbs or plants from seed will give you even more variation along with youthful health and vigour often lacking in some of the long established cultivars.



Narcissus in bulb house

It is the Narcissus that are without doubt the winter stars in our collection of bulbs.

At this point last year we were assessing the damage and potential losses caused by the ravages of the 2010/11 winter but despite that we still have large numbers of Narcissus in flower.



Narcissus bulbocodium

As has often been mentioned the Narcissus bulbocodium group is very large and variable providing us with endless variations that could rival the number of Galanthus cultivars if they were all given names. The form of Narcissus bulbocodium above is of known origin and was collected in Morocco - it is distinctly deep yellow and a very attractive plant - however the largest number of our hoop petticoat plants are seed raised and many of those from our own seed collected in the bulb houses where they can be as promiscuous as they like creating yet more variation than can be found in the wild.



Narcissus romieuxii seedling

Observation is one of the best assets for any grower – being able to spot minute differences that make one bloom stand out. Looking into the face of this flower I was struck by the number of stamens – 9, three more than normal. I have learned over the years that when these Narcissus have extra stamens they usually also have extra petals and indeed there are ten petals.



Ten petals

This makes it quite different and potentially worth propagating but first I need to establish if this is just an aberration – that is; it only happens this year- or if it is a genetic mutation that will behave like this every year. I will get some idea soon as there is a second stem rising from what I think is the same bulb and if it has ten petals then I will mark this one to be checked again next year to confirm that the extra petals and stamens are fixed features before I start bulking it up and possibly giving it a cultivar name.



Narcissus romieuxii seedling

The next three pictures are all *Narcissus romieuxii* seedlings showing some of the variations that occur in this group. In most cases I know the seed parent but have no idea which flower the pollen came from so these may be crosses within the whole group. I love the deep yellow colour and conical corona of the one above – very elegant.



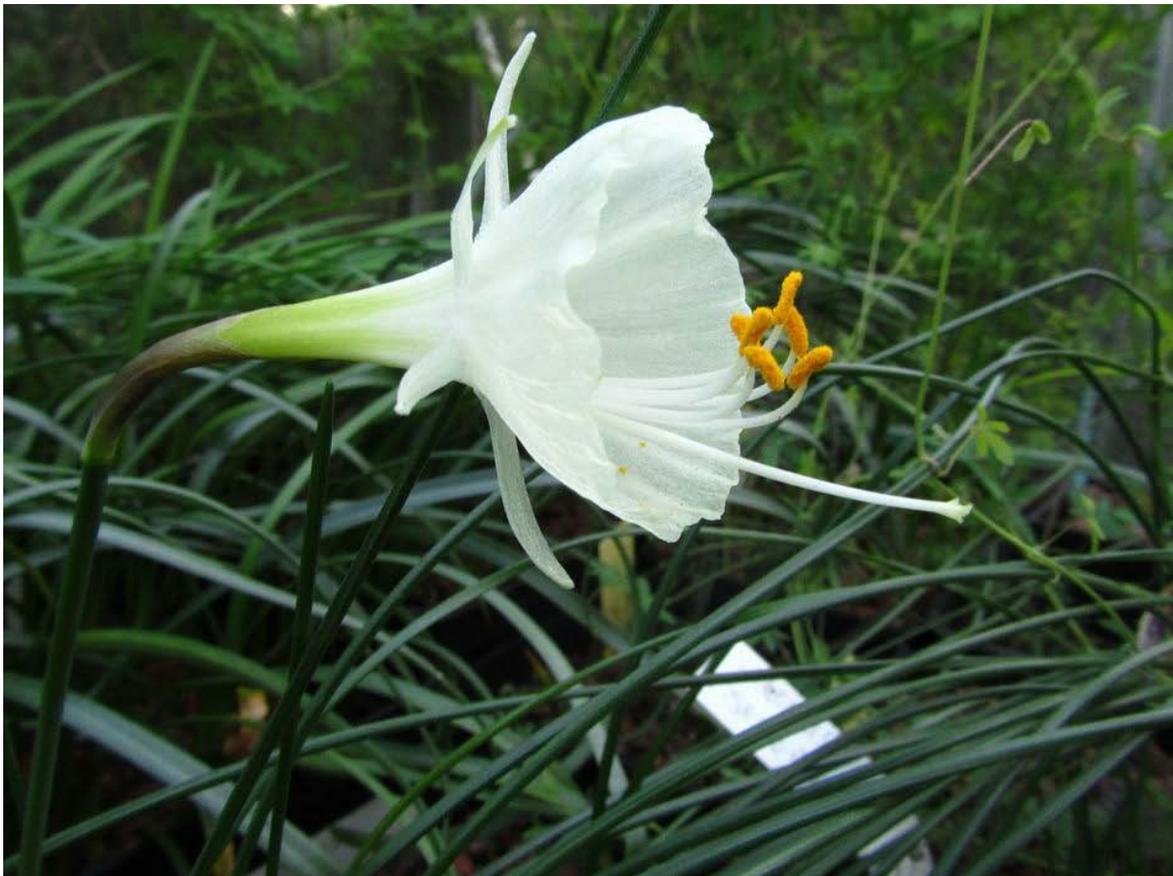
Narcissus romieuxii seedling

These are slightly paler but still distinctly yellow with a wide flaring slightly lobed corona - flamboyant.



Narcissus romieuxii seedling

Yet another variation in the flower shape - note how extended the style and stamens are – well beyond the mouth of the corona.



Narcissus seedling

This one had self seeded into a pot of Fritillaria a few years ago so I can only guess at its parentage. The pure white filaments and style along with the shape and pure white colour suggest that *Narcissus cantabricus* could be in its genes. I have been increasing this one for a few years and now have a good pot of it. All these seedlings are vigorous and healthy as well as lovely.

There are many of the old well established

cultivars still around. These are increased clonally mostly by natural offsetting and division of the bulbs and what you get is not a young bulb but a clonal copy of an old bulb that brings with it any sickness or disease it may have picked up during its long life. While many of these forms still increase and flower well for us they lack that youthful vigour and freshness that you get with sexual (seed) reproduction where a totally new plant is created through the mixing of the parents' genes.



Narcissus 'Don Stead'



This is very early for Narcissus 'Don Stead' to be in flower - a good month or six weeks ahead on most years.

A friend has also noted that her pot of Narcissus 'Don Stead' is also in full flower now when it would normally go to the Early Bulb Day in Dunblane on the third Saturday of February.

Narcissus 'Don Stead'

However, to show that flowering time is not just simply down to weather or clone, the picture on the left shows another pot of N. 'Don Stead' growing in another plunge in the prop-house which is well away from flowering. There are many factors such as when they were first watered, how moist they have been kept, temperature of the compost, etc.etc that can affect the flowering time of plants.



Narcissus 'Cedric Morris'

It is nice to have 'Narcissus 'Cedric Morris' an early flowering representative of the trumpet narcissus group which has been in flower since mid December. It seems to be sterile in that it has never set any seeds and this gives the flowers an unequalled longevity as they stay fresh for months.



I found this **shield bug** on our dining room table just a few weeks ago. It was just after we had come back from the supermarket and left some bananas and chestnuts on the table so I guess that it must have come home with them.