



BULB LOG 13.....28<sup>th</sup> March 2012



Spring colour

As if our weather in Aberdeenshire was not crazy enough we now hold the record for the highest march temperature in the UK . At 23C we have been hotter than the Mediterranean or the Caribbean and with a potential of snow by the weekend! The plants have of course responded to this heat wave and the garden is just full of colour.

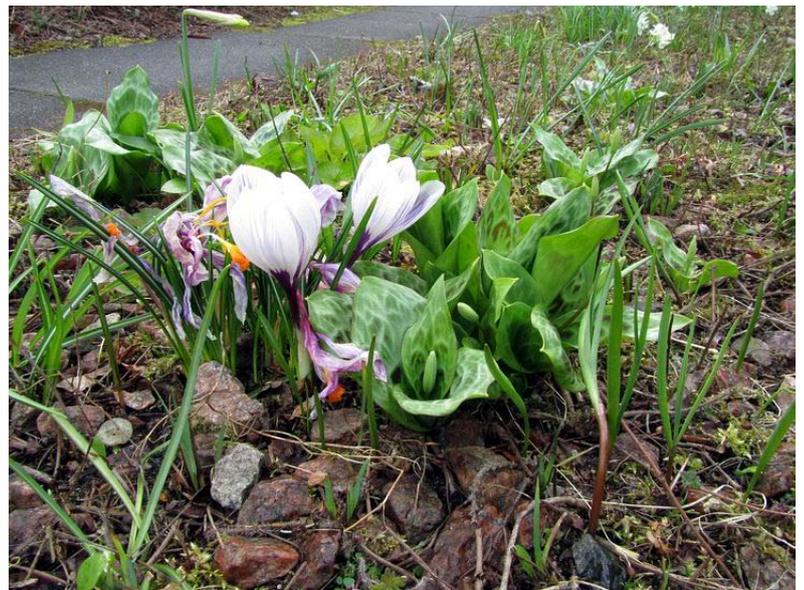


In many a week I can only show you a tiny selection of what is in flower and that is never more so than just now. I am taking hundreds of pictures a day trying to keep up with the flowers which because of the heat wave will not stay fresh looking for as long as they might in a more typical cool year. *Corydalis solida* is such a good plant both for its warm colours and its compatibility to grow happily alongside any other plant. Here it is growing on our front dyke with *Narcissus bulbocodium*.



## Front Drive

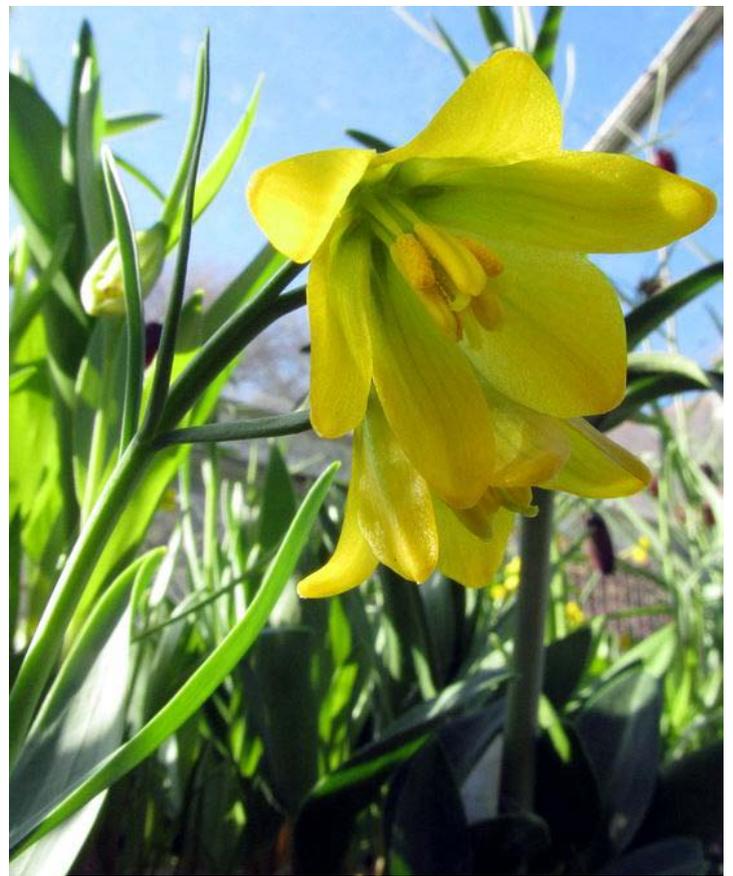
Keeping you updated on the front drive where I will remind you all the plants were introduced by simply scattering seeds on to the gravel. Now many are established I allow them to self seed and some are forming clumps as the bulbs increase by division.



All sorts of bulbs have taken to growing here providing an ever changing range of colours that fascinates both us and many of our neighbours. We also get a steady number of offers to tar or lock block our drive to 'get rid of our weed problem' by and assortment of knockers both itinerant and from established chains one of whom has now added plastic grass to the range of services they offer!

Narcissus and Crocus are both at home as are Erythroniums which unlike those round the backgarden are not in flower as they are on the north side of the house. *Corydalis malkensis* and *Anemone blanda* also thrive and self seed around in the gravel.





**Fritillaria rixii**

Under glass there are plenty of Frits to keep me snapping including *Fritillaria rixii* a close relative of *F. carica* which is named after Martin Rix one of the best authorities on bulbs in the world and one of my plant heroes. I just wish he would publish his extensive notes and research and give us a monograph on this wonderful genus.



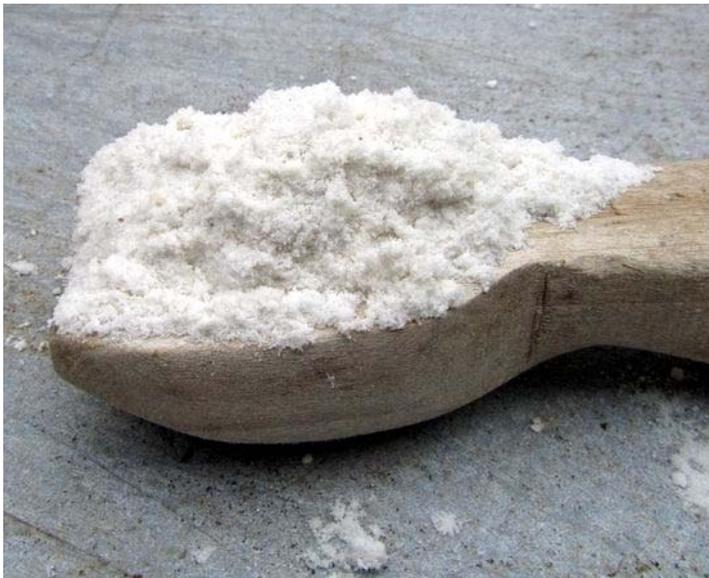
**Fritillaria minuta**

I am always fascinated by the colour of the flowers of *Fritillaria minuta* an unusual mix of red, pink and brown. The flowers are not large and often hide down among the broad leaves so it is not the most showy of plants but a firm favourite of mine



**Fritillaria minima**

As always when you raise plants from seed you will start to notice some variation as you can see clearly in this picture. I first new and grew this plant under the name *Fritillaria carduchorum* 'Elliot's Variety' - called *Fritillaria carduchorum* by Rix but now it is known as *Fritillaria minima* Boss & Noe.



**Potassium**

The unusually warm conditions are causing a lot of evaporation of moisture which along with the increased rate of transpiration means that I am having to water the pots slightly more than other years. Plastic pots loose moisture much slower than clay ones so I am always aware of taking the opportunity to add the Potassium supplement to the pots of bulbs. I did that last week sprinkling a small amount of the soluble powder onto the surface of each pot some of which was then washed in as I watered. At this stage of growth the bulbs have little need for any more nitrogen, which will only make them grow fatter but it will not help them build the scales of the bulbs, corms, etc or establish a flower bud for next year. My bulbs are smaller and firmer than those fed on heavy nitrogen based fertilisers and as a result they flower better and are less susceptible to many a rot or fungal attack.



### **Muscari ?**

I have lost the label from this pot of Muscari and I cannot recollect how or where I got it. I don't remember if I raised it from seed or was given a bulb so if anyone can help me identify it I would be most grateful. Last week I appealed for help in identifying a *Rhododendron* and within a few hours of the bulb log going on line I had the answer. It is *Rhododendron uvariifolium* – thank you to Jens B and John W for your help.



### **Muscari mcbeathianum**

While they may not be showy enough or to every body's taste I have a love of these smaller Muscari species and am happy to grow as many as I can get seed of. *Muscari mcbeathianum* was a Jim Archibald discovery which I raised from seed that I got from Jim. I was very pleased to see it pictured in the latest AGS Journal still growing in a restricted location in Turkey.



### **Muscari species**

Here is yet another beauty again raised from seed I got from Turkey many years ago and I have no idea what species it might be. To ensure that I can keep it going I need to get more seed so I always fertitlise it with a paint brush and most years I am rewarded with a few seeds. I cannot recommend highly enough that you continually raise



your bulbs from seed because you never know when you might suddenly loose an entire pot of bulbs that you have grown successfully grown for many years.

Keeping a steady supply of seedlings coming along is the best insurance to retain plants in your collection over the long term.



*Tecophilaea cyanocrocus*





***Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* var *leichtlinii***

Apart from keeping a supply of healthy young bulbs coming along raising from seed will also show you the variation that you can find within a species. The wonderful blue *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* has a touch of white in the throat which can extend up the tepals to varying degrees. At some point where the white is more prominent it turns into var *leichtlinii*. As far as I know there is not a precise delineation and that is why it has only varietal status and not sub-specific status. Naming aside I have been selecting the forms with more and more white and have now got a range that goes to almost pure white in my latest seedlings. .



***Tecophilaea* 'Craigton Cloud'**



**Tecophilaea 'Craigton Snowdrift'**



**Unnamed almost white seedling**

The other variation is of course *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* var *violacea*, see below, which introduces a hint of red giving the flowers a violet colour which I find very difficult to reproduce photographically accurately – they are more violet than my picture shows.



***Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* var *violacea***

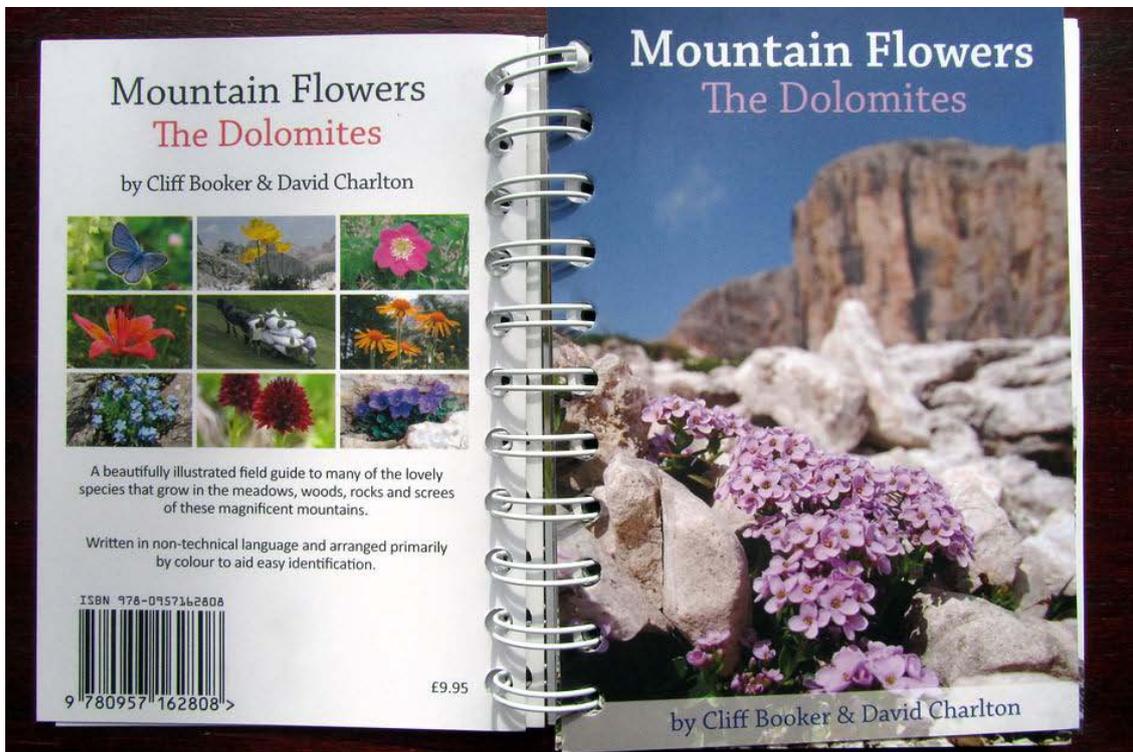


***Saxifraga x poluanglica* , Red Pol'**

Of course we don't just grow bulbs we do still have a number of alpine such as these lovely saxifrages.



***Saxifraga marginata*, *S. x bhratangensis* and *S. 'Firebrand'***



### Book Review

From time to time I review books in the bulb log that I think may be of interest to many of you so can I draw your attention to this wonderful field guide to the Mountain Flowers of the Dolomites. It is absolutely everything you would wish in a small pocket guide when you go to these magnificent mountains. The format is

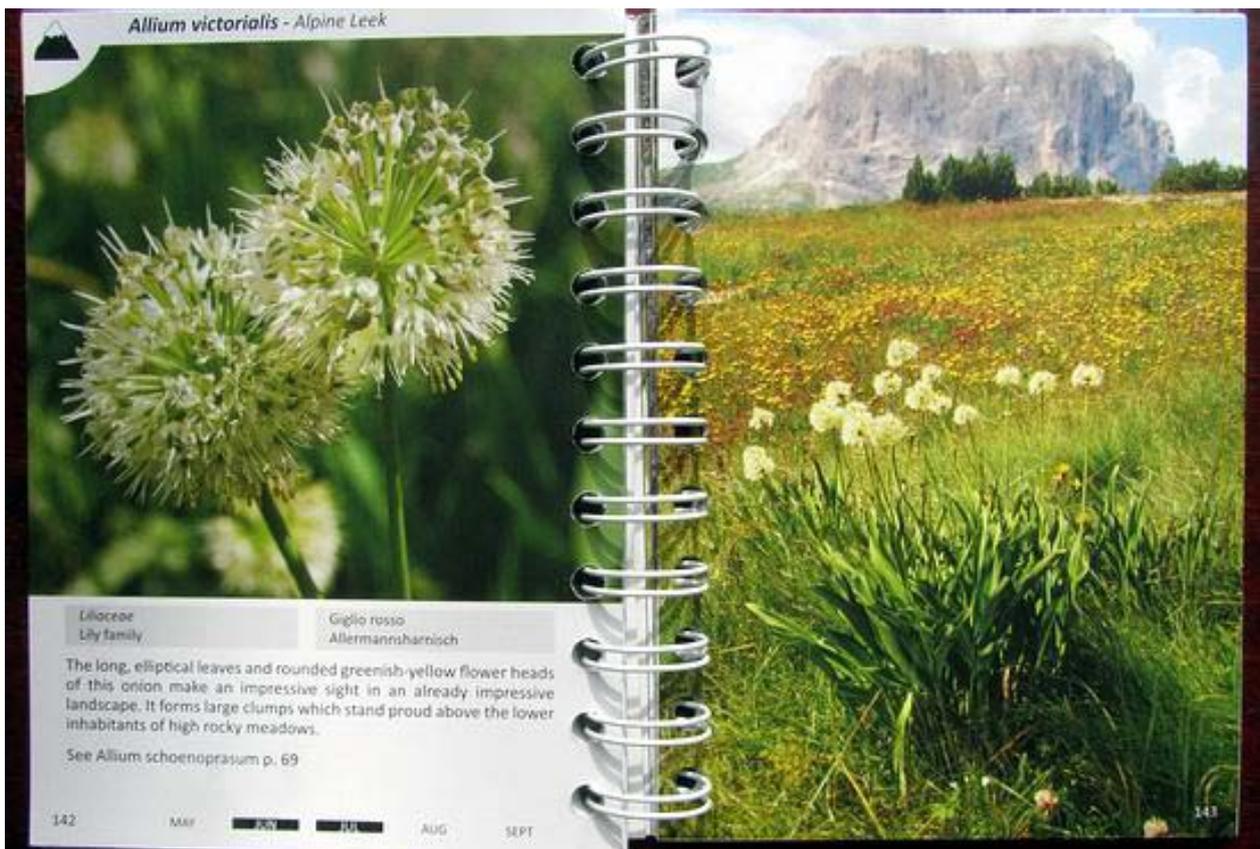
small enough at 150mm by 50mm to easily fit into your pocket and I love the spiral bound construction which allows you to fold it over to a single sheet at any page or a double spread. The paper used is of a good quality and weight so there is little risk of pages tearing away as can happen in some ring bound books. There is also a good coating on the paper making it capable to standing up to the rigours of use on a mountain top.







It is so simple to use – you are on a scree looking at a purple flower so using the colour coded tabs at the top left corner of the page you flick through and quickly discover you are looking at *Saxifraga oppositifolia*.



Whenever possible they have included the full plant in habitat – there are some beautiful scenic shots – and a more detailed picture of the flower to confirm your identity.

I think the Authors have perfectly succeeded in their intention to produce an easy to follow practical guide to the mountain plants. It is not and was never intended to be a complete flora of the region but for anyone going to the Dolomites it will be an invaluable addition that slips easily into your pocket. – I just wish that there were such user friendly guides for many more regions of the world to that would greatly add to the pleasure and knowledge that travellers can get from the local flowers.

Priced at £9.99 the book can be purchased from [Collett's web site](#), more info and comments can be left on the [Mountain Flowers website](#).