



SRGC

----- Bulb Log Diary -----

Pictures and text © Ian Young

BULB LOG 05.....3rd February 2016



Includes chapter on Erythronium hybrids



An early *Iris reticulata* flower survives all the gales and rain – it has also escaped being eaten off by a slug like the one I showed in last weeks Bulb Log.



The chewed off flower has not gone to waste as it allows me to show again the complexity of the flower structure. It is easy to see the ripe pollen being exposed as the anther dehisces but where are the surfaces of the stigma on which to place it for pollination ?

Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin'

Not surprisingly, especially after a wet year and the mild winter, we have more than one slug in the garden so an Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin' flower also suffered the same fate.

On the left you can see the floral segment with the anther and filament attached at the base.



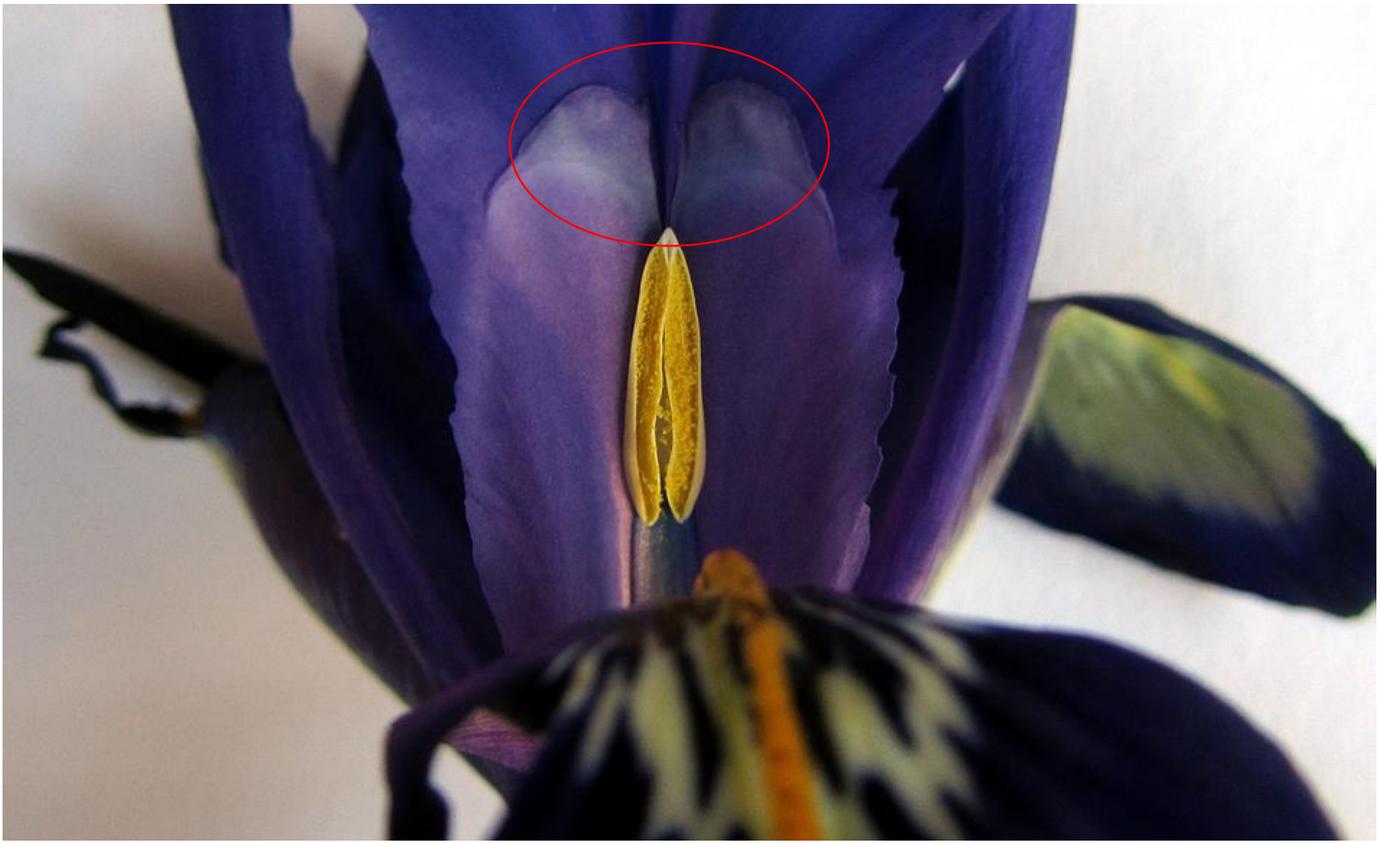
Iris 'Katherine Hodgkin'

The other segment of the flower that sits directly on top of the above segment not only forms a cover over the anther but also carries the cunningly disguised stigma.



Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin'

All the parts of the Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin' flower.



Stigma



Elsewhere in the garden the fat flower shoots of other reticulate Iris are pushing upwards.

Alan McMurtrie, the Canadian Reticulate Iris breeder recently featured in the RHS magazine "The Garden", will be one of the speakers at the SRGC Dunblane Early Bulb Day on 20th February . Other speakers are Ian Christie and Neil Huntley All welcome to the talks, display and plant sales - for all details click [here](#).



Erythronium caucasicum seedlings sown in late spring of 2014 are just germinating - at exactly the same time as the first shoots of mature bulbs are appearing. Note the slugs have been feeding here also.



I find this timing of the seedlings germinating at precisely the same time as mature bulbs come into growth is typical across all bulbs that I have raised from seed.

I can only speculate that the reason these seeds did not germinate this time last year was they were not sown in the ideal time window so the conditions for germination had not been met.

Erythronium caucasicum

The Chapter on Erythronium hybrids follows.....

ERYTHRONIUMS IN CULTIVATION

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Erythronium hybrids



The title picture shows **Erythronium 'Craigton Cover Girl'** the first hybrid that I named after its picture appeared on the cover of the Rock Garden, the journal of the Scottish Rock Garden Club Journal, in January 2002. It was an open pollinated self-sown seedling which is likely to be a cross between *Erythronium revolutum* and *Erythronium 'White Beauty'*. It mostly has three pink flowers on a stem and it forms clumps by division almost as readily as that garden stalwart, 'White Beauty'.



There is an increasing number of hybrid Erythroniums becoming available to gardeners which is no bad thing. I think it is impossible to improve upon the beauty displayed by the true species nature provides us with but many of those are not so easy in cultivation, often slow to increase if at all. What the hybrids can bring is plants that will tolerate a wider range of growing conditions as well as bulbs that increase readily by division.

I included *Erythronium 'White Beauty'* under the chapter on *E. californicum*, which it is believed to be a form of, but on the left I show

a selected seedling that I raised from the former which has darker marked leaves- I called **Erythronium 'Craigton Beauty'**.

There have been a group of yellow *Erythronium tuolumnense* hybrids around for a very long time - plants such as 'Pagoda', 'Kondo', 'Citronella' and 'Sundisc' are well known and widely available. They are all easy to grow and the fact that they increase well has allowed them to spread and persist in cultivation for such a long time. Stocks of these are often mixed up and not true to the cultivar name but all offer a plant of similar look and size with yellow flowers, having some degree of red markings towards the centre, over large plain green leaves.



Erythronium 'Citronella'



Erythronium 'Susannah'



For me the two finest yellow Erythronium hybrids were raised by the late John Walker and named after his granddaughters.

Erythronium 'Susannah' and 'Eirene' are both of similar size to Erythronium tuolumnense but have larger yellow flowers without any red markings. Mature bulbs will have three to five flowers beautifully displayed above the plain green leaves.



Erythronium 'Eirene', above left, has paler flowers than **E. 'Susannah'** above right.



Erythronium 'Minnehaha'

Erythronium 'Minnehaha' is another excellent John Walker hybrid this one being white and probably a hybrid between *E. oregonum* and *E. 'White Beauty'*. All three of these John Walker hybrids are outstanding. Although they do appear on some bulb specialists' lists they are still quite uncommon in cultivation. I hope that in time this will change and that they will all become much more readily available.



Erythronium 'Joanna' was introduced by John Amand and named after his daughter. It is a cross between a yellow flowered *Erythronium tuolumnense* and pink *Erythronium revolutum*. So often such crosses between pink and yellow result in muddy coloured offspring but this is not the

case with *Erythronium 'Joanna'* which combines these two colours together to produce a clean, free flowering plant with flowers that have a yellow face with a pink reverse.



Erythronium 'Joanna'



Erythronium 'Craigton Cream'

Most of my attempts at controlled hybridisation of Erythroniums have so far failed with the majority of the hybrids we have occurring spontaneously as seedlings in the garden so their precise parentage is not always clear. I selected Erythronium 'Craigton Cream' from a group of Erythronium helenae seedlings and indeed the bent style suggests that species is present in this hybrid.



Erythronium 'Craigton Cream'



Erythronium hendersonii x Erythronium citrinum

Hybrids are not just something that occurs in cultivation: the above *Erythronium hendersonii* x *Erythronium citrinum* hybrid is of wild origin - found where the two species grow together in Oregon. Hybridisation is an important factor in the evolution of plants –it is thought that a number of the species we know today are the result of a fertile hybrid producing a line of stable offspring hence a new species evolves. Species that are geographically separated in the wild are brought together in the garden making hybrids much more likely. On the right is a group of **Erythronium hendersonii** seedlings that I planted out; the taller larger flowered white one is a hybrid.





Erythronium hendersonii is very promiscuous in the garden and we often find evidence of its genes in seedlings.



***Erythronium hendersonii* hybrids**



Pink pollen suggests that these 'White Beauty' seedlings may also have *Erythronium hendersonii* genes.



Erythronium 'Ardovie Bliss'



Erythronium 'Ardovie Bliss' is a lovely Erythronium hendersonii seedling that occurred in the Scottish garden of Betty Husker and was brought to my attention by Ian Christie.

There has been an increasing number of Erythronium hybrids being named and distributed in recent years. Two of the best growers are Susan Band of [Pitcairn Alpines](#) in Scotland and Keith Wiley of [Wildside Nursery](#) in England both of whom have named a number of excellent Erythroniums.

I do not intend to give a long list of them here as I do not have experience of growing them all. I want to share with you the range of hybrids that are occurring in our garden which are similar in parentage to those offered by the above

growers and are the sort of plant you may expect to get if you also grow a number of Erythronium in your garden and allow them to seed.



Erythronium 'Craigton Beauty'

One of my great joys is inspecting every single Erythronium flower in our garden, and we have a lot. It was on one of those detailed inspections that I first discovered 'Craigton Cover Girl'.



Erythronium hybrids



As an artist you learn to not just look but also to *see* what is in front of you. At first glance all the flowers in the group of Erythronium seedlings above look the same.

Look again more carefully, check the details, as shown on the left, and you should see that some have yellow pollen while in others the pollen is creamy white.



Species and hybrid seed capsules and seed.

Many of the hybrids are fertile and produce seeds, but you will find the number of seeds in a capsule is much less in the hybrid than it is in the species – the top capsule and seed is from a species and below from a hybrid. Seedlings from a hybrid can look remarkably similar to the parent unless the pollen came from another different species or hybrid. The following images show some of the many, as yet un-named, hybrids in our garden. I am putting these through a rigorous trial after which I will select only the best to name.



***Erythronium revolutum* hybrids**

It is not just the beauty of a flower or leaf that makes a good garden hybrid it also has to grow well in a wide range of garden conditions and the bulb has to increase well.



Erythronium revolutum hybrids

A group of self-sown seedlings from *Erythronium revolutum* : most likely they have hybridised, they display a number of flowers, up to nine, on a single stem.

I have yet to decide if this is a desirable feature or not but it does make them stand out.





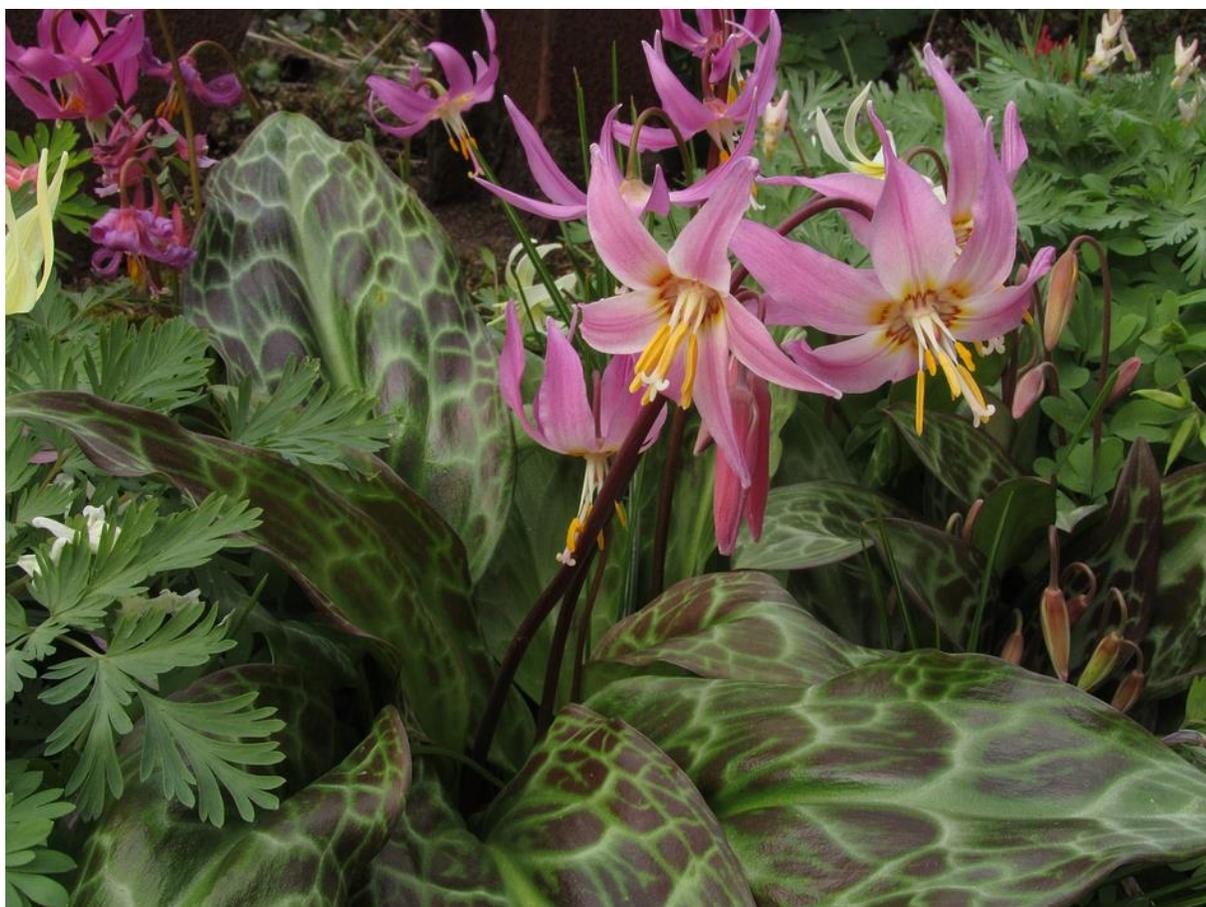
Others plants in this same group of **Erythronium revolutum hybrids** have stunning leaves making them very desirable.

I am now growing the best of these forms on to see how well they will increase – that will dictate whether they are worth naming and distributing or not.

Are there too many Erythronium hybrids being named now? No – I think it is important that hybrids are named when they are first distributed. All the plants we have raised and named have the prefix of ‘Craigton’, after the area of Aberdeen where we garden, this makes it easy to know the origin.

Erythronium revolutum hybrids

It does not bother me if there are hundreds of Erythronium hybrids being named - time will sort them out. In ten or twenty years' time many of those being named now may no longer be in cultivation – the ones that have persisted will have passed the best trial of all - that is they have proved that they will grow and increase successfully in a wide range of garden conditions.





Erythronium hybrid