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Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 01.....17th January 2024



Narcissus 'Craigton Chorister'



The first Bulb Log of the year is a time to look forward to all that the new season's growth will bring and the realisation that successful growth depends on the weather.

I think it is fair to say that none of us can depend on our weather any more as the climate emergency has added regular extreme conditions of excessive wet, drought, heat, cold, winds etc. to our local climates. We have to accept these conditions are here to stay for the foreseeable future and that will change some of the plants we are able to

grow.

What happened last year also leaves a lasting legacy.

From our own experience the unusually hot dry conditions we have experienced caused damage to the roots of some of the larger Rhododendrons which, if it happened for just one year they could recover from, but two years with dry periods in a row proved too much for *Rhododendron elegantulum*.

Fortunately 2023 turned out to be a wet season much to the relief of the woody plants so hopefully their roots will start to recover and certainly they have set plenty of flower

buds. Many gardeners are finding the changeable weather is stimulating plants to emerge earlier every year and this more advanced stage of growth often leaves the plants more vulnerable to subsequent cold and frosts. As the weather becomes more erratic we will find that we may not be able to grow some of the plants we have had for many years but there will be other plants that will tolerate the changing conditions which can take their place. The one thing that will not change is the hours of daylight; so the hoop petticoat Narcissus that flower under glass through the winter will still etiolate as they reach of for light levels that in our northern latitude are not there.





There are fewer flowering sized bulbs in the sand beds this year because we lost quite a number to the freezing conditions last year when the soaring electricity costs caused us to turn off the warming cables in the sand. I was intending to thin them out a bit because as they increased there were too many bulbs so nature has done it for me.



There are many forms and hybrids involving *Narcissus romieuxii*, *albidus*, *cantabricus* etc. flowering in the sand and in pots.



There is a whole complex of these plants in cultivation which I will not go into today because I have written extensively about them in previous Bulb Logs: check out the [Bulb Log Index](#) now updated to include 2023. Thanks again to Tristan Hatton-Ellis for revising and bringing the [Bulb Log Index](#) up to date including all of 2023. I find this a valuable resource when trying to find things I wrote about at some time in the 21 years of the Bulb Log.





Side by side the variation between these two seedlings is clear to see.



Raised from wild collected seed this seedling is not the species I expected but is a hybrid from a wild population.



Now to the garden. Since I last wrote we have had prolonged periods of heavy rain often mixed with gale force winds and of course some cold periods like we are experiencing just now with complete snow cover.

In the winter we see the garden stripped back to reveal its structure: be it the hard landscaping as in the foreground or the woody growth of trees and shrubs beyond. There is a saying that all gardens are the same under snow I do not agree a garden with strong structure will always look more interesting whether it is under snow or not.





There are shoots of promise all across the garden some are just the noses of the buds pushing through the ground while others are beginning to show their colours. The decorative leaves of *Cyclamen coum* have been providing interest since the late autumn and now their flowers are slowly rising up to show their range of colours.





The most advanced of our Galanthus are also showing their white flower buds but it will have to get significantly warmer before they open – currently they are completely covered in a blanket of snow.





Other plants that are under the blanket of snow include our pots of *Eranthis pinnatifida* where the growth has been visible since late December and started to push upwards just before the snow. My experience tells me they will come to no harm under the snow and will emerge unscathed when the thaw sets in.



There are also a few flower buds showing on the early flowering Hellebores.



More buds of promise are visible on **Rhododendron thomsonii** which is among the earliest to show flower colour in our garden.



It is interesting to observe the different shapes of the flower buds; these are **Rhododendron orbiculare**.



Celmisia lyallii

Smaller evergreen plants also provide structure and winter interest and the silver foliage of many New Zealand plants do that very well. These are both smaller plants I raised from cuttings taken from the larger parents and this regular propagation has ensured that we still have these plants forty plus years since we first introduced them to the garden.



Leucogenes leontopodium



I thought I would show what some of the areas that will feature through the year look like just now when all the plants that will flower in sequence are still under ground – to the right is a large plant of **Celmisia walkerii**.



The top bed under the birch tree is bare just now but will soon become a colourful display.



Above and below we have views of the new bed beside the pond: it was created in 2019 so it is far from new now and it also provides a succession of flowers from February through to November.





Looking east across the erythronium plunge on the left and the rock garden bed on the right, with the bulb beds and woodland beds beyond, the ground looks very bare but will soon burst into growth as the year advances.





These Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin' buds growing in the erythronium plunge are interlopers but they flower long before the erythronium appear and bring variety and interest early in the year.



The slab beds with another small erythronium plunge attached and the troughs.



Looking up the garden over some of the troughs and slab beds.



Some of the bonsai fit in with and are displayed around this area.



The bonsai we have are the survivors from a larger group we once grew that have survived a degree of neglect have been with us for a long time they are now well over thirty years old.





Looking south up the garden before the latest snow came towards one of my favourite groupings of trees.



We have to accept the changing climate adjusting our gardening methods and the plants we grow to take into account our new weather systems strong in the knowledge that there will always be plants that can adapt to the changes even if the human race cannot. I'll be back next month with plenty of early flowers, weather permitting.....