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Bulb Log Diary

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Reflections of Giants



I have spoken before about the importance of trees and they certainly attract more of our attention in the autumn than at any other time even if it is just through tidying up the annual leaf fall.

On my walks I often go through the grounds surrounding an old house which has been much added to and now houses a branch of the James Hutton Institute; the grounds form an arboretum with many 100 plus year old trees such as Araucaria araucana, the Monkey Puzzle tree reflected on the front cover one of a number of this species

that are planted around the grounds.



Do you ever think you are being watched? The bark of this tree is full of patterns with the scars left from the loss of lower branches alluding to a series of eyes watching over me as I look up at the geese flying overhead. It is a very human response to interpret any pattern with two spots such as this, as a face - you will even try and make the two vertical striations between them as a nose and then your eye seeks out the rest of the features. If you haven't noticed already I flipped the cover picture upside down, so the reflection is at the top, to make it a more arresting image.



Although I have only seen pictures I think the Monkey Puzzle tree looks best in its native habitat of Chile and western Argentina where the forest landscape reflects what our world might have looked like in a previous geological period. While I love trees I realise that giants such as these need plenty of space and should not be planted in a small garden.

There are also a number of **Giant Redwoods**, *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, that tower above me with these buttressed roots being beautiful decorated by the scattering of its own foliage gathering at its base.





Dawn Redwood, *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* is native to Lichuan county in Hubei province, China





This selection of trees includes, from the left, **Western Hemlock, *Tsuga heterophylla***, **Monkey Puzzle, *Araucaria araucana*** and **Douglas Fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*** and while these mature trees are way too big for our garden we can still have reflections of a woodland in our space.



There are genetically dwarf cultivar forms of many conifers and we have quite a number of those around the garden but I have also bonsaied some **Western Hemlock, *Tsuga heterophylla***, the best one, at over forty years old, is the tree on the right.



I also found a novel idea of what to do with a large tree stump in the same grounds where a ring of rocks and some soil creates a raised bed for some primula.



Last week I gave a Zoom talk on 'Troughs' and to bring it right up to date I took pictures showing how a few of the troughs are looking now. I approach the planting of a trough as starting on a trial of a habitat so I begin with very small plants or cuttings. When first planted it was the rocky landscape that dominated but gradually the plants grew until they completely covered the rock.



This is another where I split up a single pot of silver saxifrage planting the pieces out among the crevice landscape I created using broken cement. Through the years I have enjoyed observing the process as moss grew on the rock and other plants, such as *Dactylorhiza* orchids and *Erinus* aplinus have seeded in.



We have a number of troughs where the plants have grown to form a complete mound, completely covering the rocks. Now I am faced with the decision do I leave them and observe the evolution or do I intervene and remove some of the plants to restore a balance between rocks and plants - what would you do?

I planted a number of different saxifrage cuttings into this trough, with varying degrees of success - with those on the right growing well, merging into one another to cover the rocks while the ones on the left have not adapted to the habitat and are struggling at best. There is a process of natural selection going on here with me as a vector because I take cuttings from the saxifrages that grow well for us, so over time they will dominate our plantings. A solution for this trough could be to take cuttings from those growing well and plant them into the left hand side of the trough.



On my walks I am seeing **Common Ivy, *Hedera helix***, flowering better than ever before. Over recent years I have noticed more Ivy flowers but this year there seems to be masses of them. This plant forms a valuable winter food source and habitat for wildlife as it scrambles up and over the wall at the bottom of our garden.



There is also a good crop of Cotoneaster berries which ripen later to provide a food source for the birds when they have eaten all the other berries such as Sorbus.



***Sorbus fruticosa* 'Koehneana'.**



***Sorbus fruticosa* 'Koehneana'.**

I have often seen it written that birds leave white berries until later in the season but my observations suggests the birds eat the berries in the order that they ripen, become tasty and presumably most nutritious rather than by colour. We have one tree of *Sorbus aucuparia* near the house that has been almost completely stripped of its berries with the birds struggling to reach the few that are remaining rather than starting to eat the plentiful easy to reach supply on another tree at the bottom of the garden see below.



Sorbus aucuparia



If we get there before the birds we can harvest some tasty berries from the deciduous **Vaccinium smallii**, above, as well as the evergreen **Vaccinium ovatum** and **Vaccinium floribundum** shown in the following pictures.



Vaccinium ovatum and **Vaccinium floribundum** bushes growing over the front wall.



Vaccinium ovatum



Vaccinium floribundum



The autumn flowering crocus season is past its peak and the recent weather has not been kind to those that remain but there are still some plants flowering to be found in the garden, such as **Tanacetum parthenium**.



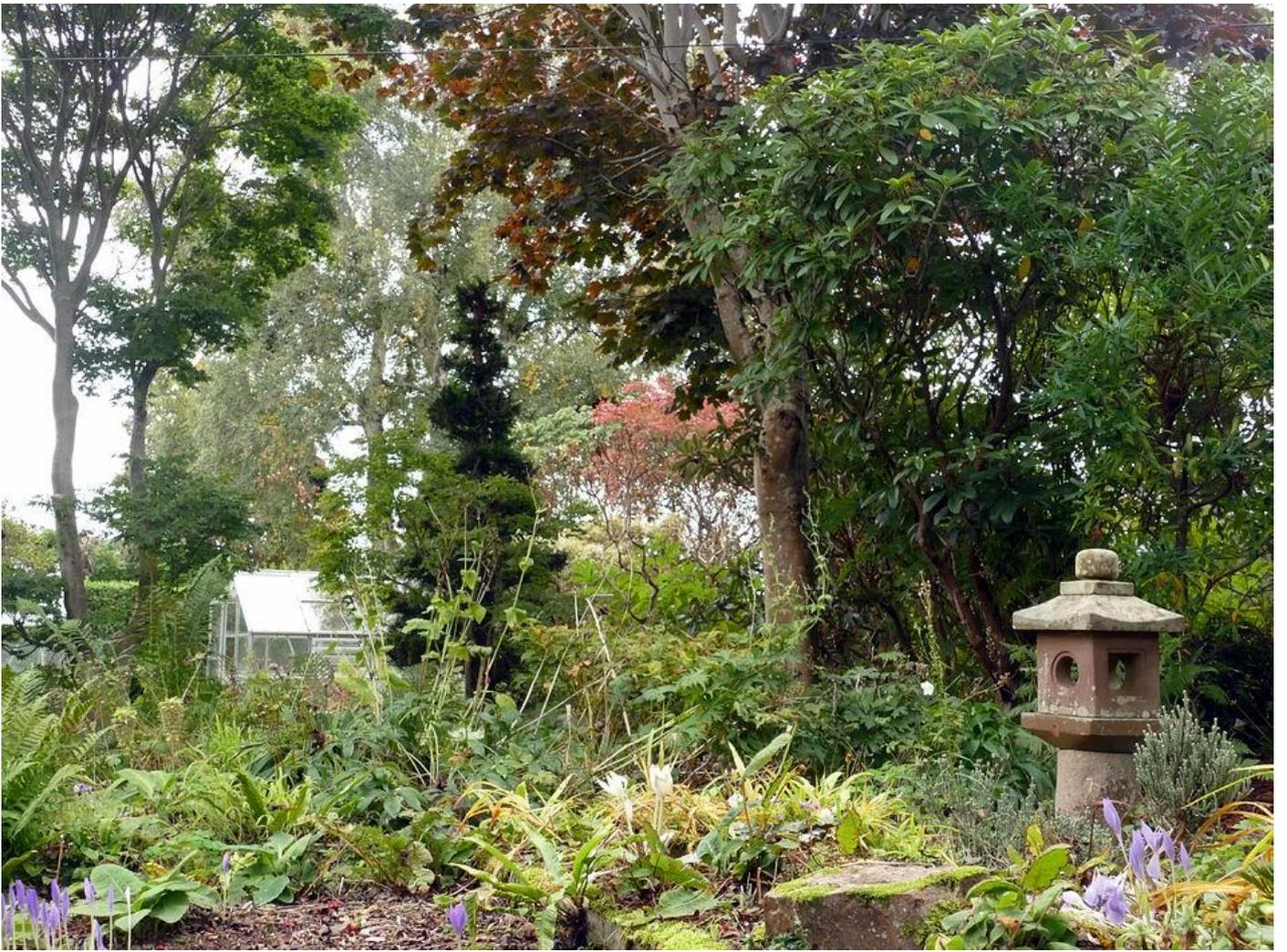
The flowers of **Allium wallichii** are also over but they can still make a strong statement when the low sun shines a light on their flower stems and seed heads.



Every winter we cut back this *Clematis* aff. *roylei* to just a few stems and every year it grows back at an incredible rate to cover the side fence and gate.



While we cannot compete with the magnificent giant trees I opened, with we have planted enough trees and shrubs to give the garden a real woodland feel that provides a habitat that the plants, birds and gardeners alike can enjoy, as I have tried to illustrate with the closing sequence of images.



As plants die back some of the ground becomes bare but will be mulched over the winter before another season of growth starts.







Some of the leaves are starting to take on their autumn colours.





The tree rich view from our doorstep down towards the sea.

Click this link if you want to read what I wrote about the power of trees in a previous edition - [Bulb Log 3121](#)