



BULB LOG 108th March 2006

Removing snow from glasshouse roof

I finished off last week's log with the picture of the snow arriving – well, we have had more snow than we have seen in Aberdeen for a number of years. I am always worried that the weight of snow will crush the flimsy aluminium structure of our glasshouses so I remove any significant amount of snow. The day before this picture I had removed about six or more inches from the roof so what you see me removing above is the overnight snow. We had in excess of two feet, (60cms) which I am sure would have caused a failure in the glasshouse structure and I do not need that.



Sun on glasshouse

Removing the snow from the roof also allows the sun in and, even though it is freezing outside, the glasshouse temperature shoots up bringing me another series of problems. Have you ever noticed how growing bulbs is like solving a never ending series of problems? One minute you are patting yourself on the back for solving one when another batch appear to block the pathway to ultimate success. The heat in the glasshouses is causing some plants, mostly Narcissus, to wilt as they are a bit on the dry side. I have two

problems: first I do not want them to be too wet and turgid when the night temperature will drop below zero as they are more likely to be damaged in that condition than they are when kept on the dry side – of course it is a fine balance between keeping them on the dry side and causing the roots damage if they dry out completely. My second problem is that if I want to water them, my outside water is frozen up and my watering can is under all the snow and I have no idea exactly where.



Inside frit house

Inside the fritillarias continue to grow; the large one to the left of the picture, *F. sewerzowii*, illustrates how quickly they grow and react to light even in these low temperatures. It is making a lunge for the door as this was the only source of good light before I removed the snow from the roof. Also notice the pot with snow on, at the bottom left.



Fritillaria alburyana with snow

This is one of our pots of *Fritillaria alburyana* which I covered with snow in the hope that it would make the plant believe it was still in its mountain homeland coming out from the winter's snowmelt.

Tropaeolum azureum

I am often asked about the hardiness of *Tropaeolum azureum*. I have never found its hardiness in question under cold glass; it has survived very cold temperatures provided the moisture levels are kept low. Again this is a fine balancing act, if the *tropaeolum* roots dry out, the plant immediately goes back into a dormancy which can be difficult to break. If on the other hand it is too wet then the freezing can damage the corm. It is only experience of growing plants and the careful observation of their condition that tells you when they must have water and when you can wait a day or two before watering. All these decisions are made more difficult by our very erratic climate with very unreliable winters and springs - it would be much better if the winter freeze came in November and everything stayed frozen and under snow until March: then spring would come along as the sun climbs higher in the sky, the temperatures would rise and the bulbs would bloom more like they do in their native habitats. The picture is some of last years seeds of *Tropaeolum azureum*, which I mentioned previously have given me the best germination rate I have ever had from this species, covered in a sprinkling of snow that has blown into the glasshouse.



Narcissus 'Don Stead'

When the sun shines the bulb houses are a nice place to be with all the colour, beauty and scent from the *Narcissus* and *Crocus*. This is the hybrid *Narcissus* 'Don Stead' a very good cultivar that is very distinctive and could easily be picked out from the rest of the *narcissus* we have.



Narcissus romieuxii and cantabricus occidentalis

Narcissus romieuxii and cantabricus occidentalis were both slightly floppy when I pictured them a few days ago indicating they could both do with a watering but they are not at the critical stage yet.



Crocus reticulatus

We have several forms of Crocus reticulatus which I was going to say are among my favourites but I could say that about most crocuses.



Crocus 'Hubert Edelsten'

One of the finest selections from *Crocus sieberi* is 'Hubert Edelsten' which I have always nurtured in a pot though not always successfully. I have never lost it completely but my stock has gone through various cycles of peaks and troughs so it surprises me to see it being offered so cheaply in some of the mass trade outlets. Is this the same form? Is it a sport that grows better? Have the Dutch growers succeeded where I have failed or is it just me?



Hyacinthella libanotica

I got this lovely wee *Hyacinthella libanotica* at the SRGC Small Bulb Exchange which is held at our Discussion Weekends – it is only 5cms tall when it first comes out and does not exceed 7cms.



Galanthus

Just for all you galanthophiles, we do have some snow drops and this is a named form! Can you put a name to it?
Frame cover
Back outside the frames have the ideal covering, snow - this both insulates them from the worst of the frosts and provides a mass watering as it melts away.



Watering can

The snow is thawing away now as the wind swings round and the temperatures rise again and there is the watering can. I am off now to give the bulbs a good watering while the milder conditions prevail.