



BULB LOG 52.....29th December 2010



The opening picture is of a native birch tree growing at the southern end of our garden, the sun that is directly behind it is at the highest point that it climbs to in mid-winter. The masses that you can see are not birds' nests but 'witches' brooms' caused by a mutation in the growth bud of some of the twigs. Where it occurs we get a very dense growth of hundreds of small twigs all budding from the same point causing these balls. While they are not nests a pair of wood pigeons have used one as a readymade home for the last two years.



Front of house

The scene at the front of our house shows the pile of snow that we have built as we try and keep an access to get our wee car out. If you compare the snow on the roof with the picture below of the southern facing back of the house you can see that even though the sun does not climb high it does melt the snow from the areas of the roof that it strikes.



Back of house



Pine tree

We were a bit worried that the pine tree from which I removed the lower branches earlier this year might not be so useful to the birds as a shelter. I am pleased that there is still evidence that some birds do roost in the dense areas towards its top and the open area below, because of the much reduced covering of snow, now provides a good foraging area. I planted a number of bulbs in this recently exposed area including some *Narcissus romieuxii* types: I am watching with interest to see if they will grow and flower there. The lower branches of the pine used to cover at least the top two courses of the rock wall but since I opened it up I also popped a few *Narcissus* bulbs in between the rocks.

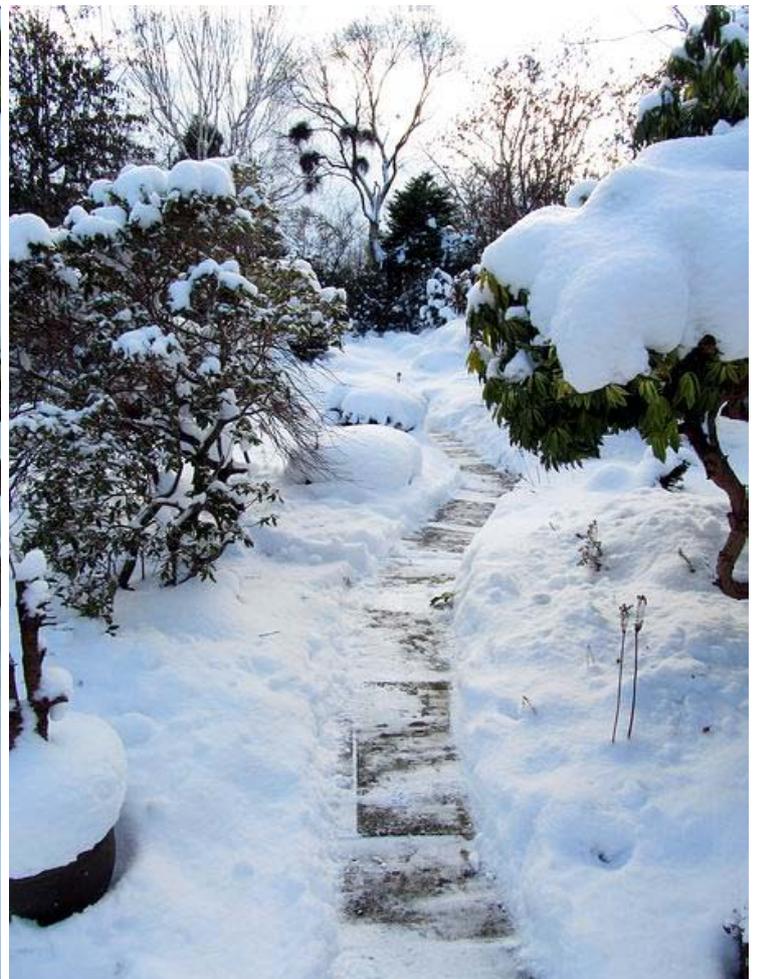


Under Pine tree



Rescue helicopter

As I was out in the garden taking these pictures a helicopter moved slowly overhead.



As well as trying to keep our front access and pavement clear of snow we also clear a path for Lily and Poppy to get around the back garden without having to plough through snow that is deeper than they are tall. While I was sitting having a cup of tea I realized how much clearer the long stretched 'S' shaped curve of the path was when the snow was cleared.



Frit House

This Monday the temperature climbed above freezing for the first time in a while leaving the glasshouse roofs free of snow and ice. There are no signs of any growth in the Fritillarias yet.



Bulb house

It is a very different storey in the bulb houses where lots of bulbs are in a well-advanced stage of growth. The Crocus and Narcissus leaves can hold themselves upright now the frost has gone from most of the pots. A few, which must be furthest away from the soil warming cables, are still frozen.



Narcissus in bulb house

These Narcissus were all lying flat for most of the last few weeks now they have pulled themselves upright to display their flowers.



Crocus sieberi sieberi

Underneath the ground bulbs continue to grow despite the cold as they slowly push their shoots towards the top of the soil and burst through the gravel dressing - like these *Crocus sieberi sieberi*.



Iris leaves

It is not just the bulbs that are active in the cold of the winter as the well chewed leaves of this Iris show - obviously a slug or snail was out for a winter snack. The most worrying aspect of this is that, like aphids, slugs and snail can spread virus between plants that they nibble.



Sternbergia Leaves

The last time I showed these Sternbergia leaves they were frozen flat to the ground, now I am pleased to see that they have recovered well. Unfortunately they will have to go through a good number of freezing episodes before this winter is finally over.



Narcissus stems

This picture shows the evidence that the Narcissus have been growing through this cold snap – can you spot it? Notice the very pale almost yellow section at the base of each leaf this is the growth that the plants put on while the snow covered the roof, blocking out nearly all the light and preventing the proper formation of chlorophyll.



Narcissus 'Craigton Clumper'

If you ever wondered why Narcissus 'Craigton Clumper' got its name then these clumps of up to eight flower buds rising from each bulb show exactly why I gave it that name.



Narcissus cantabricus foliosus

Another interesting observation resulting from the cold weather can be seen in this pot of *Narcissus cantabricus foliosus*. Look at what short stems, all the flowers that are just opening have then compare those to the one that opened some weeks ago and has now faded – its stem is more than twice as tall. I must say I prefer the short stem version but it is difficult to achieve this in our changeable winter conditions.

We have again reached Bulb Log 52 the last of the year and I can look back to review how well the bulbs have grown this year.

Well, after eight years of writing the bulb log I can say that each year has its highlights and disappointments - a bulb that grows well one year might do poorly another for no apparent reason. This uncertainty is one of the reasons that keeps me interested in growing bulbs that and the endless fascination every part of them have from the bulb to the flower. If all bulbs were easy to grow and presented me with no challenges then I would get fed up and move on but even the so called easy to grow subjects that increase so freely most years can suddenly go into a decline and I have to try and understand why.

The biggest excitement for me is still seeing the first flower appearing on a bulb that I have raised from seed whether it is from wild source or seed collected from my own plants it is still the most rewarding thing to do.

If I could send a single message to you all it would be to grow your plants, of whatever kind, from seed.

I thank you all for your support and kind comments and I wish you a very healthy happy new year to enjoy your gardens. I will leave you with one more picture.



Narcissus seedling