



BULB LOG 08.....24<sup>th</sup> February 2010



**Garden under snow**

Last Friday we were hit by another snow storm that dumped around 15cms of snow in a little over an hour. I am showing you a slightly different view across the trough area towards the bulb houses taken on Monday. Luckily it has not snowed since Friday so on Saturday we were able to get down to the Late Bulb Day in Dunblane where everyone had a great time.



Sunday was another cold but bright day when we went down to **Brechin Castle** to see the snow drops.

Although they had very little snow in Brechin the cold weather meant that most of the snowdrops were lying flat on the frozen ground.

Fortunately we did find a sunny bank down by the river where the sun had warmed these *Galanthus nivalis* up enough to open their flowers.



**Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin'**

Before the snow came last Friday I had photographed the first of our Iris 'Katharine Hodgkin' flowers to open in the sunshine. On Monday I photographed the same flower just reappearing from under the snow as it slowly melts in the mid day sunshine. These Iris have a very delicate appearance and you would think that they would be damaged by the slightest hint of frost never mind being covered over completely by snow. This is not the case they are extremely tough coping with all that our highly variable weather brings down on them.



**Reticulate Iris**

Likewise these reticulate Iris hybrids which appear every year long before the threat of snow and frost is past. In fact they are among the earliest bulbs to produce their flowers in our garden.



**Crocus cultivar**

Another of the very early flowering bulbs are the many Crocus cultivars and hybrids of *Crocus chrysanthus* and *C. biflorus* – these are equally hardy and unfazed by the snows and cold.



**Prop House**

In the shelter of the cold glasshouses a mass of Crocus and Narcissus are flowering and are tempted to open their flowers to face the warmth that the sunshine brings. You can see one of my cameras fitted with a macro lens on a tripod that I use to record the life of the bulbs through the seasons. This is not a big plunge it is just 60cms wide and 120cms long but it can hold a lot of 7cm pots (128) and that is all you need to have a good collection of wonderful bulbs.

## Thermometer



The clear blue skies that are giving these lovely sunny days also mean that the temperature plummets at night as there are no insulating clouds to hold in that warmth from the sun. This is the maximum minimum thermometer from the prop house which shows that on Sunday night the temperature dropped to -8C and just after mid day on Monday it reached nearly

29C that is some swing. But it is not quite so dramatic a swing as it seems because thermometer is in full sun the maximum temperature recorded is not the actual air temperature which is a bit lower at around 20C. The outside thermometer recorded a low of -11C on the same night so the glasshouse does provide around three degrees of protection. The massive temperature swing can be a problem as it brings plants on too quickly some time but this is one of the hazards of having smaller glasshouses with a small volume of air that heats up quickly. However as we can have weeks or months at this time of year when we never see the sun I am always pleased to have the warmth to open the flowers and get the pollen flowing.



**'Varzob'**



**Crocus korolkowii**

**'Dark Throat'**

Two nice forms of *Crocus korolkowii* from Janis Ruksans are the lovely all yellow form 'Varzob' from the Varzob Gorge in Tadjikistan and 'Dark Throat' a selection with a very conspicuous dark throat particularly noticeable when the flowers are fully open.

## **Crocus 'Janis Ruksans'**



Another Crocus that I was pleased to get was 'Crocus 'Janis Ruksans' which is similar in colour to many of the forms of *C. korolkowii* but this is a hybrid between *Crocus angustifolius* and *Crocus reticulatus*. Even though this is described as a good increaser I decided to speed up the process when I got a corm a few years ago. To do this I used the plants habit of breaking down into many small corms when it does not receive sufficient moisture in the growing season. This defence mechanism of flowering sized bulbs breaking down into a number of small

bulbs is often encountered when people first start growing bulbs in pots. That is how I first observed this reaction which I now use to my advantage. Two years ago I planted the corm much nearer the surface than I would normally and was very sparing when watering only giving it sufficient to survive – this caused the corm to break down into multiple cormlets. At repotting time I planted them at the normal depth and have been feeding them up resulting in the first flowering sized corm this year - next year I expect to have a good pot full.



## **Crocus angustifolius**

Here is *Crocus angustifolius* one of the parents of *Crocus 'Janis Ruksans'*.

You can see a picture of the other parent *Crocus reticulatus* below.



**Crocus reticulatus**



**Bakers tray**

In the small extension to the prop house I have extended the plunge by adding two bakers' trays so I have more room for bulbs. It does mean that there is barely room to stand in this part of the glasshouse but it also means that I can accommodate another 63 (7cm) pots in each tray where I grow many more Crocus and Narcissus.



### **Crocus sp. Mixed seed**

I know that a number of you have found that you did not get all your first choices from the Seed Exchange – that is because you will have asked for all the popular choices which are often in short supply. Let me give you a little tip. When I make my choices I always include the mixed species choices like this Crocus species mixed from the 2009 Exchange which is just germinating. You always seem to get a good quantity of seed in these mixed bags and you never know what you will get - I have had a lot of very choice species this way. Perhaps I should not have given you this tip as next year you will all want to make this one of your selections!! Remember that if you sow your Crocus seed deeply you will get much stronger growing seedlings that given the right treatment will flower a year sooner than those sown on the surface.



### **Crocus abantensis**

Crocus abantensis is one of the most fabulous blue crocus species with a lovely deep yellow throat. We grow it both in pots in the bulb house where we can enjoy the flowers in perfect condition and outside. Where we grow it in raised beds it opens a bit later and the flowers are often damaged by the weather or chewed by slugs but still make a wonderful spectacle.



**Crocus abantensis**

Another view from the reverse angle of this wee beauty.



**Crocus dalmaticus**

Another species enjoying the warm sunshine in the bulb house is *Crocus dalmaticus* above and below.



**Crocus dalmaticus**



**Bulb house**

A general view of the bulb house shows the amount of growth that we have. The flowers on any of the earliest Narcissus are now fading and I will give them a feed with potassium the next time I water them.



### **Bulb house plunge**

Plastic pots retain the water much longer and I am watering about a third less often than I did when I used clay pots. This also means that I have less opportunity to apply the potassium supplement so I have to remember to get it on as soon as the flowers start fading. Even though some of the narcissus stems are flopping over in the warmth I will not water them as long as these very low night time temperatures are forecast. Wet compost conducts the cold much quicker and the turgid bulbs are more susceptible to being damaged by freezing than bulbs that are on the dry side. As soon as the weather turns I must give them a good soaking to avoid the bulbs breaking down into many small bulblets as I described above.



### **Narcissus hybrid**

This is an as yet un-named *Narcissus bulbocodium* hybrid with good sized yellow flowers in reasonable short stems. Good feeding with potash last spring has ensured that the majority of the bulbs in this pot are flowering sized.



### **Outside frame**

These pots of *Crocus herbertii* (towards the front) and *Crocus cvijicii* (at the back ) are protected from the recent heavy snow falls by the cover I placed over this frame to protect the *Eranthis pinnatifida* seedlings that I showed you a few weeks ago.



### **Tough area under snow**

Today, Wednesday, as I finish of this week's Bulb Log there are the first signs that the weather is changing and the temperature may rise so next week's view of the garden could be a very different one to that above.