SRGC ----- Bulb Log Diary -----

BULB LOG 38.....21st September 2011

Autumn is well and truly upon us with noticeably cold mornings and evenings and the plants that flower in this season have responded. Colchicum speciosum album is emerging in the undergrowth below a tree and beside one of our antique stone mushrooms. The light was so low here that I had to hand-hold the camera at a shutter speed of

1/40 of a second. I will try to hand-hold down to around 1/15 by employing the technique used by marksmen who get steady, breathe out slowly and gently squeeze the shutter just as you reach the end of the exhale. I could use flash but that adds harsh shadows and contrasts that are not what I desired here.

Colchicum speciosum album

One of my favourite forms of **Colchicum speciosum** that we have grown for a very long time - very dark coloured with a white zone in the throat it possibly a hybrid but it looks just like speciosum.

Eucomis bicolor

The flowers of Eucomis bicolor are now fully open looking very majestic over their rather chewed leaves.

Crocus speciosus

The darkest form of Crocus speciosus that we grow came from Alastair McKelvie and it is a beauty with a wonderful contrast between the dark petals and the strong orange much-branched stigma.

I never cease to be amazed at how fast these flowers grow. The above two pictures were taken eight hours before the next two showing the floral tubes much extended and the flowers opening whenever the sun warms the air.

Crocus speciosus

Crocus speciosus

The wind and rain have taken their toll on some of these Crocus nudiflorus.

Crocus vallicola

The camera has failed to capture the intensity of colour that my eyes saw in the Crocus vallicola flower on the left. It was a really striking colour and if you compare it to the one immediately behind which was the more typical creamy white I think you get some impression. The flower on the right is intermediate with strong violet stripes that are clearly visible form out side as well as inside the flower. All these variations are one of the many advantages of raising your bulbs from seed.

Seed raised **Crocus banaticus** also shows good variation in colour as the pictures above and below show

A slightly chewed pale form of **Crocus banaticus**

Crocus autranii

While I am deeply upset to have lost so many pots of Crocus over the last winter I am cheered by the hardy species, such as C. vallicola and C. banaticus that enjoy our cool moist conditions and do not seem to suffer from the cold winters and especially Crocus autranii. Still very rare in cultivation we are slowly increasing our stock from seed

collected from this plant last year. Sadly when I found this flower in the open frame it was lying flat on the gravel because a slug had chewed the tube at gravel level. I hope that the damage was just to the outer floral tube and not the stigma tube which allows the pollen to grow down and fertilise the seed. I self-pollinated the plant and also cross pollinated some C. vallicola flowers to see if a cross is possible.

Crocus kotschyanus

Other species that are proven hardy are Crocus kotschyanus which we grow in both pots and the garden and Crocus pulchellus (below)

I especially admire the classic shape of Crocus pulchellus flowers.

Crocus pulchellus

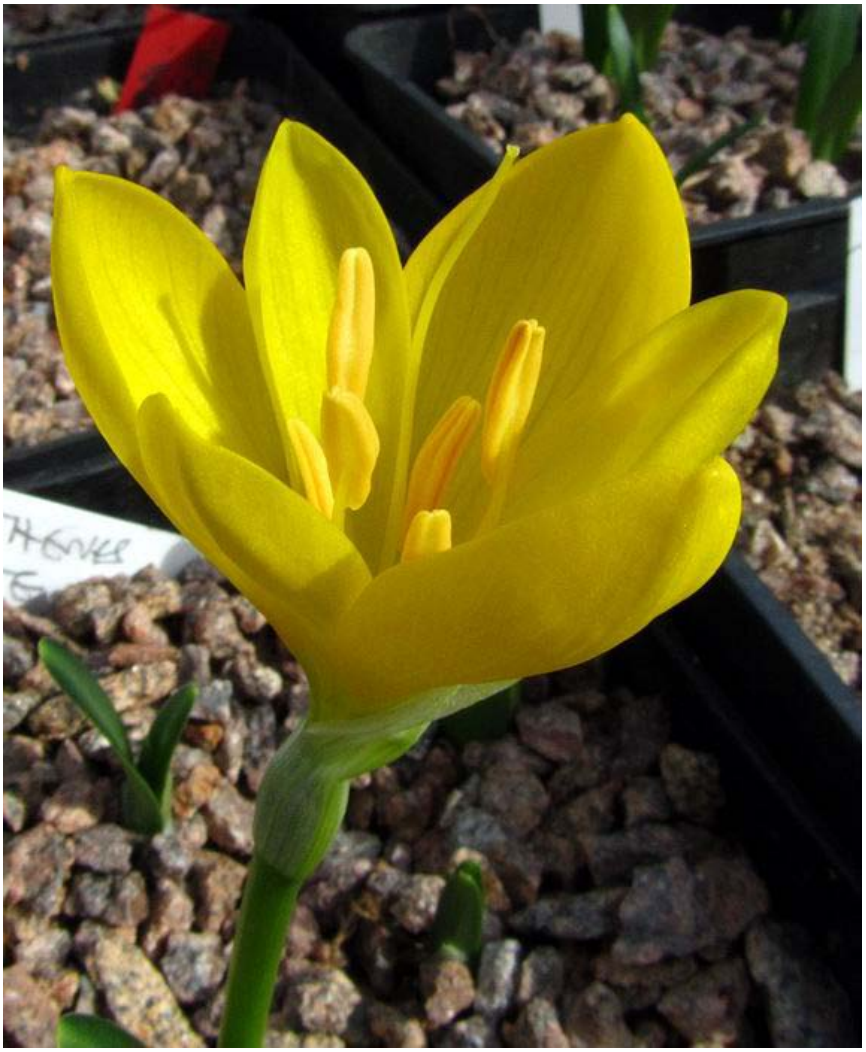
Crocus speciosus xantholaimos

The picture above is a detail from the picture on the left and it shows the detail that I can capture with my compact Cannon PowerShot SX210IS.
I have used this compact almost exclusively for most of my pictures since I got it as it is so adaptable and I carry it all the time in a pouch on my belt.

As I reported in a previous bulb log I was delighted to receive some Sternbergia bulbs from a kind friend to replace some of my losses of last winter. Now my pleasure is immense as they are flowering and reminding me why I try so hard to find forms that will survive our unsuitable climate.
It has also rekindled my curiosity as to the status of the three species *Sternbergia lutea, sicula* and *greuteriana* that I see many differences in while some want to merge them into a single variable species.
I am of the opinion that it will take some intensive field work studying the wild populations before any acceptable conclusion can be drawn but until that is done we can speculate and hypothesize.

Sternbergia sicula

Sternbergia lutea, sicula and greuteriana



Above are the outside floral segments from each of the three species and it is clear that S. lutea has a very rounded tip which forms a very three dimensional boat shaped sepal very different to the other two. S. sicula also has a rounded blunt tip but the sepal lies quite flat the third S. greuteriana also lies flat but has an acute tip in addition this segment is much thiiner than the other two. The width to length of each is also clearly different and are as follows 22 x 40, 11 x 30, 5 x 25 giving ratios of approx 2, 3 and 5.

Each of these features are used by taxonomists to differentiate between species in other cases so why not here?

These are some of my observations and to me it seems logical to suggest that there are three entities or as I have said before two species – S. lutea and S. greuteriana and a hybrid swarm in the middle which accounts for the variable S. sicula.

Whatever the relationship between these plants is I will persevere to grow them and enjoy their beauty.

Sternbergia lutea

Sternbergia greuteriana