



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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BULB LOG 28.....13th July 2022





I am always on the lookout for a cover picture to set up the week's Bulb Log which both grabs attention and suggests what may be contained in the following pages.

This week I found that image while walking by the River Dee about a mile upstream from the harbour mouth that featured a few weeks ago in [Bulb Log 2622](#). This area is a popular dog walking area so much of it is mown but there are some areas where bulbs, mostly Daffodils, are planted that are left to grow. However the 3 metres sloping down to the water is left completely to nature and that is where my eyes are fixed as I walk along.

I was immediately attracted by the clump of grass and buttercups, on the cover, growing as a small peninsula which also stood out visually as it was isolated against the background water.

I am not alone in seeing the wonder in something as simple as some grass and buttercups. I immediately thought of Albrecht Dürer's watercolour and gouache study, 'The Great Piece of Turf', completed in 1503 at his Nuremberg studio, which in my view is the most remarkable nature study in art.

Nature and plants connect us all through history so I was attracted to this vignette in the same way as Dürer's must have been to his piece of turf only I could never capture the scene in paint the way he did – but fortunately we now have very portable digital cameras.

I have recently read an excellent new book 'The Rise and Reign of the Mammals' by Steve Brusatte (a palaeontologist and Professor at University of Edinburgh) where I learned how important plants were in the evolution of mammals. I read that buttercups were a favourite food of Woolly Mammoths and Mastodons and that grasses are not as old as many of the flowering plants. The first evidence of grasses is from the late Cretaceous but they only started to be widespread 23million years ago in the Miocene. Now there are more than 11,000 species and, including all our gardens and agriculture land, they cover 40% of the earth's surface.

All along this section of river bank there are groups of interesting plants including grasses, rushes and many herbs.





My sequence of threads and links continues as turning from where I took the above images of grasses I see The Old Bridge of Dee. The bridge was funded by Bishop William Elphinstone who died in 1514 and was completed by Bishop Gavin Dunbar in 1527, the year before Dürer died. The bridge still carries the main A92 road into Aberdeen from the south so many generations have passed this way.



Following my thread the common names for ***Aegopodium podagraria*** include **Bishop's weed**. It got this name because it was a herbal remedy used to treat gout a condition often brought on by the opulent life style enjoyed by Bishops of old and so it was planted around their residences.



Another common name for *Aegopodium podagraria* is Ground Elder because of its similarity with the European **Elderberry (*Sambucus*)** and indeed there are superficial similarities between the leaves and flowers.



I regularly walk past this scene where *Aegopodium podagraria* (**Ground Elder**) and *Sambucus* (**Elderberry**) grow together.



It is extremely important that we preserve wild grassland especially around our towns and cities. I have a special interest in conserving habitats such as this one, which is only a ten minute walk from our home. It is classified as Green Belt but once again it is under threat with a planning application for a development. This once cultivated land has for 50 plus years been left to nature and I am curious how a number of distinct habitats have formed. Some areas are dominated by large grasses while fine grasses predominate in the area closer to the camera, brambles grow in one area and raspberries in another no doubt these variations reflect the ground conditions below.



Greater biodiversity within these areas can easily be re-established if mixes of native wild flower seeds are introduced.



A moss covered sloping roadside has become a seedbed for a large number of plants including Rhododendrons and tree species such as Rowan and Yew, all growing among the moss and fine grasses.



The gardener can take so much inspiration from nature especially the use of selected grasses. In recent years more grasses, especially some of the larger types, have featured in gardens, I especially think of the prairie style plantings, but I am interested in finding some small fine grasses that would be suitable for introducing to gardens.



I am interested to observe how well the **Primula vulgaris**, naturalised among the grasses, are growing so much better than the ones in our garden which get the same weather conditions as it does, only a ten minutes' walk away.



The leaves and growth of the **Primula vulgaris** growing among the grasses in the wood are at least twice as good as ours and while our ground was very dry when I checked at the base of the grass and Primula there was moisture.



We are often guilty of looking for the dramatic colourful flowers in gardens and not taking in the more subtle but equally interesting decorative shapes and forms created by the stems and leaves. Here in the harsh bright light there is beauty in the fern fronds even the ones scorched by the heat when they were in direct sunlight.



Arisaema leaves.



Lilium martagon



Aconitum



This is the view we get from one of our swing seats where I often sit observing and thinking about how our plants and garden fit in with nature. Gardening is about habitat manipulation where we, the gardeners, can adjust the soils and drainage by building up raised beds etc. The plants we select also create habitats I am especially thinking of trees and shrubs that affect the habitat above and below the ground with their canopy casting shade while their roots change the soil structure as they push up and down.



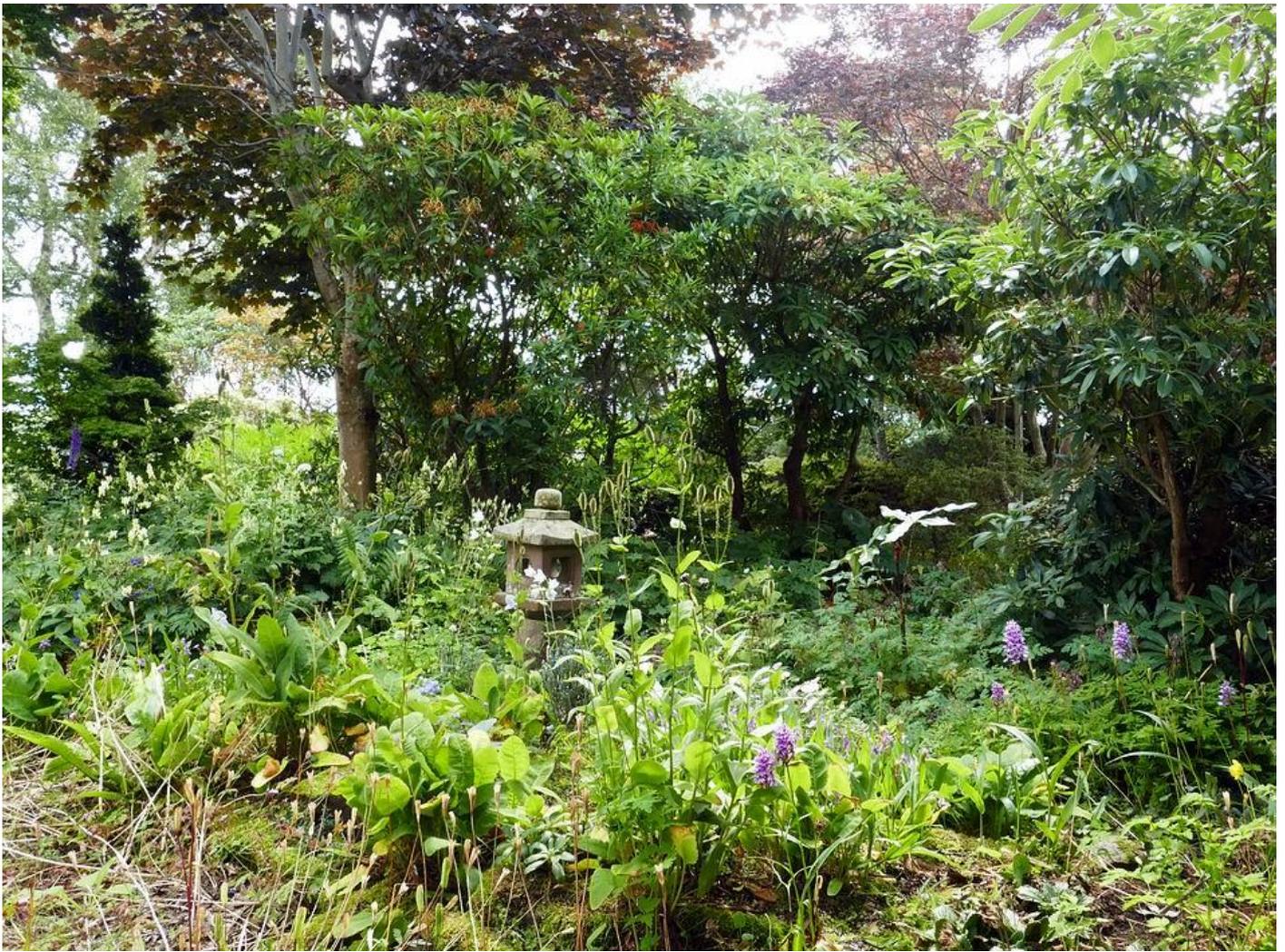
Potentilla eriocarpa is one of the plants we bought in May which brings some welcome colour to one of the raised slab beds.



The overall habitat we have created in the garden is that of a small open woodland which in turn contains many macro and micro habitats. The many trees and shrubs provide cover and food to attract the birds which we further encourage by feeding them with sunflower hearts. We get large numbers of birds and while we get great pleasure watching them on the feeders I am most heartened by watching them foraging among the habitats we have created. I took these pictures from the swing seat of this Bullfinch feeding on the Geranium and Viola seeds on a raised bed.



By pure luck I captured the bird in flight.



After sitting for a while I took my camera for a walk capturing images of the garden at what I think of as a transitional stage of growth. Mid-summer is when many of the early plants, that we are so fond of, are setting seed and collapsing but among the chaos there are some new growths and flowers to be found.





Roscoea alpina seeds out across the rock garden so we have several groups of plants flowering just now.





Some of the ground cover of *Dicentra*, which was collapsing in the hot dry weather, has been rehydrated by the few days when we had some welcome rain.



When the *Dicentra* is in full growth it looks superficially the same but closer observation shows there is a wide variation in the foliage of this hybrid swarm.



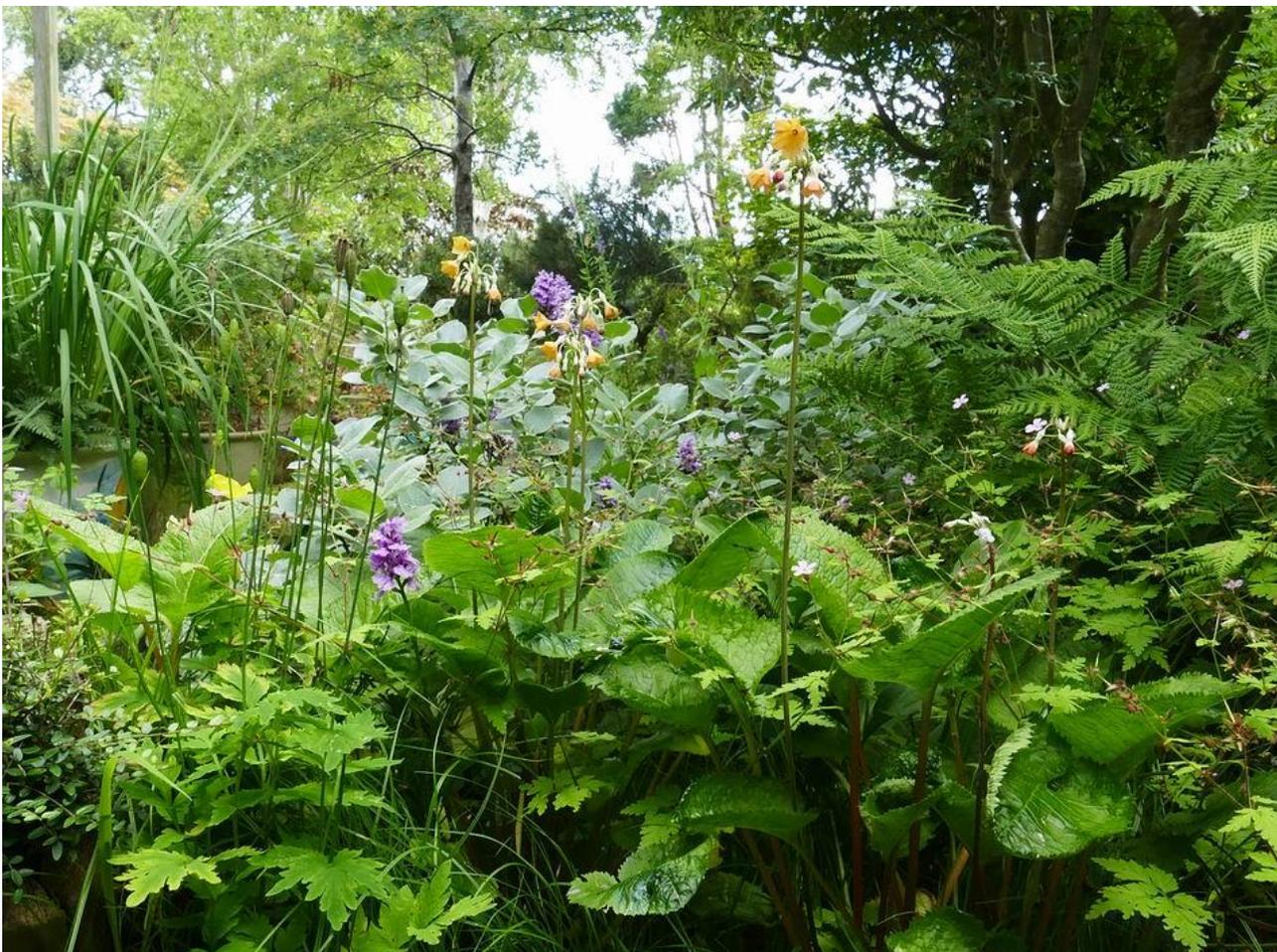
While the *Dicentra* and other plants are now retreating underground until next year other plants, such as these *Roscoea*, are just pushing up their new leaves to be followed later by their flowers.



I spot the fan shaped leaves and flowers stems of another late summer/ autumn flowering plant ***Veratrum fimbriatum***.



I started this week with a depiction of nature by one of the greatest artists of all times, Albrecht Dürer, since I cannot separate art and gardening, all gardeners are creating art. What we build is art - how we depict it is also an artistic process whether we use cameras, pencils or paint, how we frame the subject is a creative process and so it goes on. This picture was taken after 22.00, when the colours and tones appear very different to during the daytime.



It has never been easier for us to record and share images of our gardens, and I encourage you all to do it.



We can all learn from the past - in his painting Durer choose to isolate the grasses and wild flowers by leaving the background white making them stand out dramatically. We can also do this in the garden by using a white sheet of paper as I did here to isolate this trough planting. Just remember to get the correct exposure for the plants and keep the background white and not grey - you will need to overexpose by around one stop.



The next sequence of images shows the before and after pictures of the same view - first to the left the image as it is complete with distracting background.



Next I apply the Dürer trick of isolating the plants by holding a sheet of white paper behind them to obscure the background..



Creativity can then continue with a few clicks and a digital filter.



I will finish off this week with one of a series of mixed media drawings I did around 2014; this one depicts Bishop Weed, grasses and Rowan leaves which have featured above. I do not have the patience to produce a work like Dürer's 'Great Piece of Turf' but there are many ways that we can depict and express our feelings about the nature that surrounds us through gardening, photography and so many other artistic mediums.....