



## Log 1 ... 6th January 2009

I and all the Alpine staff at Wisley bid you a Happy New Year! Though 2009 may have got off to a gloomy start with economic woes and freezing weather, our plants will bring colour and lift our spirits I am sure.

Though it may be cold, the weather brings some unusual sights. It is rare these days to see snow on the Rock Garden. We haven't had any great depth, but it does give a whole new appearance to things:



The minimum temperatures have been down to around minus 9 centigrade, with daytime temperatures barely above freezing. Being our first day back after the Christmas & New Year break, we were anxious to check out all our plants. Having most of our pots plunged gives some protection but even so, in our unheated houses, all of them have frozen completely through and many look sorry for themselves. We just hope they revive once the thaw comes. Even in the heated houses the heaters are struggling to keep the temperature above zero.

Outside, all the ponds are frozen over, again a rare occurrence these days:



Where snow had fallen on the frozen ponds it was amusing to see all the tracks left by the ducks that would normally be swimming here. The birds themselves had all vanished, presumably to search for open water elsewhere.

It is unlikely the poor ducks would find open water – even the new big lake next to The Glasshouse was frozen:



Where running water enters the ponds some fantastic ice 'sculptures' had formed:



Here are some more examples:



When conditions have been like this overnight, our first concern has to be for the safety of our garden visitors, so an important job is to clear the paths and steps and put down salt or grit to help prevent people slipping. It's a good job to get warmed up with first thing in a morning:



After all these winter scenes it is definitely time for some.....

COLOUR!!



This is *Lachenalia bulbifera*, an easy and reliable flowerer for the winter months from South Africa. From the same area we have flowering for the first time *Bulbinella latifolia*:



There are two subspecies recognised for this plant. This picture shows the yellow-flowered *Bulbinella latifolia* ssp. *latifolia*

The other is *Bulbinella latifolia* ssp. *doleritica*, which has orange flowers and which we also have in flower for the first time:



You can see in the first picture above that they have long, strap-shaped leaves and make tall flower spikes. In the wild they grow to approximately 1 metre tall. They need a large pot and plenty of water while in growth. They have thick, fleshy roots that are sensitive to desiccation so they should be given an occasional light watering while dormant. *Bulbinella* is an odd genus in that it has a strange, disjunct distribution. There are about 14 species in the Cape region of South Africa while a further 6 can be found in New Zealand. Oddly, the New Zealand species are more commonly seen in cultivation, even though they are all similar to each other, while the more attractive and diverse South African species are seldom encountered. I find them most attractive and think they deserve to be more commonly grown – while you are unlikely to find plants for sale anywhere, seed is increasingly available so there is plenty of opportunity to try these out.



Staying with South Africa for one more plant, *Daubenya marginata* has been putting on a fine show for us for the past three or four weeks.

Finally for this week, moving back to the

northern hemisphere, this is a really nice form of *Narcissus bulbocodium*:



We have this as *Narcissus bulbocodium* ssp. *praecox* 'Moulay Brahim'. This has been discussed in the SRGC forum before because no-one seems certain if this is its true identity. Whatever its real status, it is a great form and brings a great glow in the Display House.

That brings me to the end of this first log for 2009. From a cold but bright Wisley, we wish you all good growing in the New Year!

