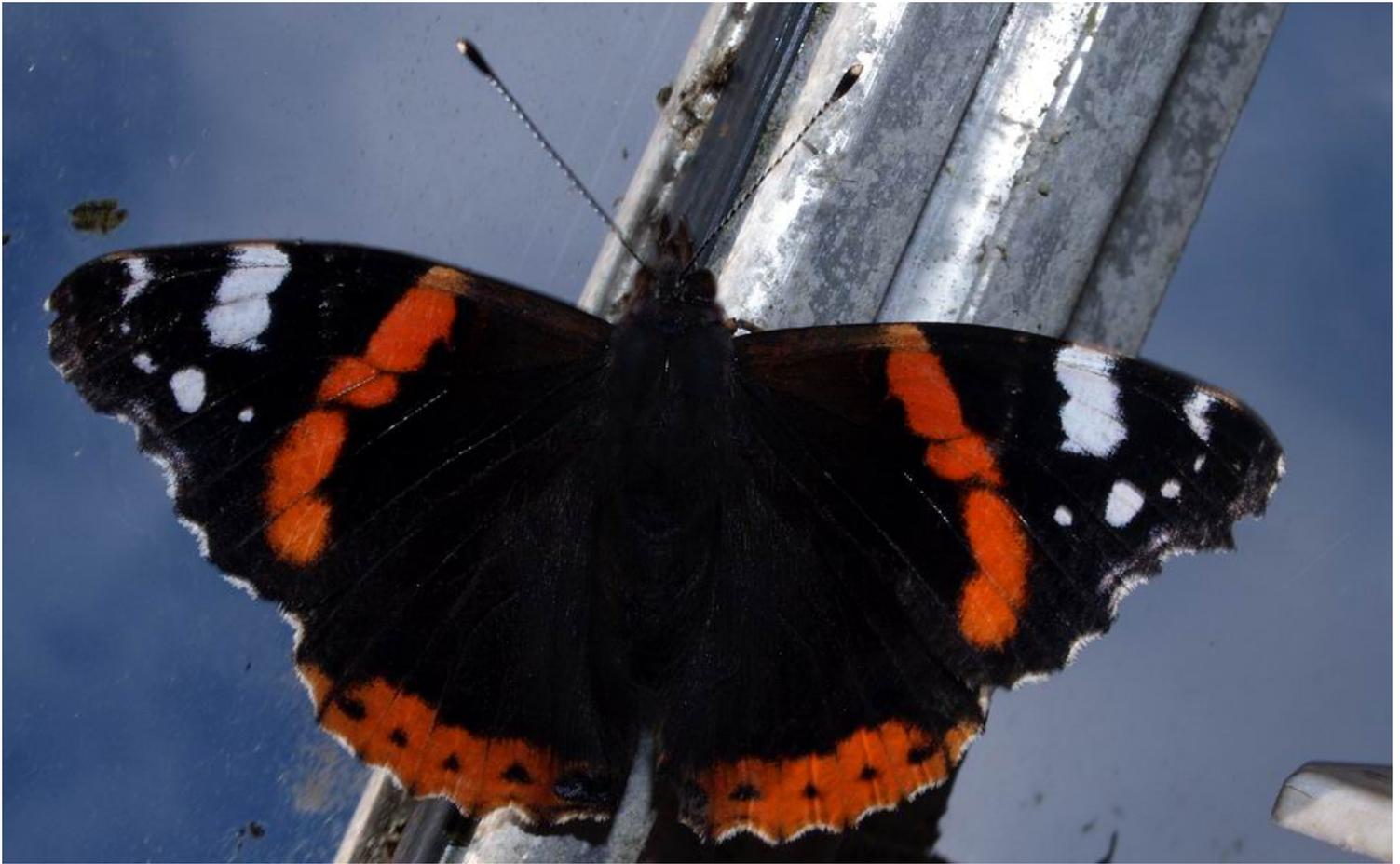




BULB LOG 44.....4th November 2009



Red Admiral Butterfly

The heavy rain that I mentioned in last weeks bulb log suddenly stopped and we had two brief days of bright warm sunny weather with temperatures reaching 17C . This was a great relief as we were all in danger of entering a deep depression – this butterfly had been wise to shelter in the bulb house during the deluge but seemed anxious to be on its way now the sun was out. I took advantage of the sunshine to catch up on some garden jobs and on checking the bulb houses where I could take pictures of open flowers without the need of flash to provide the main light source.



**Narcissus cantabricus
foliosus**

I just love to look carefully at flowers as they emerge from the protection of the bud.

The flowers of Narcissus cantabricus foliosus appear this creamy yellow colour as they are emerging but quickly turn pure white as they fully expand.



Narcissus cantabricus foliosus

This time of the year sees many gardeners preparing for the long winter shut down while I see it as the start of another twelve months of growing and flowering. My 'year' starts with the 'September storm' which coincides with the time I sow much of the seed I have collected over the year, that is followed with the early flowering autumn bulbs; firstly Colchicum, Crocus and Sternbergia, with the 'winter' flowering Narcissus following on.



Narcissus cantabricus foliosus



Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus

Watering

This is a critical time to get the watering of bulbs correct and I took advantage of the first bright day to water the pots of bulbs that were showing active leaf growth.

It takes a lot of moisture to allow the bulbs to make so much growth so quickly. If the bulbs do not get a sufficient supply of water then they can start to break down into multiple small non-flowering sized bulbs. I have a few simple rules that I follow at this time of year.



- 1) Water in proportion to the amount of leaf growth.
- 2) Where possible always water early on bright frost free days when any surplus water can drain or evaporate away.
- 3) Water by flooding each pot and letting it drain.
- 4) Try to avoid getting the leaves too wet.



Crocus flower

This spent Crocus flower shows clearly one of the problems that we face in cold wet conditions – grey mould – which generally starts on the pollen before spreading to the rest of the flower. The removal of the flowers once they have withered is an essential task to prevent the botrytis spreading to living tissues on the leaves.



Crocus banaticus

This is one of the pots of *Crocus banaticus* that I keep in an outside frame and only bring under glass for a week or so, to enjoy the flowers away from the rain and help the chance of getting fertilisation.



Crocus caspius

I have grown the above form of *Crocus caspius* successfully for many years during which time it has increased both by division and by seeds. It is only when I replot it that I find the seeds as the pods always stay underground even when they open. I don't know if they behave like this in the wild or if the different environment there triggers the stem to grow and push the seed pod above the ground. When the flowers open fully like this you can see that the floral segments are fairly narrow giving the flower this starry effect.



Crocus caspius seedlings

These are the first flowers, from a pot of seed from the above plant, sown in September 2005 and you can see that they too have inherited the narrow segments. Four years from seed to flower is a good bench mark for raising Crocus. When grown in optimum conditions it can be done in three years but these have not been repotted since sown – ideally they should have been repotted after their second year of growth. They have had additional feeding mostly in the form of potassium.



Crocus caspius

Compare this form of Crocus caspius with the two pictures above and you will see that this form has much fuller flowers with broad floral segments that overlap towards the base. This variation in shape illustrates the reason why I am always pleased to get seed from other sources even though I already have a plant.



Crocus caspius

A number of recent **Crocus caspius** seedlings I have raised from seed collected in Iran are a nice violet colour from when they first open. The white forms in the previous pictures all have a hint of this colour on the outside of the flowers which becomes more obvious as the flower ages so it is nice to have this coloured variation. I have cross fertilised the different forms and await with interest the seeds and resulting flowers in five years time.



Crocus ochroleucus



Crocus ochroleucus albus

These two pictures allow you to compare directly the typical form of *Crocus ochroleucus* with the yellow throat on the left and the white throated variation on the right. Also take note that there is no yellow in the stigma of the white form.



Crocus laevigatus and Crocus niveus

It only takes a few hours of sunshine to warm the bulb house enough to bring the next batch of Crocus species into bloom. On the right is a later flowering, shorter, form of *Crocus niveus* with the first flowers just opened.



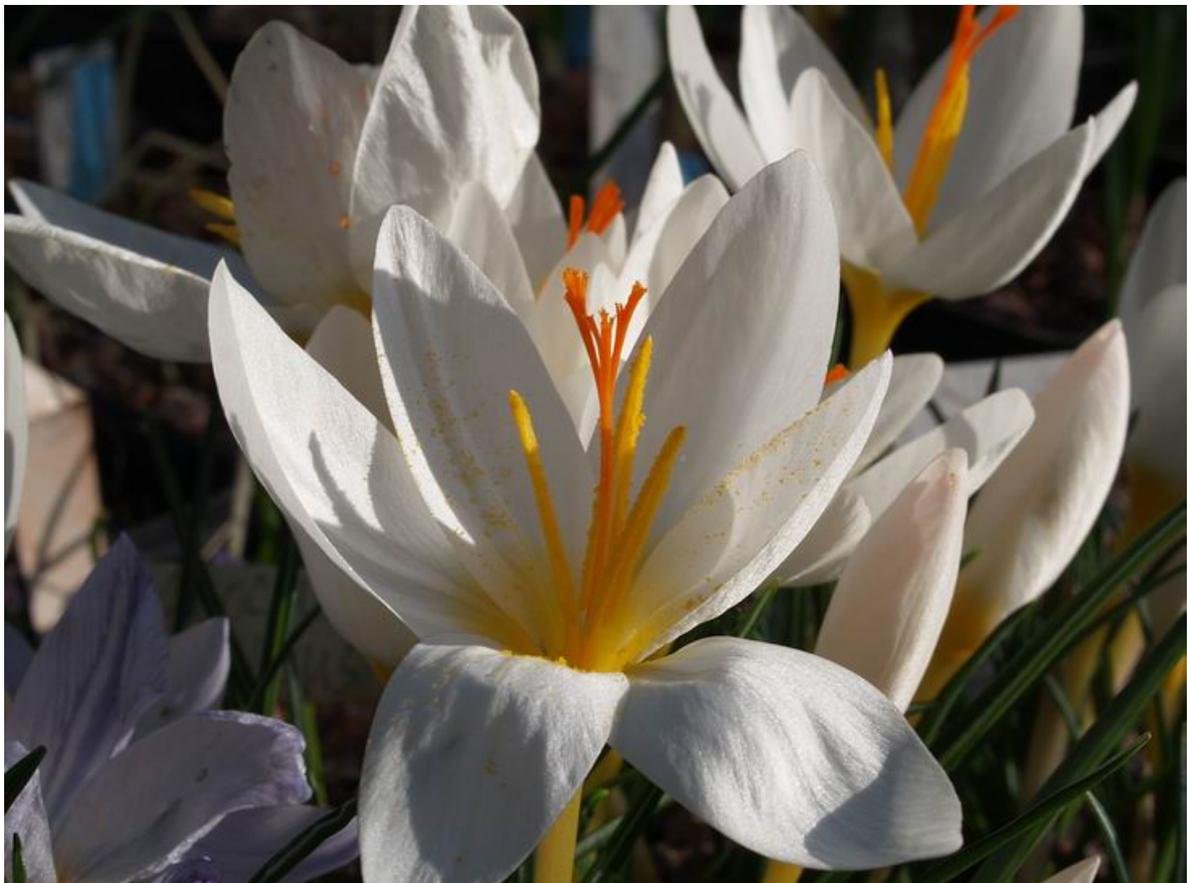
Crocus laevigatus

This certainly will not be the last time I share this beautiful species, *Crocus laevigatus*, with you as different pots of seedlings send up many variations on the theme.



Crocus laevigatus

I love the contrast between the pale blue petals, the deep yellow throat, white pollen and the orange style and to cap it all, it is sweetly scented. In future weeks I will share some of the variations in dark feathering that appear on the exterior of the flowers.



Crocus niveus

A closer look at the flower of *Crocus niveus* also shows that beauty that makes *Crocus* such a popular genus.



Crocus hadriaticus

Superficially the flowers of some forms of *Crocus hadriaticus* can look very similar to those of *C. niveus* and sometimes these species appear mixed up as their corm tunics are both finely reticulate.



Crocus biflorus melantherus

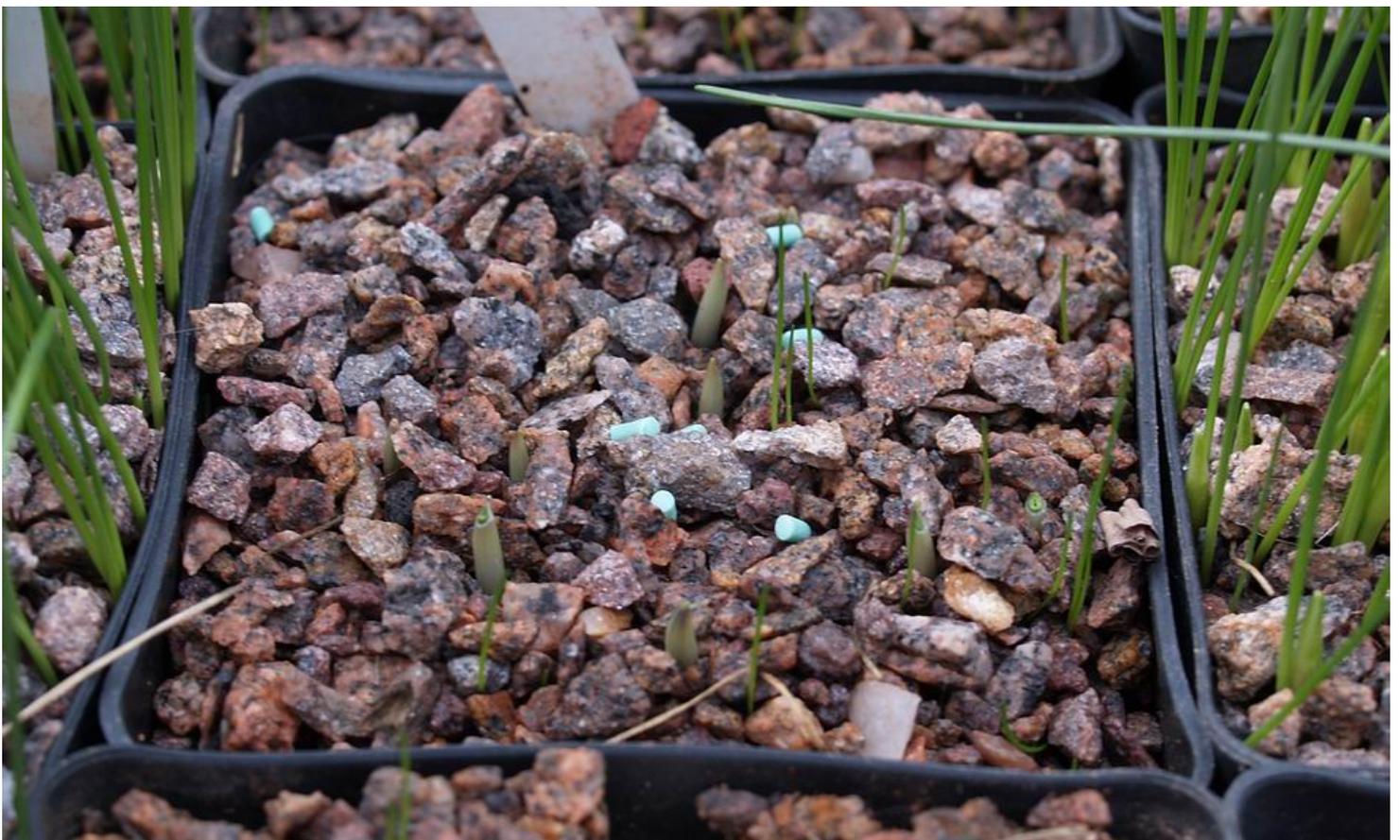


Crocus biflorus melantherus

Crocus biflorus is primarily a spring flowering species but there are a few forms that will flower in the autumn and winter such as Crocus biflorus melantherus above which has black anthers. The anthers are only black until they dehisce when their golden pollen becomes visible and the dominant colour - you can still make out the dark stripe of the outside of the anthers.

The outside of the flower has the typical dark feathering seen on the majority of this species.

All these Crocus with leaf growth showing also got a good watering on our two nice days last week.



Tecophilaea cyanocrocus shoots

Although they will not flower until March or April the shoots of Tecophilaea cyanocrocus have broken the surface.



Tecophilea cyanocrocus shoots

You should have observed the small blue pellets in the above picture these are slug pellets. I do not like to use these but do resort to them in the seed frames and the bulb house when I think slugs and or snails have got in. The evidence that I have a problem is clear in these two detailed pictures showing the chewed tips of the Tecophilea. Also note that you only need very few slug pellets they are a poison and should be used sparingly. I often see some gardeners pile them high around their plants as if they are creating a wall of pellets to stop the slugs.



Tropaeolum azureum

On a few occasions slugs have taught me valuable lessons. Yes I once was disappointed when a slug chewed the new emerging shoot on, at that time, my single plant of Tropaeolum azureum.



Tropaeolum azureum

However my disappointment turned to delight when I found that rather than destroying my rare plant the slug had actually improved it as several side shoots appeared from the chewed off stem.

Left to its own devices the stem grows and grows ever taller as it twines up the support but if you nip out the leader it will branch and produce a number of side shoots each of which can be pinched out resulting in a much more bushy and floriferous plant.

The slug gave me the courage to do something that I would never have attempted on my own and now do every year.



Ghost Moth

I will finish this week much as I started this time with a picture of a Ghost Moth that visited the bulb house.