

# Wisley's Alpine Log

By Paul Cumbleton

Log 24...19 Nov 2009



This is the time of year when I take some leave from work and stay home to unpot my *Pleione*. This also explains why this log is a little late as I'm writing it from home in between bouts of unpotting. What I like to do with the Pleiones is to unpot all of them now into paper bags which I keep in trays. This way they take up less space and can be easily moved. Once I have unpotted them all I will then sweep out the glasshouses, removing any debris and other rubbish before spraying the insides with a horticultural disinfectant. I like to think that that I am then starting the new season "clean". Good husbandry of this sort is always a good investment. Once this is done, I will leave them in the bags until January when I will take another time off work to pot them all up again in fresh compost.

Adding a little cheer while I do this job is a couple of them flowering. The first is one of my own new hybrids. This is a cross between the Spring - flowering hybrid *Pleione* Ueli Wackernagel and the autumn - flowering species *Pleione praecox*. It has produced autumn flowering offspring. I named the cross *Pleione* Slender Loris and it looks like this:



The other *Pleione* in flower just now is the rare and beautiful *Pleione praecox* var. *alba*. This form was collected a few years ago by a botanical expedition at 2000m on Doi Inthanon - the highest mountain in northern Thailand. It has the purest white petals with just a little pink

suffusion on the reverse of the petals which you can see here coming through as the lighting is coming from behind.



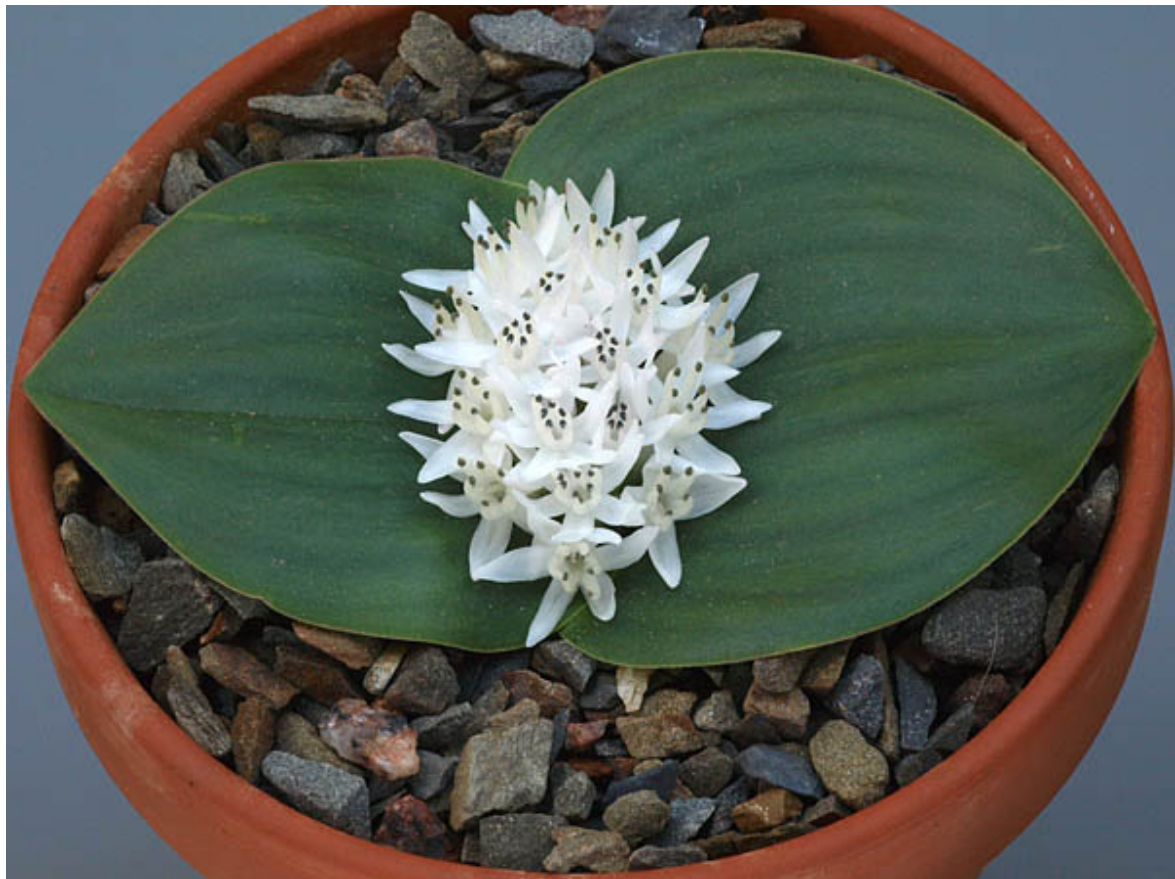
Despite having had this plant for several years, it has remained as a single bulb which is sad as it is worthy of being spread around more in cultivation. Other white forms are known from elsewhere but these usually lack the purple spotting and instead have some yellow in the lip.

Some other plants at home merit some comment. Back in log 8 of 2007 I talked about *Massonia* from South Africa. One of the rarer ones, *Massonia hirsuta*, I could only show as a pot of small seedlings belonging to a friend, as this was a species I did not have myself. Thanks to a bulb swop with a grower in Germany I managed to later obtain this species and it is now in flower, so for the record, this is what it looks like:





I have also previously shown *Massonia jasminiflora*. Since then I have had more of these flower from seed obtained from Gordon Summerfield. These are the ones from the Winburg area and they differ from my other form. The latter has postulate leaves and flowers which stand elevated on stout tubes. The Winburg form has plain leaves and the flowers sit much closer to the leaves. Here pictures of both forms for comparison:





This year on his seed list, Gordon is offering a third form newly discovered from the Nieuwtdville area which he tells me has very hairy leaves. I look forward to growing this in the future. Meanwhile, one of the other Massonias, *M. depressa*, gets bigger every year and is threatening to swamp its neighbours:



This species sometimes has purplish spotting on the leaves, but my forms are plain.

While on the South African theme I would mention another couple of plants of interest currently, both of them *Gethyllis* species. Some species from this genus have interest other than the flowers. One is *G. verticillata* where the interest is in the paired basal leaf sheathes. These are white with maroon spots and fimbriate at their apex:



The other is *Gethyllis linearis* which has wonderfully coiled leaves:



The *Gethyllis* are plants which need some care in watering as they are usually from fairly arid areas. They are unusual in being winter-growing but summer-flowering. The leaves have usually died down before the flowers suddenly emerge some time later. Emerging in the heat of summer, the flowers are fairly fleeting, but they are unusual in having a subterranean ovary which gives it protection from the heat. The fruits slowly mature below ground but then emerge on to the surface in the autumn, just before the new leaves start growing. Like other members of the Amaryllidaceae, the seeds have short viability and germinate immediately. This gives time for the new bulbs to grow and become established before the onset of the next dry season.

A momentary digression – outside the window where I am writing this we have a bird feeder in the garden. One of my favourite visitors is quite active now – the Nuthatch:





One of my favourite plants is neither alpine nor bulbous, but I allow it space in the greenhouse because it is just so spectacular in form. This is *Aeonium tabuliformae* which is endemic to the Canary Islands. It forms a perfectly flat rosette of leaves from which its name derives:



A close up of the centre is quite photogenic:





This plant is winter-growing so needs watering then, though it also likes just a little moisture during its dormant period in summer. It also needs some shade while dormant or the leaves get burnt – at least in my part of the world. But I move it back into sunlight for the winter growth period. It is monocarpic so will die after flowering, but is easily grown from seed sown in September. The seed is like dust and should be surface sown then not allowed to dry out before germination. The seed germinates freely and the plants grow quite quickly to several cm diameter in their first year.

To finish with, more non-alpine things but at least some colour – our *Phalaenopsis* collection is looking good right now:

