



BULB LOG 47.....25 November 2009



Bulb house



Crocus michelsonii shoots

We are not exactly enjoying the best of weather for the bulbs that are flowering just now with so many dull days and much rain. However we are not suffering as much from the wet as some areas of the country where they are experiencing record floods. It must be horrendous to have your house flooded never mind what it might do to your garden. We live towards the top of a hill and the ground falls away both to the south and the east. The mild temperatures that come with the wet front are causing some of the late winter/early spring crocus to push their shoots up early, like this *Crocus michelsonii*.



Crocus laevigatus

Despite the low light levels this pot of *Crocus laevigatus* manages to open its flowers perhaps they are conditioned to open at a certain temperature.



Crocus laevigatus albus

This is the first time I have flowered this white form of *Crocus laevigatus* that I got from a friend a few years ago. I was interested to see that the bud had a strong suffusion of yellow on the exteriors when it first emerged which all but faded by the time the flower opened. Despite being grown in the same conditions as the form above, this form has not opened its flowers. Bulbs that open and close their flowers as a reaction to light and or temperature use this as a defence mechanism to protect the important reproductive parts from being damaged by wet or cold conditions.



Narcissus buds

Narcissus buds are held upright when they first emerge and then they turn over as the flowers open to be held in the characteristic fashion. Holding the flowers sideways or pointing downwards is another way of sheltering the stigma and anthers from bad weather but has the added advantage of allowing night pollinating insects in. It also means there is no requirement for the flowers to open and close as most species of Crocus do.



Narcissus hedraeanthus bud

Another problem of this mild autumn weather is that some plants such as this *Narcissus hedraeanthus* have been tempted into coming through too early. Most years this species does not appear above ground until January or February but it is already through and the flower is opening before the stem has pushed it above the ground level.



Bulb house

Pulled by the mild temperature the Narcissus have put on lots of leaf growth and their stems have also been enticed into growing too tall in the poor light levels. Unfortunately our climate at this time of year either gives us mild wet weather when light levels are extremely low which encourages the bulbs to put on this extra growth or clear relatively bright clear days when the low temperatures slow down any growth to a standstill.



***Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus* and *Narcissus* 'Camoro'**

Despite the stems and leaves being a bit floppy the *Narcissus* flowers are a joyous sight that will be with us all the way through the winter months when not much else is flowering. Many of them have the additional benefit of a beautiful scent.



Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus

Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus is one of the most reliable of the winter flowering hoop petticoats and provided you give it plenty of water and a little supplement of potassium sulphate later in the season it will produce masses of flowers every year without fail. There are a few slightly different forms that go under this name due I believe to variation from seedlings. I have had a suspicion for a number of years that this is not a true species but a hybrid that contains both N. romieuxii and N. cantabricus genes.



Narcissus 'Camoro'

We know that Narcissus 'Camoro, is a hybrid between N. cantabricus monophyllus and N. romieuxii, made by Henry Taylor, and it is indeed very similar in looks to Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus.

Both plants are fully fertile and may even be hybridising further in our bulb houses.



Seedlings ex Narcissus 'Camoro'

Both this picture and the one below are of a pot of seedlings raised from seed with the seed parent being Narcissus 'Camoro'. As they were open pollinated I have no way of knowing what the other parent was but can narrow it down to the several other Narcissus that we have in flower at the same time. The flowers are bigger and have a wider more frilled corona and to my eye is an improvement on what is already a good hybrid Narcissus. As I have never grown 'Camoro' in isolation I cannot rule out it being self fertile so it may be that a third species is not involved in its parentage.



Seedlings ex Narcissus 'Camoro'



Narcissus romieuxii* ssp *albidus* var *zaianicus

It is always at this time of the year that I have my much studied copy of John Blanchard's superb book 'Narcissus: a guide to wild daffodils' constantly by my side as I try and get to grips with this group of *Narcissus* which frankly I think are laughing at the taxonomists. This beautiful wee plant with the great long name, *Narcissus romieuxii* ssp *albidus* var *zaianicus*, has confused me for years and it is reassuring to read Blanchard's comments regarding the variability of wild populations and he states that he can see no characteristics that clearly separates ssp *albidus* from ssp *romieuxii*.



***Narcissus romieuxii*
ssp *albidus* var
*zaianicus***

Would it make our life easier if we could just accept that they are all just variations of the same polymorphic species?

Well- no, because then growers would still want to give them all different names to distinguish them.

Whatever we should call it, this is a very beautiful flower.



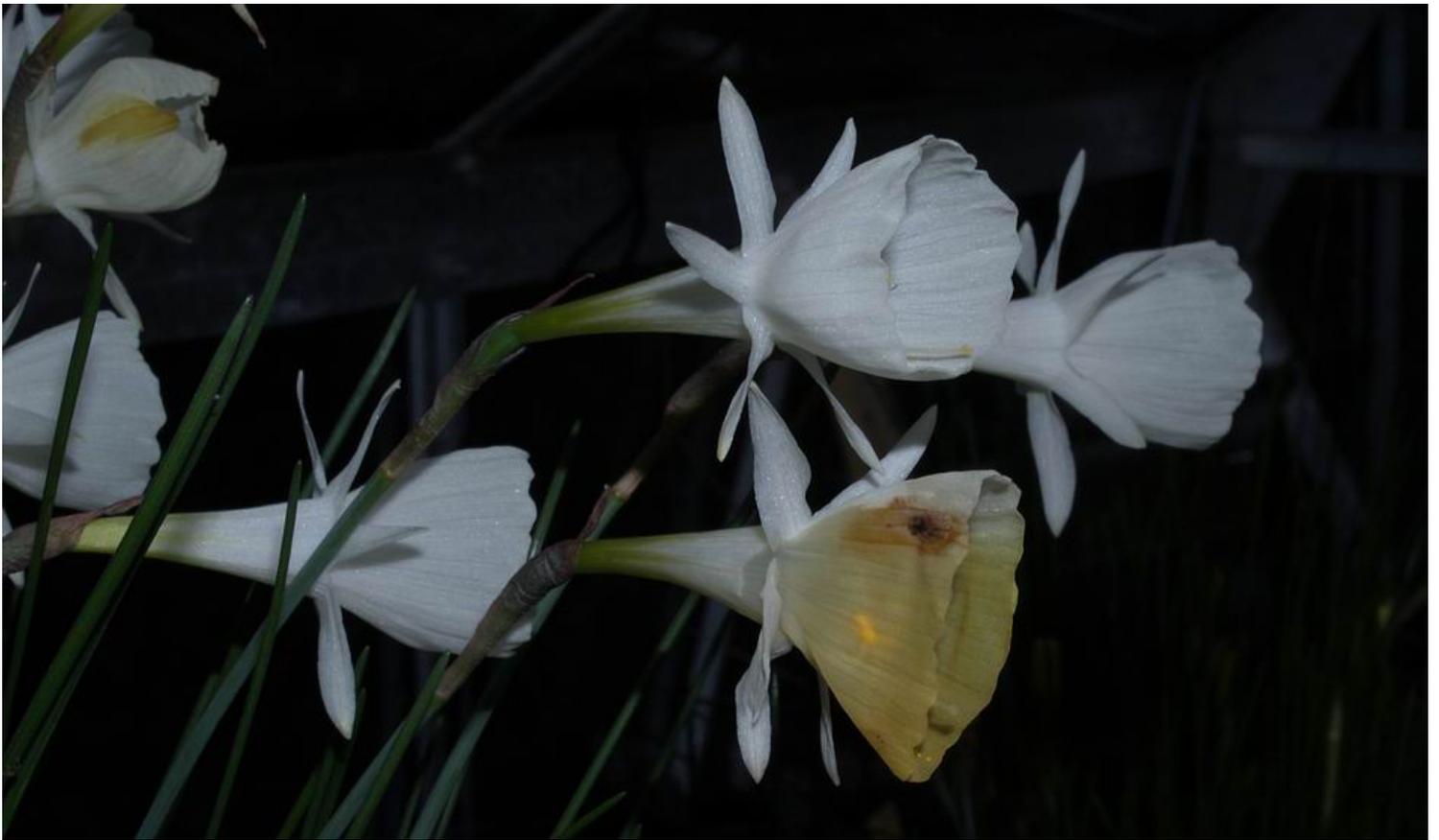
Narcissus seedling

This is the flower on one of the seedlings growing in the plunge that I showed in the bulb log two weeks ago.
Again it shows the variability of this group



Narcissus cantabricus foliosus

The very damp conditions are having a detrimental effect as these *Narcissus cantabricus foliosus* flowers show. Rather than starting to dry out as they fade the flowers are laden with moisture and start to attract moulds.



Narcissus cantabricus foliosus

The lower part of the corona is just dripping with moisture and a spot of mould has started to form.



Beauty in Decay

There is still a quality of beauty as the flowers starts to decay – but I must be vigilant and remove the flowers before the moulds infect the living tissues of the stem and leaves. Unfortunately these are not the best conditions for good fertilisation so I am not expecting a good seed set from this flower however as the pot of bulbs will produce a number of other flowers some may enjoy more favourable conditions.



Crocus niveus

I face a similar situation with these *Crocus niveus* flowers and I am removing the dead ones daily to protect the long term health of the plant.



Beauty in Decay

I will sign off this week's Bulb Log with this close up which shows that despite being a hazard to the plants these moulds have a fascinating beauty that should be observed and enjoyed just before I remove it to a safe place well away from my bulbs.