



BULB LOG 41.....14th October 2009

How time flies when you are enjoying yourself and I only came back last night from Ponteland near Newcastle upon Tyne where I have been enjoying myself since last Friday. I was down for the Autumn Show on Saturday and also to talk to the local Group of the AGS on Monday night.



Crocus speciosus

First thing this morning, after walking the Lily, I was out into the garden to see what I could find for this week's bulb log when I was struck by this autumnal scene which not only shows the colours but gives clues to the recent weather conditions we have experienced. The gale force winds of last weekend have ripped at least half of all the berries off the trees which is a big shame for the flocks of thrushes who will arrive looking for food but it does make a colourful back ground for this Crocus speciosus.



Bulb house

After a brief walk around the garden I went to check out the bulb houses as so much can happen in five days – especially at this time of year. Lots of Crocus have gone over to be replaced by others just coming into bloom now.



Dead Flowers

My inspection of the bulb houses is not just to admire what is in flower but also to check and see what actions I may need to take to ensure that the bulbs will get well looked after. All the withered flowers that you can see on this pot of crocus are now at the stage where they should be removed.

In hot dry conditions this is not such an important task as they quickly dry up but as soon as damper conditions prevail the fading flowers will

stay very wet and will become infected with rot and moulds.



Removed flowers

By the time the flowers have collapsed and start to shrivel they will have served their purpose and if they have been successfully fertilised the pollen tube will have grown down and fertilised the seeds so they are best removed by plucking them upwards.



Crocus caspius

Crocus caspius is one of the many species that flowers with its leaves and you can see the lovely yellow throated white flowers have a slight violet wash as they open. Most years this plant sets seeds for me but it is not until repotting time that I find the seed pods as they always remain underground. I am not sure if they behave like this in the wild or if the conditions there trigger the stem to grow and push the seed pods above the ground like most other species.



Looking down into the **Crocus caspius** flowers shows the deep yellow throat. On the right are a few seedlings from a wild source and I am interested to observe that one is much darker in the bud that any of the others that I have raised from our own garden seeds.



Crocus ochroleucus albus

I will share a few more of the Crocus that are in flower today with you starting with Crocus ochroleucus albus; this all white version of a familiar species lacks the yellow throat.



Crocus goulimyii

The very distinctive shape of the flowers of Crocus goulimyii makes it easy to identify even at a distance – the inner three petals are usually shorter than the outer three and are often also paler in colour.



Crocus goulimyii leucanthus and Crocus niveus

On the left above is another form *Crocus goulimyii leucanthus* along side a picture of its close relative *Crocus niveus*. *Crocus niveus* is very variable and this large white form is probably the most commonly seen in cultivation where its scale makes it a perfect subject for planting out in sunny well drained beds.

Crocus karduchorum

I have only a single flowering corm of the true *Crocus karduchorum*.

So often the plant distributed under this name turns out to be the white throated version of *Crocus kotschyanus* var. *leucopharynx*

The long multiple style branches seen on the right make it easy to separate the true species from *C. kotschyanus*.

As is often the case the mistaken identity arose many years ago in the early 20th Century when *Crocus kotschyanus* var. *leucopharynx* was mistakenly introduced as *C. karduchorum*.

These mistakes are easy to make but sometimes it take a very long time before it is completely cleared up as there are still wrongly named plants being offered.

I was delighted to receive some seeds of *Crocus karduchorum* a few weeks ago from a kind friend.





Crocus mathewii

The same kind friend also gave me two corms of *Crocus mathewii* which I am delighted to have to extend the genetic base of the ones I already have. The wider the range of a species that you have, the better chance you have of getting seeds and keeping it long term in cultivation.



Crocus longiflorus

Another of my favourite species is *Crocus longiflorus* – in fact I find it hard to think of a crocus species that I do not like.



Crocus kotschyanus



Crocus caspius and Crocus niveus

As I am looking at the wide selection of beautiful crocus flowers I am also checking on their condition to see if they require watering or not. My normal rule is to water in proportion to the amount of leaves showing and this is very important with the autumnal flowering Crocus. The flowers of *Crocus kotschyanus* appear quite a while before there is any leaf growth so it will not need and further watering after the two storms until the leaves appear. The leaves of other species like *Crocus caspius* and *Crocus niveus* appear with the flowers so you have to judge if they have sufficient water or not by checking the growth. If they are firm and turgid then they have sufficient water; if they are at all floppy then they may need watering especially if the days are warm and sunny causing a lot of evaporation as well as transpiration through the leaves.



Narcissus bulbs

A reminder if you have not planted or watered your Narcissus yet that they will be desperate to start into growth now as these two bulbs that I found lying on the repotting bench show. You can see clearly the leaves growing slowly from the top and the ring of stubby root tips pushing out from the basal plate. Because they are growing in full light the root tips especially on the right hand bulb are green due to chlorophyll.



Narcissus in full growth

Many of our Narcissus are in full growth with flower buds appearing on some of them. They also need checking regularly to make sure they have sufficient water and again I will water in proportion the amount of leaves showing. That is both the amount of leaf growth as well as the number of leaves appearing as the more bulbs you have growing rapidly in a pot the quicker they will use up the available water. I prefer to water on hot bright windy days when the surplus water can quickly evaporate and drain away and I tend not to water in cold damp weather as that has the opposite effect of keeping the bulbs too wet which can lead to rot.



Lilium nanum seedlings

For some reason I have failed to listen to my own advice which is not to sow Lily seeds until January.

As you can see I sowed this pot of Lilium nanum seeds in September it must have got mixed up when I was sowing my Fritillaria seeds and I failed to realise.

However it does illustrate very well why I advise against sowing these bulbs too early. They have germinated and I now have the problem of trying to get these fragile young growths through the cold dark winter months.

I will keep you posted on their progress.



Autumn leaves



Arisaema seed head

I will leave you with these two pictures of autumn colours in the garden and an appeal. If you enjoy reading the bulb log or any other part of the SRGC web site and you are not an SRGC Member, perhaps you might consider joining. All the work is done by Members who volunteer their time and all the expenses of the server etc. are paid for by the Club; if you enjoy the BulbLog and this site, please join SRGC and help support our work. Other benefits of being a Member are the twice yearly Journal and if you join NOW you will be in time to take part in this year's Seed Exchange. The SRGC is a registered charity whose aim is to encourage the interest in Rock Garden Plants and we also give out a number of grants to help mostly young people in their horticultural education.

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