



The long cold winter means that little is yet stirring in the Rock Garden. But here and there are the first signs of awakening from winter's sleep. For me, the cheeriest of the harbingers of spring are the aconites, *Eranthis*. The first of these appeared this week to join the snowdrops.



The winter has also brought its share of problems. With the cold being unusually prolonged, the frost has penetrated more than usual. Some of our rocks have been damaged and the picture on the right shows where some of the sandstone rocks on a step have disintegrated. We will have to have a repair programme to make them safe again.



Another job the team started this winter was to drain and renovate some of the smaller pools on the rock garden. We had been losing water last summer and it was obvious that cracks and gaps had developed that needed sealing. The water is pumped out and as much wildlife as possible rescued along the way and relocated to other pools. Silt and sludge that has accumulated in the bottom of the ponds then has to be removed. Here we see Chris helping with this job:



This is hard and dirty work! Chris, Peter and our trainees who have been doing this job deserve a medal for sticking at it. Once the ponds are drained, any leaks are filled. As you can make out in the picture, these particular pools are made of concrete, so we are using cement for the repairs.

The new bog garden we made for carnivorous plants last year has stood up to the winter remarkably well and all the plants look fine.



Although outside still has little colour, in the Display House it is altogether a different story with bulbs especially making a great show.



Picking out just a few of these, the *Crocus* have been looking very good. This is the popular form of *Crocus sieberi*, called 'Firefly':



Crocus korolkowii 'Kiss of Spring' is excellent for its warm glowing orangey yellow display:



Crocus biflorus ssp. *crewii* is charming with its black anthers and beautifully feathered reverses to the petals:



The European Romuleas seem somewhat neglected by growers, perhaps because some of them have small flowers that are often hidden inside copious leaves. However this is not true of all of them and some forms can make a good show of flower, such as this *Romulea bulbocodium*:



Other plants that we think of as early flowering are the Hellebores and Hepaticas and these are indeed beginning to make a nice show. Ian's recent bulb log showed some of the wonderful Hellebore hybrids at Ashwood Nurseries, so I will add just the pretty species *H. thibetanus*:



More and more of our Hepaticas are starting to flower, especially the Japanese forms of *Hepatica nobilis*. This one has no name with it, but it looks similar to one we have labelled 'Wabune':



Finally, two more *Hepatica* in flower just now:



Above: 'Nishiki'
Below: 'Wakakusa'

