



Wisley's Alpine Log

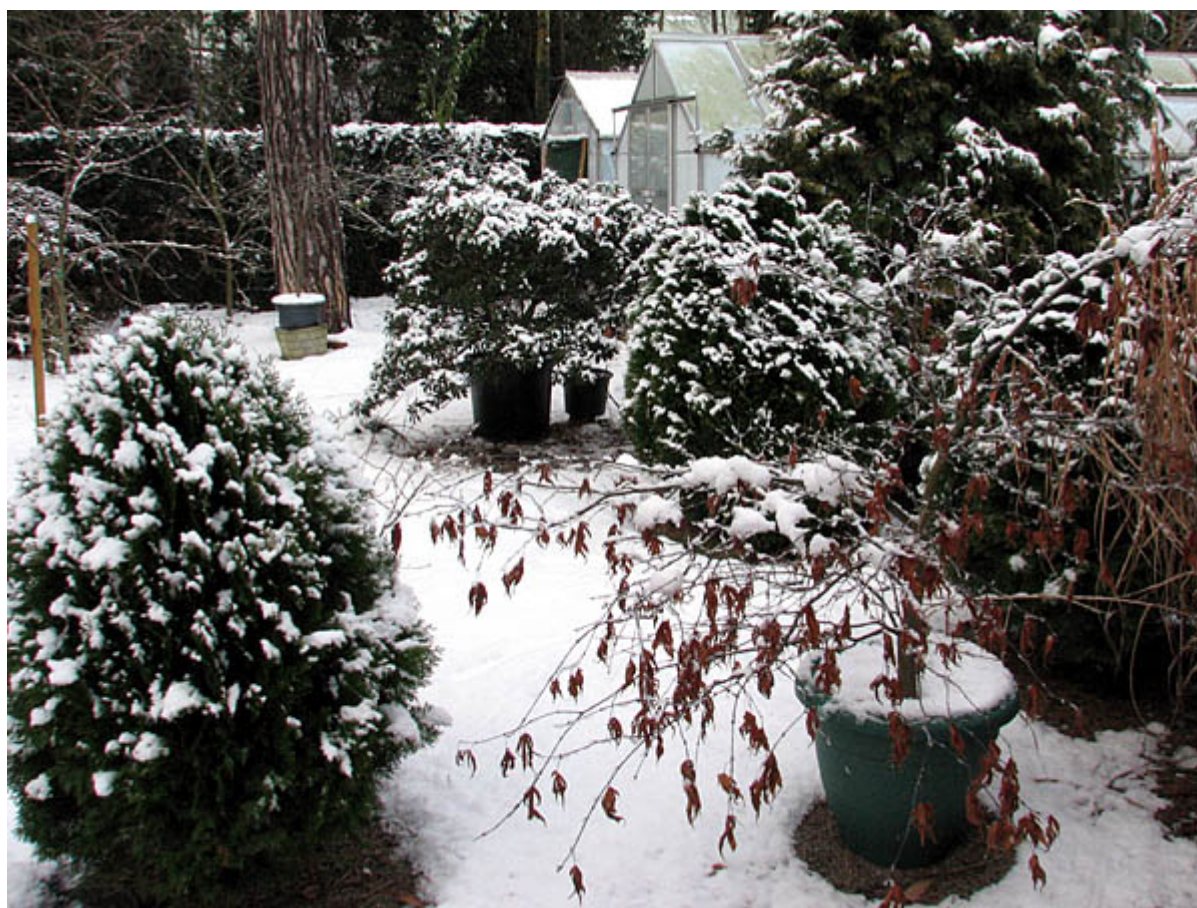
By Paul Cumbleton

2010: Log 01...07 January



May I take the opportunity in this first log of 2010 to wish all my readers a very Happy New Year!

The extreme weather means I have been unable to get into Wisley for the past couple of days and the Garden itself has been closed, with the safety of our visitors in mind. So I'm writing from home. Here, just outside Staines in Middlesex, we missed the very worst of the snowfall which occurred just a little further west and south of us. We have had around 10cm (4"). The temperature has fallen as low as minus 6 centigrade at nights



I have had to dislodge the snow from the conifers as its weight was weighing down branches. This is a job well worth going out to do as the snow could easily break branches or disfigure the plants by bending them out of shape. The snow has begun to settle on them again as you see in the picture so this is a job that may need repeating.

Another job worth doing is to remove the snow from glasshouse roofs. Thick coverings weigh a lot and risk damaging the structure, but even thin coverings cause problems by blocking out

light. It is surprising just how dark it can be in a glasshouse with a snow-covered roof. Plants will thank you for removing it.

In my last log from home (Log 24 of 2009) I showed a plant of *Massonia depressa* in bud. I was asked if I would show it again once the flowers were open, so here it is, followed by a close up of the flowers:



One of my *Massonia pustulata* produced a huge bud this year:



This particular form is especially pustulate and is my favourite of the various clones I have of this species. It also makes large leaves. It came to me from a friend who grew it from seed collected near to the De Hoop nature reserve in the south-western Cape.

This is it once the bud opened. The inflorescence is as big as my hand:



You may notice the pink coloured labels in some of the pictures; the colour is not significant but I put these under the leaves of some plants where the leaves are sitting on the sand of the plunge. The idea is to get the leaves off the damp sand and sitting on something dry. This helps avoid them getting *Botrytis* mould. This is always a problem for the winter growing bulbs and this year it seems to have been worse than usual.

Back out in the garden, the bird feeder is in constant use with the poor birds hard-pushed to find food in the freezing conditions. With little else new on the plant front to share from home, I hope you'll indulge me as I share some of the bird life with you. Our most numerous, regular, everyday visitors are not surprisingly Tits of various kinds, such as this Great Tit:



Its smaller relations, the Blue Tits, are also plentiful in our garden:



Coal Tits are the last of the everyday Tits that we see:



A much less common visitor for us is the Long-Tailed Tit. They come in flocks that pass through from time to time. They are a great joy to see:



Ring-Necked Parakeets have been in the news recently and we have great flocks of these around us. We have to put up with their raucous calling and their stealing of all the fruit off our apple trees, but nevertheless we enjoy such colourful birds on our feeders. It does though seem odd to see birds that I think of as tropical out feeding in the snow:



We wondered if the Parakeets we saw every day on the feeders were the same individuals or whether it was lots of different ones. You can't tell because they all look the same! One day however an individual showed up that had obviously been in a bit of a scrap and had some feathers pecked out of his head. We called him Scraggy:



Because he was easy to differentiate we were able to look out for him (or was it her?). It was soon obvious that he was an everyday visitor. He also seemed to get used to us over time and sometimes he let me get within an arms length of him on the feeder before he would fly off. Sadly, over time his head feathers grew back and we can't tell any more which one he is, if he is still coming at all.

The weather has also stopped us re-stocking on bird food, so we are improvising (having checked on the RSPB website to see what was safe). Uncooked porridge oats seem acceptable to some birds, and we have seen Robins, Tits and Blackbirds eating these. The Blackbirds seem to especially love them and will eat large amounts at one sitting.

Another bird we only see rarely is the Goldfinch. This is sad as they are so attractive. We know there are many of them in the area but we guess they only rarely come into the garden due to the nearby abundance of natural food sources such as Teasels.



Peanuts are a great favourite of many birds and they entice lots of species into our garden. My absolute favourite of all our visitors is the Great Spotted Woodpecker, which we see quite regularly:



My second favourite would have to be the Nuthatch which I think is a most handsome bird. Gladly, this too is an everyday visitor:



Greenfinches sometimes turn up but for us but they are only occasional visitors:



Inevitably, birds are not the only visitors and we have the same battle of wits as most people do with this attractive scoundrel:



I hope you have enjoyed my ornithological digression. It seems fitting to leave you with a seasonal bird, though taken here at a more favourable time of year!:

