SRGC ----- Bulb Log Diary -----

BULB LOG 02.....12th January 2011

Ice on trough

Some people think their gardens ‘stop’ in the late autumn and those gardeners hang up their tools for the winter waiting for the shoots of the spring before they venture back out into their plot again. That type of gardening is not for us – we have a 365 days a year garden, 366 in a leap year, and every one of those days provides interest even if the weather sometimes prevents us from tackling some of the many jobs that need doing. It is true that when the spring comes around our eyes will be spoilt for choice and will not know which of the many delights to look at first but there is still lots to see and appreciate in mid winter - you just have to look a bit harder.

The snow has mostly gone for the meantime and the temperature has pushed back up above freezing but not high enough for a complete thaw - most of the beds have a crust of ice on the surface as do many of the troughs. One of the problems when the thaw comes with containers of all kinds is that the surface tends to melt first and as the drainage holes are still frozen the surface water has nowhere to go. At the moment many of the troughs are still frozen throughout as you can see from the picture above showing the layer of ice decorating this miniature planting.

Shortia soldanelloides

Plants that provide evergreen foliage are always especially welcome and earn their place in the winter garden. They are not so difficult to please in our cooler garden and we grow them in a number of situations. This Shortia soldanelloides is at the east of the wall that forms a raised bed and so does not see much sunshine but every spring it produces lots of stems topped off with a number of its small frilly pink flowers.

Shortia uniflora

A number of small plants of Shortia uniflora can be seen in this picture and they are growing in the peat bed which sees more sunshine. It is this exposure to some sunshine that helps bring out the brilliant colours of the leaves in the autumn and which will stay all through the winter until the fresh leaves appear in the spring.

Colchicum agrippinum

Colchichum agrippinum has braved the cold and managed to push up a few late flowers through the frozen ground and the carpet of fallen leaves - lifting these leaves is one of the jobs awaiting our attention. You will see that the strong shoots of this colchicum have no problems in piercing their way through the thick mat of leaves but germinating seedlings cannot cope with a thick mat of large leaves and are unlikely to thrive until the leaves break down or ,better still, we remove them.

Narcissus ‘Cedric Morris’

Leaves are not such a problem when they are dry and can blow around or in the shrub beds where we are not expecting early germinating seedlings to appear. In recent years this clump of Narcissus ‘Cedric Morris’ would have been in flower before December was past but this year it looks like it is going to be at least Feburary before it is encouraged to open its flowers.

Narcissus perez chiscanoi

Under glass things are no different with most of the winter flowering Narcissus being behind recent years. I use the term later than ‘recent years’ and not the more commonly used phrase ‘later than normal’ because I do not know what a normal season is. I see this season and the flowering periods of the Narcissus returning to those I recorded ten years and more ago when I found it hard to believe the late Kath Dryden when she told me what was in flower in December in her bulb collection – it was months ahead of ours - then our weather pattern changed and our Narcissus started to flower earlier, just like Kath’s.

Narcissus in Bulb house


Narcissus cantabricus buds

One of the reasons that I check the bulb houses daily is to watch for any signs of problems such as the evidence of a chewed bud indicating that I still have a slug or snail issue in the bulb house that needs to be dealt with. The damage does reveal how the anthers are completely formed just waiting until the temperature rises that wee bit to open the flowers.

Narcissus plunge seedling

I decided it was time to take action to release this poor Narcissus from having to battle its way up past the sides of the plunge and the tightly packed pots.

Narcissus plunge seedling

While they are in root is not the ideal time to move bulbs around but I have intended to rescue it for a few years now and always forget when it is hiding dormant in the sand. The advantage of lifting them now is that I know that they are all the same clone The picture above and detail below show how well the roots have grown in the sand and how well this single bulb has increased in only a few years. A few flowers were unable to find their way towards the light and had become trapped under the pots.

Narcissus cantabricus, N. ‘Camoro and N. romieuxii mesatlanticus

I show here just how long some of the Narcissus stems become in our low winter light levels.
This bothers me because while the stems get progressively longer they do not become any stronger resulting in the stems flopping all over the place looking very untidy and unattractive.

I have often pondered why they grow long like this and what can I do to either keep them short or encourage them to thicken up so they can support themselves.

I know that it is basically that the plant thinks if it grows upwards the light will get stronger but are there other factors at play.

Is there a genetic factor where some forms are more inclined to have excessively long stems? If so then crossing between the shorter stem specimens could strengthen this gene dominance in our specimens.

Could I be feeding them with a particular nutrient or element that would either reduce the etioliation or thicken up the stems?

Am I feeding them too much nitrogen that encourages this characteristic?

Could I water them later in the season to try and delay their growth until the light improves?

Does the lack of movement by wind under glass weaken the growth? (Though we have etiolation problems out of doors, too!)

These are some of the many questions regarding the cultivation of bulbs in pots that I still have to find the answers to and will address over the coming years.

Interestingly I have noted that the narcissus in 7cm pots like the pot of Narcissus romieuxii in the picture below tend to have shorter stems than the same clones growing in larger pots.

Is this because there is less compost and so less water and nutrition or is it because there are fewer bulbs and stems and so there is less competition for the light?

So many questions!

Narcissus romieuxii

Left and below is a typical pot and flower of Narcissus romieuxii that has evolved over the years from the JCA805 introduction. The style and anthers of typical Narcissus romieuxii tend to be a yellow colour and protrude beyond the flare of the corona.

Narcissus romieuxii, N.’Camoro’ and N. cantabricus foliosus

Narcissus ‘Camoro’ in the centre above is a hybrid between the other two species Narcissus romieuxii and Narcissus cantabricus foliosus. A few features to look at are that Narcissus romieuxii has no pedicel(flower stem) check out last week’s log for explanation. Narcissus cantabricus foliosus is the only form of that species that has a short pedicel, I have peeled back the spathes to reveal it and you can also see that this parent has passed this feature on to N. ‘Camoro’ which has a slightly shorter pedicel.

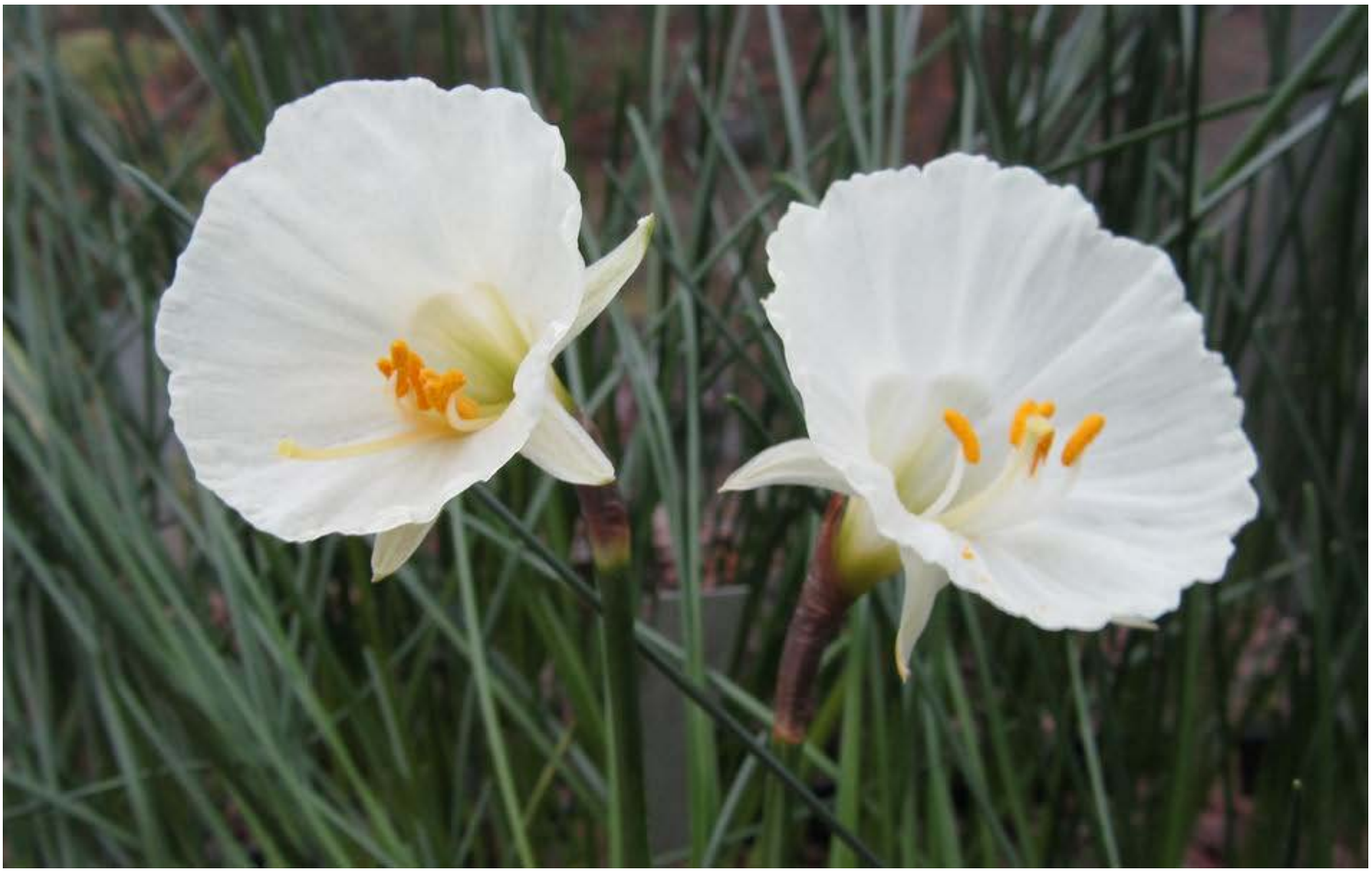
Narcissus romieuxii, N.romieuxii mesatlanticus and N. cantabricus foliosus

The picture above shows the same two parent species, this time with Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus in the centre. I have stated before that I suspect that the plant that I have as N.romieuxii mesatlanticus, which I got many years ago from the late Harold Esslemont, is also a hybrid between Narcissus romieuxii, N. cantabricus foliosus and if you look carefully you will see that it also has a short pedicel and would seem to be intermediate between the two species shown.

Narcissus cantabricus foliosus N. 'Camoro' and N.romieuxii mesatlanticus

The group pictures above and below show further views of these Narcissus.

Narcissus romieuxii, N.romieuxii mesatlanticus and N. 'Camoro'



Narcissus ‘Camoro’ and Narcissus ‘Camoro’ seedling

Here I show together Narcissus ‘Camoro’ on the left and a Narcissus ‘Camoro’ seedling on the right which I think is an even nicer flower. I will leave you this week with the picture below that shows a good strong yellow colour form of Narcissus romieuxii which is also a seedling growing in the sand plunge.