

Wisley's Alpine Log

By Paul Cumbleton

2011: Log 10...21 Sept



It's been a while since my last log and I'm sorry that their appearance has become so unpredictable. This has been purely down to pressure of work. But I will continue to write them as and when I can and pray patience from you for their irregularity.

As well as a busy summer, it has been a really odd year for weather that has affected various plants and in particular led to unusual flowering times. For example I have had autumn flowering *Pleiones* in flower in July! Many bulbs have started into growth much earlier than usual. We even have a single flower of *Narcissus bulbocodium* in bloom on the alpine meadow right now.

Despite this, we are glad to be entering autumn when we get a return of more colour into the alpine display house, with the autumn bulbs brightening both the place and our spirits. Here is a general view of the house as it was just this morning:



We always have a lot of *Cyclamen* in the house at this time of the year. We know we can rely on them to provide a really good splash of colour. With differing clones flowering at somewhat different times we can have a long period of interest from just a single species. Here are just a couple of examples of *Cyclamen hederifolium* that are in the house right now:



Our winter growing South African bulbs are now all back in growth. Among the first to flower each year are the Brunsvigias. One on display at the moment is *Brunsvigia gregaria*:



One of the reasons this collection is so useful is that some of the South African bulbs flower right at the start of their season (like the *Brunsvigia* pictured), some in the middle and some at the very end, so there is a long period of interest. One that flowered at the very end of its season, last May, is this very striking *Lapeirousia corymbosa*:



At home I have a few species of *Gethyllis* and this year they did their best so far. They flowered 3 to 4 weeks earlier than they did the year before, starting in May. This genus is unusual in that the flowers appear during the plant's dormant period, pushing up blooms after the leaves have long since died down. While beautiful, they sadly are fleeting; each flower appears very rapidly, not there one day but there the next, then lasting only a day or two. On a hot day they may last only a few hours – which means they may have come and gone while you were out at work so you miss them!! I flowered four species this year:



Above: *Gethyllis roggeveldensis* (white form)

Below: *Gethyllis roggeveldensis* (a form with a very faint flush of pink, hard to see in the photo)





Above: *Gethyllis transkarooica*
Below: *Gethyllis verticillata*





Above: *Gethyllis villosa* (white form)
Below: *Gethyllis villosa* (pink form)



The *G. roggeveldensis* and *G. villosa* flowered at exactly the same time so I decided to try crossing them to see if they would hybridise. The cross was made on the 15th May. On the 29th August this pod started to push up from the underground ovary:



It took nearly two weeks to completely appear, so by 17th September it looked like this:



Gethyllis pods have a wonderful fruity aroma, a characteristic much valued in their home country where the pods of some species are sought out and eaten, especially by children. Some species have also been investigated for medicinal compounds, particularly for stomach problems.

Back to work, and one job that kept us busy for a week in August was cutting our hedges. I am grateful to our trainee David Green for this picture:



Back to the Display House and another South African there at the moment is *Strumaria gemmata*. This has small flowers on airy heads, but a potful is rather attractive nevertheless:



A common and easy plant that always gets attention for its cone-like flower structures is *Leuzea conifera*:



Finally I must show you the altogether beautiful *Sphaeralcea caespitosa*, flowering in our sand bed. My favourite of all the many things we have grown from seed this year:

