

BULB LOG 32..... 8th August 2012**BULB LOG 500**

I have always numbered my bulb logs 1-52 by the week and the year but if I had been using consecutive numbering this would be Bulb Log 500 - something of a mile stone for a 'one year project'. When I started over ten years ago I wanted to make the SRGC's website more dynamic in the sense that something new was added at least every week to encourage people to browse back our way. Many of our members were sceptical of the internet thinking it no more than a fad that would go away in a few years. Enthusiastic as I was back then even I did not realise just how important a communication tool the digital media would become or how fast it would grow. The Journals and Bulletins our organisations publish reach some thousands of members two or four times a year while the Bulb Log is read by tens of thousands every week: a humbling experience for me. The SRGC forum is added to twenty four hours of the day, instantly reaching out to a worldwide audience of thousands. Registered members of the forum now constitute the SRGC's largest 'Group' and it meets all day every day not just once a month. It is now the case that it is the traditional printed publications that are coming under pressure due to ever rising costs of printing, paper and postage while more and more forms of digital media such as the World Wide Web, Face Book and Twitter gather in strength.

The Bulb Log has become a weekly routine as I first have to take pictures, think of what I might say, resize the pictures write the text, put them together, get Maggi to spell check to make sure I am saying what I mean (as I am dyslexic normal spell checkers are no good to me) convert it to a PDF and upload it to the site. Since I started in January 2003 I have filed all my pictures by the week after the bulb log and this has proved a very good system and it is relatively easy to locate pictures of specific plants. I just need to remember approximately what week they would be in flower and there I find them. I would say the discipline of this is probably good for me as I need deadlines to work to and of course it is all the encouragement I get from you, dear readers, that keeps me going.

***Rhodohypoxis baurei***

The *Rhodohypoxis* troughs are flourishing in the cool wet conditions we call summer. They come from a region of the Drakensburg Mountains that experiences summer rain - almost certainly this is a factor as to why the centre of the flower has evolved to close over to protect and hide the reproductive parts.

I was recently corresponding with someone about the planting depth of bulbs in pots - a subject that has long fascinated me. In my early writings I have suggested that it is best to plant bulbs quite deeply and as a general rule that does still just about hold up but like all rules there are exceptions. Over the years I have conducted many trials to try and discover the optimum depth to plant bulbs and what I have learnt is that there are too many factors involved to give a simple answer. My main conclusion is that it is not an optimum depth that the bulbs are seeking but an optimum condition – cool moist, warm dry, etc. The shape of the bulb can indicate what the bulb's preference might be, so long narrow bulbs such as these



Erythronium, seen at right, are seeking the cooler moist conditions generally found deeper down.



Fritillaria pudica (left) is one of the disc shaped bulbs which produce masses of rice grains and these seem to prefer to be nearer the surface. When you think of it this flat disc shape is not best suited for travelling down into the soil. Now I have established that it is a condition found at a depth that is important it is easy to see that there are many other factors that will affect those conditions. Clay or plastic pots obviously have an effect on how long the potting mix will remain moist so you should consider planting bulbs deeper in the clay pot than you would the same bulb in a plastic pot. The potting mix itself is another factor as is whether the pots are plunged or not, the material they are plunged into and to what

depth they are plunged are all critical factors. I have discovered that if left undisturbed for a number of years, *Fritillaria camschatensis* bulbs (right) work themselves up to just below the surface where they flower freely. When I have planted them deeply they do not tend to flower well. There is an obvious lesson here as like the *Fritillaria pudica* bulbs they tend to have a broad flat base with lots of scales/rice grains attached so I now tend to plant any similar type of bulbs relatively shallow. Knowing the natural habitat of bulbs also helps ascertain the planting depths. *Narcissus rupicola* for instance is often found in pockets on rocks so prefers to be planted in the levels of a pot that dry out quicker while *Narcissus jonquilla* comes from a wetter habitat and so does best when planted deeper in the moisture retentive layers. So you see that there are plenty of guide lines and tips but no hard and fast rule about what depth you plant your bulbs at.





Snail on pot

I discovered this snail apparently resting on top of the gravel dressing of a recently planted pot of Crocus. I thought this was a strange place for it to spend the day as they usually prefer to attach themselves to a smooth surface such as the glass or the sides of the pot where they can seal themselves into their shells and preserve moisture.



I thought this unusual behaviour needed further investigation and discovered that the snail was not resting at all but was probing down the side to deposit its eggs in a cool moist layer of the compost – just like some bulbs. Needless to say I made sure that I got all the eggs out of the compost disposing of them before I replanted the bulbs. Interestingly snail's eggs are very bouncy!!



Crocus pelistericus leaves

We are used to most Mediterranean-cycle bulbs taking a summer rest in our gardens but, given cool moist conditions such as we now experience, many exhibit perpetual growth with new roots forming before the old leaves die back. The two I show here, *Crocus pelistericus* (above) and *Narcissus bulbocodium* (below), are good examples and typically keep green leaves well into the autumn. I know without lifting them that next season's roots will be well formed already.



Narcissus bulbocodium leaves



Tecophilaea leaves

To have leaves still in full growth at this stage is not to be expected in *Tecophilaea cyanocrocus* but these are some of the ones that were donated from the southern hemisphere in appreciation of the SRGC forum. I have always said the bulbs have a time clock so they know when they should be growing but I have never understood how it worked. It is as if the bulbs and their seeds know the exactly the months of the year and what stage of growth or resting they



should be in at any time. However the fact that they can switch from the Northern to the Southern hemisphere and vice versa tells us again that the bulbs are responding to conditions of temperature and moisture to indicate when they grow not a date.

These *Tecophilaea* are obviously growing out of season as I get them adjusted to a life in the Northern hemisphere. Indications are that there should be good sized new corms replacing the planted ones plus the slender secondary leaf appearing a few cms away from the main growth tells me that offset corms are also forming. We sold the majority of this generous donation earlier in the year but for those of you who did not want to take the risk of growing them out of season there will be another opportunity to buy these dormant corms this autumn.



Corydalis pseudobarbispela leaves

The beautiful glaucous blue/green foliage of *Corydalis pseudobarbispela* as the plant, encouraged by the cool moist summer, puts on a second fresh growth of leaves.



Dactylorhiza o'kelleyi

We were delighted last autumn to receive a tuber of the beautiful white *Dactylorhiza o'kelleyi* from a friend who is one of the few people we know who grows this scarce plant.

I hope that now we have it we can work on building it up, increasing it in our garden so we can then also pass it on.

As gardeners I believe we all have a responsibility to increase and pass around our plants, especially the rarer ones, as part of our contribution to preserving and conserving our native and garden floras.



View from swing seat

Since we bought the swing seat we seem to spend an awful lot of time gently rocking back and forth while drinking tea and this is the general view that we have.

It is incredible just how the view changes as each tiny change of natural light effects the scene just like stage lighting can apparently change a stage set without physically moving anything but by simply highlighting different parts. Bright light, flat light, warm sunshine, cool blue cloudy light all pick out different flowers while also changing how we view the perspective before us.

This got me thinking that using my trusty 14x optical zoom lens I could take all the pictures for a bulb log or even a talk without getting out of the swing seat. I decided that might be a bit much so I have limited myself to the following series of pictures that complete this 500th Bulb Log.

I am using the camera, a Cannon Power Shot SX210IS, that I have used to take at least 95% of all my pictures since I got it – only on a very few occasions when I wanted a very close detailed macro shot have I reverted to my digital SLR.

I relied on that 14 times zoom to compose the images, framing into the distance and changed the exposure settings, utilising spot metering and the +, - exposure values until I got the image that I wanted. One of the many valuable features of this camera is that the view seen on the screen is a live one and changes as you play with the settings so you can instantly see the effects these changes have on the image as they appear on the viewing screen before you ever push the button.







