



BULB LOG 05.....1st February 2012



I have just arrived back after four days down in England speaking to plant groups in the Lincoln area, who looked after me extremely well, thank you.

As a result of being away I have not had much time to prepare this week's bulb log so join me as I have my walk around the garden to see what has emerged since last week. The first flowers I see are the Galanthus (above) growing in a narrow border on the front dyke, below the hedge. The hedge used to extend out over the edge of the wall but a number of years ago we cut it right back to the upright stems to gain this narrow raised planting area which fits in with our policy of using every inch of the garden to full advantage.



Narcissus bulbocodium

Narcissus bulbocodium is one of the many bulbs we have planted there along with Arum and Cyclamen which can both be seen in this picture. We have planted up a number of other plants such as Lewisia both on the top of the dyke and in the vertical gaps between the granite blocks.



Galanthus

While one group of Galanthus appear at the base of an Acer tree another group is enhanced as it emerges through the decorative foliage of *Corydalis flexuosa*



Galanthus and *Corydalis flexuosa* leaves



Galanthus 'Snoopy'

Snoopy is one of the Scottish castle drops selected and named by Ian Christie and I only noticed the label when I processed the picture - I hate seeing labels in our garden so have just been out to bury it out of sight. While in Lincs. I visited a number of lovely gardens with impressive collections of snowdrop cultivars, many of which do not grow very well in the far north so it is good to have some Scottish raised forms of proven hardiness, having seeded in Scottish gardens over hundreds of years.



The Eranthis I showed last week continue to emerge through the leaf litter.



Bulb bed

This view shows the early growth in the bulb bed which I will return to as we move through the year to further illustrate my ever evolving high rise and time share system of planting.



It is time I moved this self sown Rhododendron from the edge of the gravel path to a more suitable spot where it can mature and we can see its flowers. I also have to lift the leaves from the gravel areas and paths before too long.



The experimental sand bed I built a few years ago has proved enormously successful and I will also be returning to it through the year to feature the many bulbs that have grown so well – many of which were sown as seed.



I split a clump of **Crocus abantensis** growing in raised bed that had become quite congested. Now they are coming into flower, nicely spaced and spread throughout the bed.



Under glass *Crocus biflorus* subsp. *alexandrii* seedlings emerge



Narcissus are still the dominant flower in the bulb houses.



More Narcissus in the prop house

Masses of 7cm pots of bulbs now occupy what was once the mist propagation unit. Regular readers will remember that it is now located below this plunge where it is still effective but not quite so good as it was when it was in this prime spot in full light.



Narcissus romieuxii and Narcissus 'Don Stead'

Who could not love the many forms and seedlings of Narcissus? Some deserve a cultivar name while others should just be part of the crowd.



Narcissus bulb exposed

Being a bulb in my hands can be a hard life as I continually grow some to observe and experiment on. As I have said so often the most interesting bit is underground and I want to know what it is doing and when. Because I want to see the bulb and roots at different stages I have been growing this bulb along with a few others in pure sand because it is easier to remove by letting the sand get nearly dry.



Narcissus bulb in growth

The first thing I observed is that the bulb tunic was quite loose – the bulb scales had obviously given up some of their store and shrunk back slightly. With the flower and leaves fully formed the bulb has completed a major part of its growth cycle and now as the flower fades it will support the development of seeds, if the plant has been fertilised, form a flower bud for next year and add to its store by enlarging the scales. Narcissus are one of the plants that form ‘true bulbs’ that is bulbs that survive and expand year on year and will in good times split into two or form offsets – they could be described as perennial bulbs. Other plants classed as ‘bulbs’ such as Fritillaria have more basic scales and replace themselves completely every year – these are annual bulbs.



Further dissecting reveals that the flower stem and leaves come from the very centre of the bulb and are surrounded by many scales or modified leaf bases. These modified leaf bases or scales serve the purpose of storing up starches to both support the plant in a long dry summer dormancy and give it a good push start when it comes into growth.

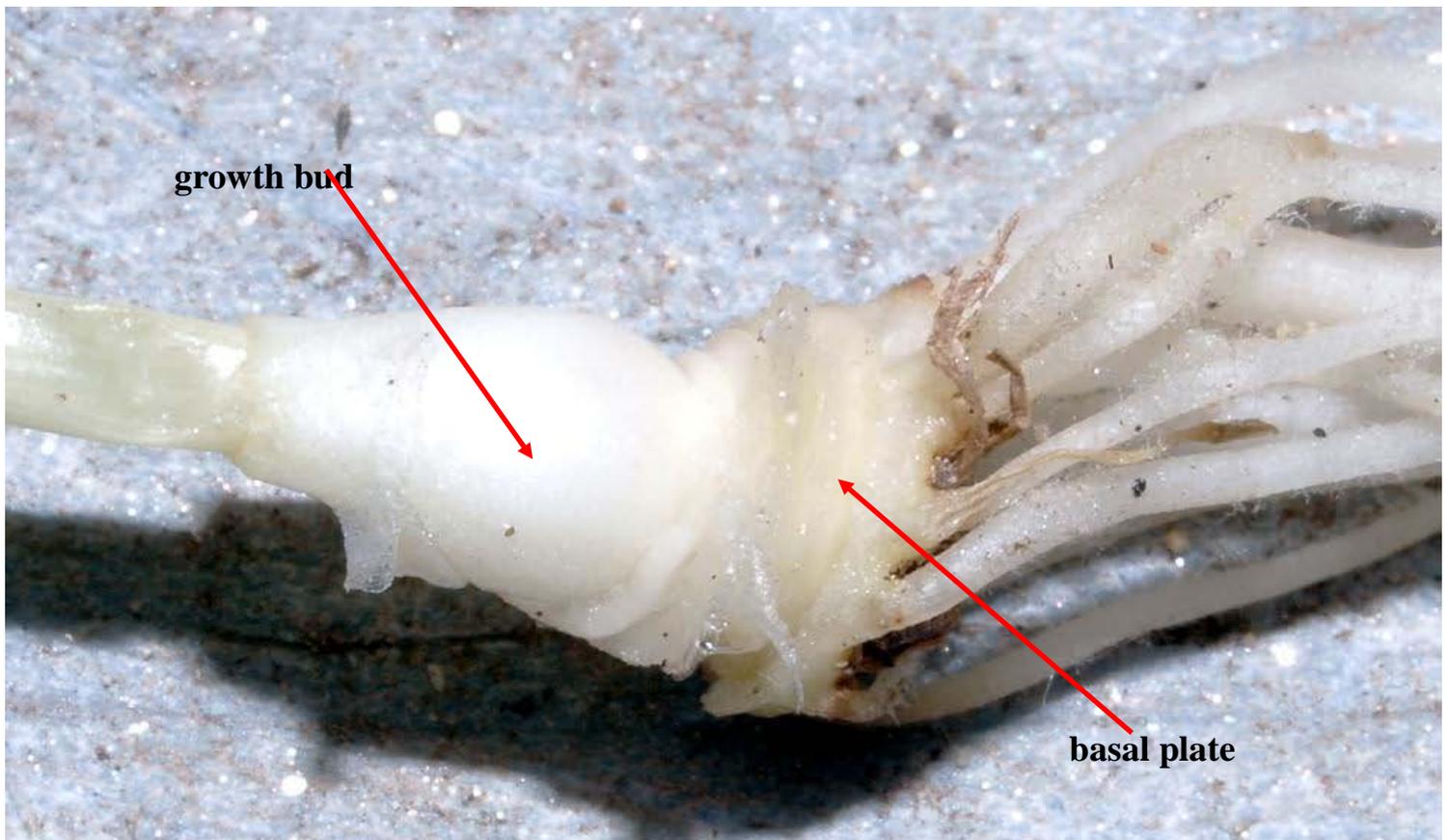


What I am not yet clear about is: do the bases of the true leaves continue to grow after the above ground green parts have withered or are the scales completely separate structures? If the scales are formed from the bases of the true leaves they must grow (enlarge) for a number of years to accommodate the new emerging ones in the centre of the bulb. Eventually they will reach the outside of the bulb, go brown and become one of the many layers of tunic you find on undisturbed bulbs. If this is the case then the basal plate must also continue to grow from the centre outwards.

I know that much of this study has been done before but it has always been my nature to find out things for myself.



I have left the flower stem and newest scale intact sitting as it does on the basal plate – a compressed stem that has the growth point sitting on the top and the roots coming out of the base just like any stem does. Alongside are the scales that I removed and the dried outer layers that form the brown tunic that helps protect the bulb from desiccation in dry conditions.



This detail shows the disc shaped basal plate complete with flower stem and roots. I have replanted it and will be interested to see if it can survive without the majority of its scales and leaves.



I do not butcher all my bulbs just a few in the course of trying to understand exactly their growth cycle and structure.

These wee beauties are some of the Narcissus that have self sown into pots of Fritillaria bulbs and have not been re-potted for at least three years.