



BULB LOG 02..... 8th January 2014



A frosty morning draws a beautiful pattern on the bonnet of our wee blue car – such a beautiful transient image.

The patterns are very like delicate drawings of some exotic foliage or perhaps feathered wings of some mythical creature. Harking back to a recent Bulb Log when I discussed my art and seeing links and patterns continually repeated is the reason that I chose to include the badge of the company symbol in this picture.

Keen observation is not only a benefit to an artist but also a gardener - we can learn so much if we just look carefully at our plants.



These Crocus corms have worked their way to the surface of one of the sand beds, partially by erosion but also because each year the new corm forms on top of the previous one. There are two substantial growths on the left hand corm each will result in a new independent corm by the end of the growing season – look carefully and you can also see a tiny green shoot rising through the ruptured tunic of the right hand corm, this is an offset bud that has formed at the base of the corm and will take a few years to achieve flowering size. I also note the evidence of slug activity in the chewed shoots just behind the two corms and to the bottom right.



Even though it is so early in our calendar year we are well into the growth cycle of many of the bulbous plants and this also goes for their seeds. In this picture you can see the first growth emerging as a tiny Crocus seed sends out a root to anchor it into the sand. Sown on the surface this corm will have to spend more than the first year of its life exposed because the young corm forms beside where the seed is located – it is not until the second year of growth that it will form contractile roots to work its way down into the ground. Hopefully it will survive and grow but this is precisely why I sow Crocus seeds deep so that the new corms are in a more protected and stable environment from the start.



There are also Fritillaria seeds on the sand and they too are germinating – here the tiny root emerges, always from the pointed end of the seed, probing down into the sand and in this Genus the new bulb will form towards the end of the root so that the young bulb is from the start down in that more stable and protected strata. Understanding the way the seeds germinate gives us the clues we need to sow them to their best advantage but how do we know which to sow deep and which to surface sow? My observations and trials have led me to the conclusion that the best guide is in the method of distribution the seed type have evolved – so wind distributed seed like Fritillaria, Allium etc should be surface sown, with just a bit of gravel over them, while insect distributed seeds such as Crocus, Narcissus, etc. will grow best if sown deeply.



It is not just in the sand beds that I am seeing seeds germinating, these **Eranthis seedlings** are everywhere despite, or perhaps because, of the repeated frost and thaw weather pattern we are in.



Iris reticulata shoots



Narcissus 'Cedric Morris'

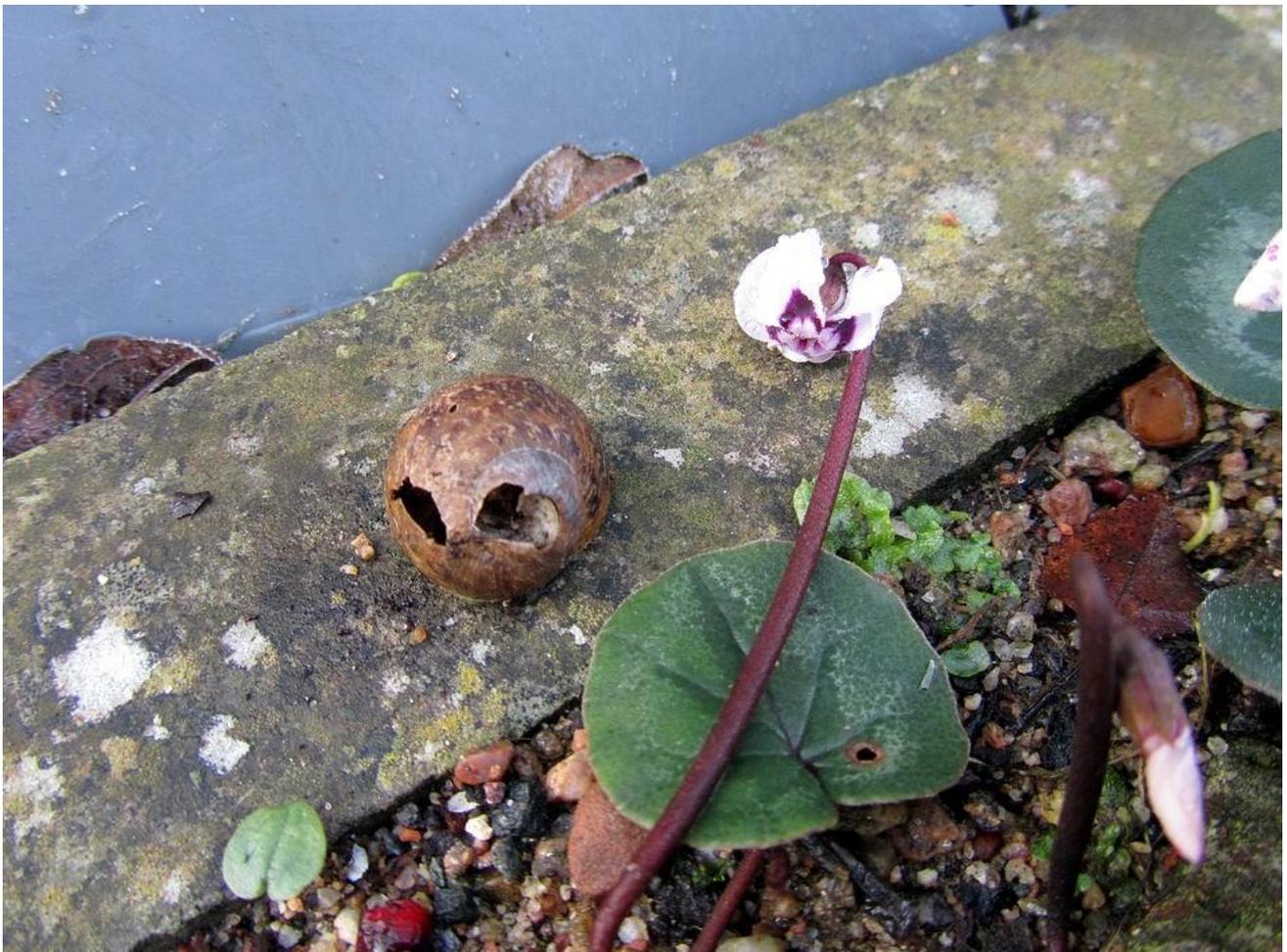
I continually try and find a spot in our open garden where we can grow Narcissus 'Cedric Morris' but have not yet achieved long term success.

In some spots it has done well for a year or two then it dwindles, in others it hardly survives a year after planting but this area below the south facing kitchen wall looks hopeful. We do grow it well in pots protected in the bulb house so have a regular supply of bulbs to experiment with.

I get such pleasure carefully observing the garden at this time of year - so many things are slowly growing in expectation of the spring.

Below, Cyclamen coum is now self-seeding around in a sand bed - the flower in the picture is frozen to the ground. The original plants were introduced as seed buried quite deep as I prepared this bed in I think 2008 and now I have a number of generations of seedlings. The snail shell is evidence that I am not alone in predated on the snails and slugs that graze on our plants.

Cyclamen coum ↓





Cyclamen coum

It is only by persistently trying that we get some plants established in our garden and climate. For years I have looked on in envy at gardens further south that have Cyclamen growing like weeds as they, may in turn, envy that we have Meconopsis and Erythronium self-seeding everywhere. The undisputable fact is that a garden's location, soils and climates will govern which plants will do well and others struggle. One way we can succeed is by growing the plants from seed – this way the seedlings that survive select us as they can tolerate our conditions. Raising from your own garden seed will further reward you as each subsequent generation will become more adapted to and tolerant of your conditions. I hope that eventually I will raise a selection of Cyclamen coum whose tolerance has been pushed in the direction of our garden and climate.



Cyclamen mirabile and Fritillaria davidii

Under glass we have some control of some of the parameters that effect plants - primarily seasonal moisture levels which allows us to greatly extend the range of plants we grow. I have tried to grow Fritillaria davidii a few times before when I was given a small bulb but they did not survive the first year. I was so delighted to get some seeds, my preferred way to receive plants, from a kind friend in 2008 and here they are still growing but not yet of flowering size.

Oxalis obtusa

Even glass protection cannot modify the conditions sufficiently for some plants to tolerate and *Oxalis obtusa* is among those. The soft downy nature of the foliage is a good indication that this plant will not take kindly to frosts followed by long cold damp conditions. It is as a result of exactly those conditions that the centre of this pot has been devastated by a grey mould infection. I should really provide it with near frost free conditions and drier air circulating.



Sternbergia sicula

Another kind gift I received last year was a bulb or two of *Sternbergia sicula*. I was even more delighted that the package also contained some seeds from the same plant. I sowed the seed deeply in the same pot as I planted the bulbs in last July – it was kept dry through the summer then watered in September. The *Sternbergia* flowered and in turn has two fat seedpods on - plus you will also see from the crop of slim leaves that the sown seed is now germinating.



Eranthis pinnatifida

Refer back to last week's bulb log and you can compare how quickly the pot of *Eranthis pinnatifida* I moved into the bulb house has grown. I am always fascinated by the way these flowers develop unprotected by any scales, bracts or other form of bud to protect them – the flowers will continue to expand for some weeks before they reach their ultimate size. The pot of seedlings I showed last week is also making good progress under glass.



I cannot work out why a bulb that needs warmth and / or good light for the flowers to open should find the need to grow in the conditions of cold and low light we have just now - even under glass the temperature has not risen above around 8C. The disappointing thing is that these flowers are unlikely to open unless I move them into our house and as I do not want to disturb or damage the roots that may have probed beyond the pot into the sand I will not do that.



Bulb house

In the bulb house the Narcissus continue to open their flowers – with so many closely related species and hybrids in cultivation makes it very difficult to identify many of them clearly. A new updated book on Narcissus species with good keys would be so welcome.



Narcissus romieuxii seedling



Narcissus romieuxii JCA805



Narcissus romieuxii JCA805



Narcissus romieuxii seedling



Narcissus romieuxii seedling



Narcissus bulbocodium



Narcissus seedling



**Narcissus
romieuxii
seedling**

along with

**Narcissus
'Cedric Morris'**



Narcissus hybrid 'JS' select

Narcissus are likely to continue to dominate the next few bulb logs as there are so many of them coming out each slightly different. While many are very similar and difficult to separate some just stand out from the rest such as this wee challenging beauty with its deeply divided corona and very exerted style and anthers.....