



BULB LOG 43.....22nd October 2014





The opening picture is of a group of white *Crocus speciosus* hybrids growing in one of the sand beds along with *Cyclamen coum* leaves of varying ages, from seedlings to established plants. Over many years I had struggled to get *Cyclamen coum* to establish in our garden some plants have survived rather than thrived, persisting for many years but some seeds I scattered into this sand bed in 2008 have gone on to flower and now their offspring are self-seeding in a very satisfying way. This just underlines my belief that a small change can make all the difference to whether a plant will grow for you or not. Sometimes just moving the plant 30cms, into shade or out of shade for instance, can make a difference; in this case it is the environment created by the sand that has made all the difference. Now the plants are self-seeding each new generation will become more adapted to the conditions in our garden and particularly this sand bed.



Crocus medius

A group of *Crocus medius* growing in a mesh basket in another sand plunge is getting battered by gale force winds and rain as I write. The evidence of the wind is the bunch of *Cotoneaster* berries ripped from the tree. *Crocus* flowers are not pushed above ground by a stem but by an extended floral tube – the *crocus* corm is a compressed stem and it is only when the seed ripens that some species will grow a flower stem to push the seed

capsule above ground. Little wonder then that *Crocus* flowers are so fragile and susceptible to being knocked flat by winds that can rip bunches of berries from the trees.

This fragility is one of the reasons that so many of us will also grow some bulbs that are perfectly cold hardy in our gardens under glass protection where we can enjoy their beauty in shelter and relative comfort. The warmer conditions under glass also give the flowers a better chance of fulfilling their prime purpose of being fertilised with the pollen growing down the long floral tube to fertilise the seed capsule on the top of the corm.



Crocus medius



Crocus banaticus is unique among the genus and easily identified because the inner three floral segments are so much shorter than the outer three. We have lots of this species growing and self-seeding around the garden where it enjoys our cooler moist growing conditions but they are very susceptible to winds and slugs.



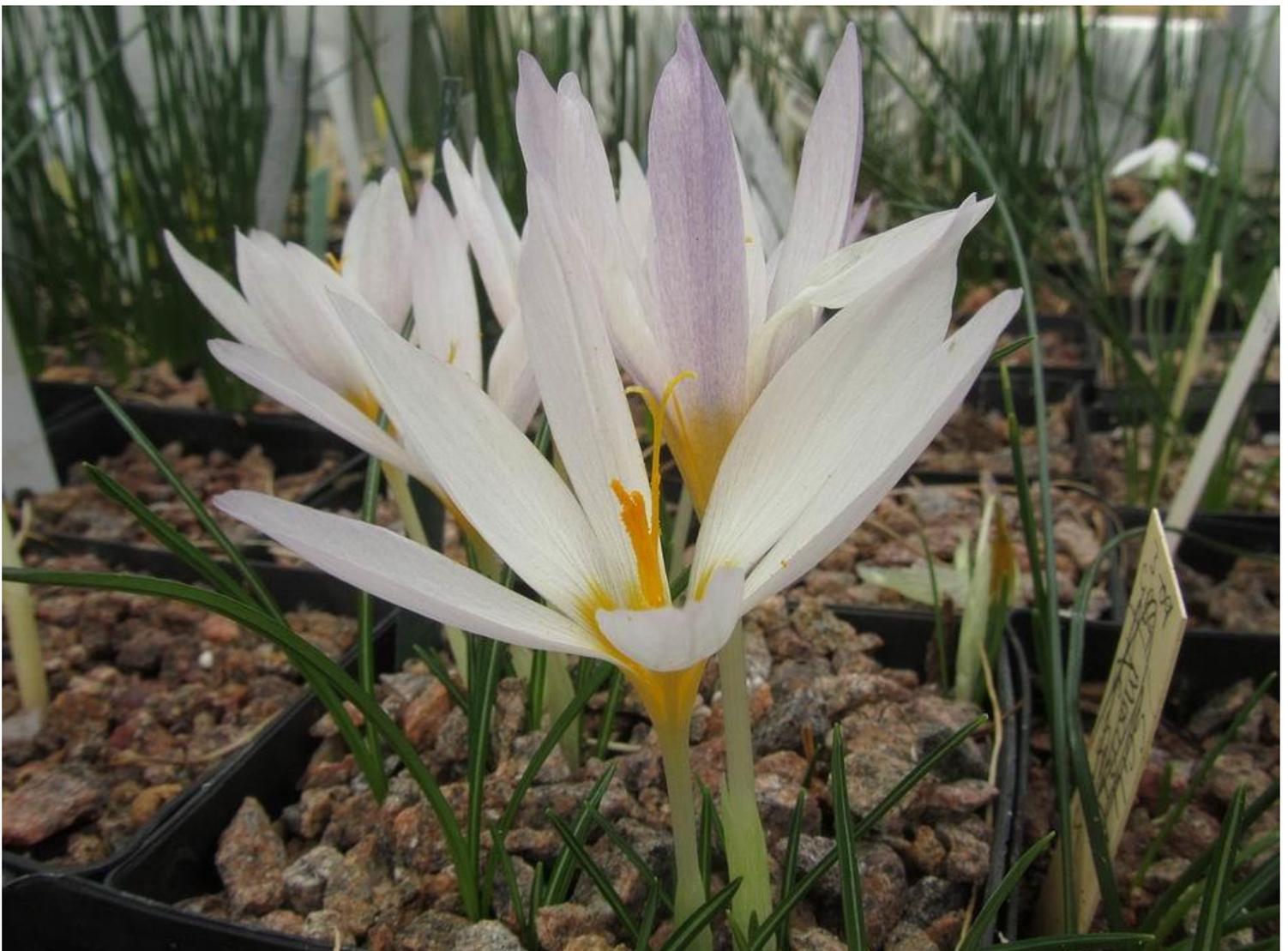
Crocus laevigatus and Crocus kotschyanus



Crocus laevigatus is possibly my favourite crocus because seed raised plants can send up flowers over such a long season. The first flower opened two weeks ago and we can still be seeing flowers well into February or beyond.

Crocus caspius

It is hard to single out which crocus you like best in such a varied and beautiful genus and perhaps my favourite at any time is the one in front of me. I have grown *Crocus caspius* for many years since I first received a gift of a single corm. I get seed most years and always sow some to keep new healthy generations coming along.



Having raised hundreds of *Crocus caspius* I have seen very little variation in colour, the flowers have a violet flush when they first emerge this fades away after a day or two leaving almost white flowers.



Crocus kotschyanus



**Crocus goulimyii
leucanthus**

My preferred method of increasing our stocks of plants, including bulbs is from seed. Seedlings have all the vigour and health that we associate with youth and will for the most part grow much better than bulbs that have been clonally increased. If you get an offset from a bulb clone that has been in cultivation for 100 years, and there are some, you are not getting a young bulb but a clone of a 100 year old bulb that comes with any disease that the parent has picked up in its long life. It is very easy to see why bulbs that increase rapidly by division are so widespread but we should never rely solely on this method. History shows the disaster that monoculture can bring where whole fields of a

single clone can be wiped out by disease very rapidly. Seedlings will also show variation in colour and shape, as you can see in the pot of seedlings above, which I personally enjoy more than a pot or group of a single clone.



Crocus goulimyii leucanthus



***Crocus goulimyii* MELJ9562**

Some clones are worth bulking up and growing enmasse but that should always be done along with sowing seeds.



Crocus mathewii

Above is a clonal pot of *Crocus mathewii* built up from the collection HKEP9291 which to my mind is the most attractive colour form of this plant and on the left are two seedlings I have raised from that form.

Never having seen them in their habitat I do not know what variation occurs in the wild population but some variations occur in seed from cultivated plants. I often hear discussions over what colour form should be applied to a particular collection number but we should remember if that original collection was of seed then many clones would have been raised. Often one clone will dominate if it increases vegetatively and thrives best in cultivation - that then becomes the plant that growers associate with and apply the collection number to. This should not be the case we should apply a cultivar name if we want to distinguish a particular colour variation from a seed collection. Seed collected in cultivation from original plants are best described as Ex-HKEP9291.





A perfect example of applying a clonal name to an outstanding colour form is **Crocus mathewii 'Dream Dancer'**.



The best pollinator working on **Crocus niveus**.



Galanthus reginae olgae



Colchicum cilicicum



Autumn leaves, including *Rhododendron bureavii* bring wonderful colour to the garden even when they have fallen to the ground

I sometimes find myself answering general garden questions on BBC Scotland radio and one that often arises is why are the leaves on my *Rhododendron* turning yellow and falling off. Firstly I must ask if this is a deciduous *Rhododendron*, many formally included in *Azalea*, that do lose their leaves every year. Then I have to point out that just because *Rhododendrons* are 'evergreens' does not mean that their



leaves last for ever. Most *Rhododendrons* lose leaves in their second year - leaves formed in the current season will persist until next autumn making the shrubs appear evergreen. Some species can hold onto leaves for two or more seasons, it is fun counting how many seasons of leaves they hold onto.....