



BULB LOG 10.....9th March 2016



The cover picture sums up a Spring in our part of the country, the flowers of *Eranthis hyemalis* are shut tight to protect the reproductive parts, the young red shoots of a herbaceous *Paeonia* are pushing through the snow-covered ground with the woody stems of a tree *Paeonia* in the background. We have seen quite a lot of sunshine over the last week but we have also had a lot of snow showers. Fortunately each covering of snow has mostly melted away in the sunshine before the next one arrives so there has not been a build-up in the depth of snow.



I am fascinated by the mechanism that allows these early flowering bulbs to open and close their flowers in response to changing conditions and have often wondered what triggers this response. Is it light or temperature or a combination of both? To help me understand more I have bought myself a new 'toy' - a digital infrared thermometer. The age we live in has seen devices that were at one time very expensive become relatively affordable, I bought this one on the internet and it cost me less than £10, delivered. The beauty of this device is I can get the temperature of different parts of the plant as well as of the ground around and below the leaves. If

you look at the readout in the previous picture you can see that the ground temperature is minus 3.1C.



Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'

My earliest findings indicate that *Eranthis hyemalis* flowers start to open at 5.7C but I will need to take a lot more readings for accuracy. Then there is the other question - is light also an essential parameter of this reflex mechanism? It is interesting to note that the reflexing starts to break down as the flowers age, with the three outside segments failing to respond first, as shown on the right. My non-gardening friends wonder why I am so interested in the garden.



Gardening to them is just weeding and cutting the grass – they have no idea how fascinating plants are – the more you look the more you will find I could never be bored when surrounded by plants.



Colchicum szovitsii



Colchicum szovitsii is such a beautiful spring flowering bulb with its white, sometimes pink tinged, flowers just opening.

On the left above I show a group flowering in a pot – the other flowers are growing in the Bulb House sand plunge.

I have never tried this species in the open garden mostly because I have never had enough bulbs to risk them outside.



At exactly the time flowers are opening, some seeds sown in February 2014 are also germinating. Because these seeds were sown late, outside of the time window, they have taken two years to germinate.

I have found Colchicum seeds are very irregular in germinating - sometimes they come up as expected but more often they stubbornly remain dormant for many years and I have no idea exactly why.



Galanthus 'Annielle'

Galanthus 'Annielle' is a beautiful pristine white poculiform snowdrop found by Cyril Lafong and named for his wife.



Narcissus cantabricus

Rafa Díez Domínguez may recognise this superb crystalline white *Narcissus cantabricus*, raised from seed, although Rafa is more used to seeing them in larger quantities growing wild in Spain. See many of his wonderful pictures in the [Narcissus pages on the Forum](#). Last year this pot of bulbs only produced an immature flower - now it is flowering for the second time with four flowers. The flowers are not fully formed yet they will continue to expand over the next few weeks. I will be pollinating it daily with my paint brush when the pollen is ripe to ensure that I have the best chance of getting seed to set.



Narcissus cantabricus petunioides



Narcissus species ex Morocco ex JCA



Narcissus cantabricus flowers, like the others in the Bulbocodium group, continue to grow after they open and will only reach their full size after a few weeks. The Narcissus cantabricus petunioides flower I show above does not look very petunia-like yet but it will grow to reveal the full flat face of the corona.

I still do not know the name of Jim Archibald's Narcissus species ex Morocco but its tiny flowers have similarities to Narcissus cantabricus.

Narcissus minor

One of the smallest of the trumpet daffodils is Narcissus minor – here even in our low northern light a seed raised plant flowers at less than 10cms tall.

**Narcissus romieuxii
ex JCA 805**

This is a pot of *Narcissus romieuxii* that I raised from seed from our bulb house. I had carefully pollinated the flowers between our original bulbs from JCA 805.

I have raised many hybrids from this introduction some were deliberate crosses others were the result of uncontrolled open pollination - this one does appear to be true with no hybrid signs in the flower shown below.



Narcissus romieuxii seedling ex JCA805



A number of years ago I was given a bulb under the name *Narcissus hedreanthus* –it has grown well for us but it does not look like *Narcissus hedreanthus* to me - perhaps it is a hybrid.



Corydalis nudicaulis flowers will also continue to grow before they achieve their full size revealing their true beauty. The *Corydalis* flowering in the background is a hybrid - I find *Corydalis* are very promiscuous when grown close together in our small glasshouse and this is a self-sown seedling.



This view across the bulb house shows many of the earliest Narcissus flowers are now fading reminding me to get some Potassium (Kalium) powder so I can give them a good feed to help build flower buds for next season.



Cyclamen coum

These early flowering bulbs have evolved to cope with such changeable conditions and sometimes they can look even more attractive when surrounded by the snow.



The flowers of **Crocus herbertii** are egg yolk yellow, or at least they are the colour that egg yolks used to be!

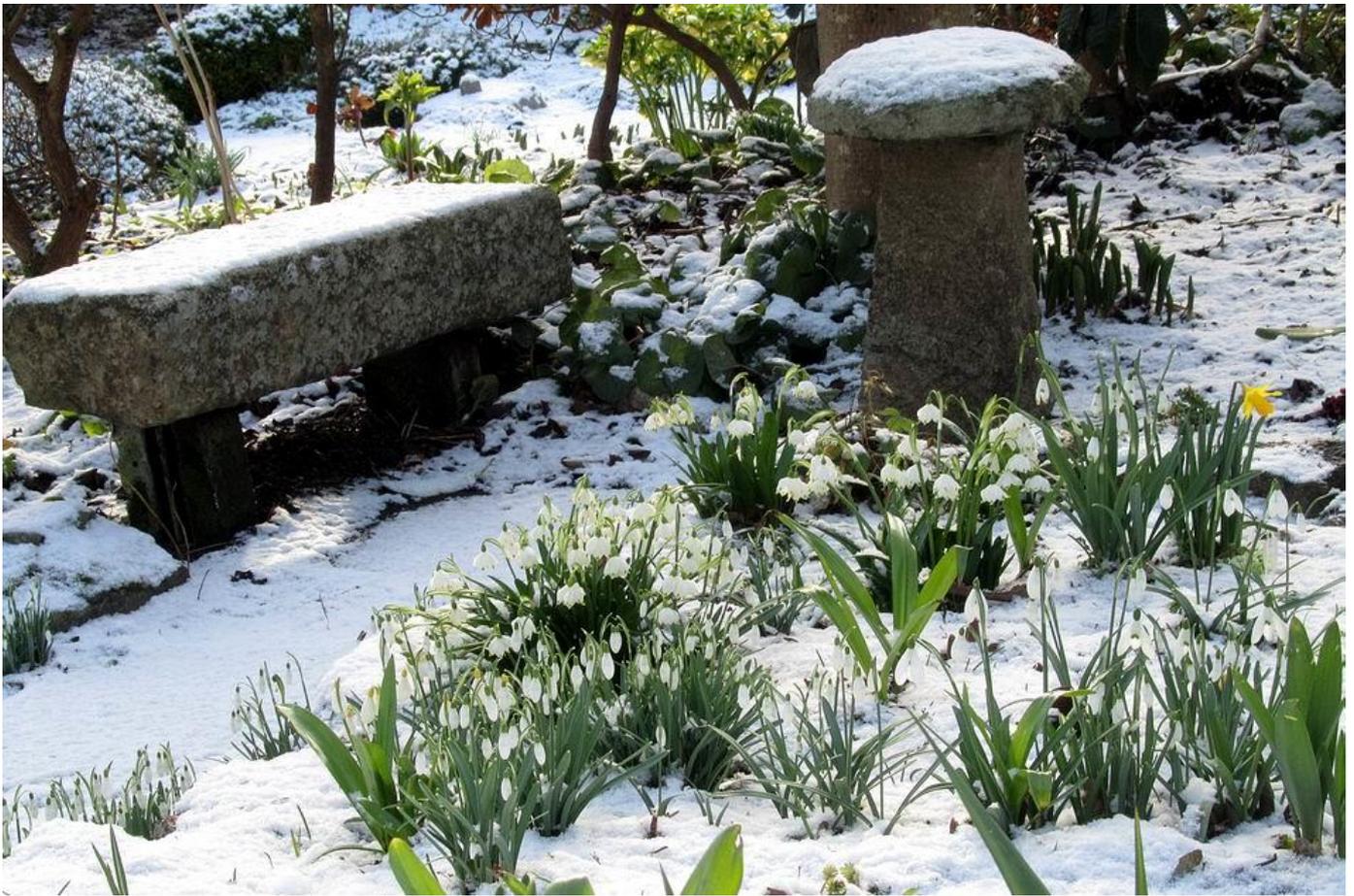


Crocus heuffelianus with the characteristic dark markings towards the top of the flower.



Erythronium hendersonii

The emerging Erythroniums are also undamaged by the changing conditions – I just hope we get some nice sunny weather to allow them to open their flowers and set some seed.



Snowdrops and snowflakes living up to their name in this wintry scene – if the sun shines the thin covering of snow will soon melt away.





Our garden is constantly changing - one minute the flowers are open in the sunshine the next they are surrounded by a blanket of snow that is the joy we get from 'Bulbs in the Garden' which just happens to be the title of a talk I am giving to the Mid-Anglia Group of the AGS this Sunday, March 13th 2016 at 2.30pm, in Birdbrook Community House, Birdbrook, Essex CO9 4BN – please come and say hello if you are there.....