



BULB LOG 37.....14th September 2016





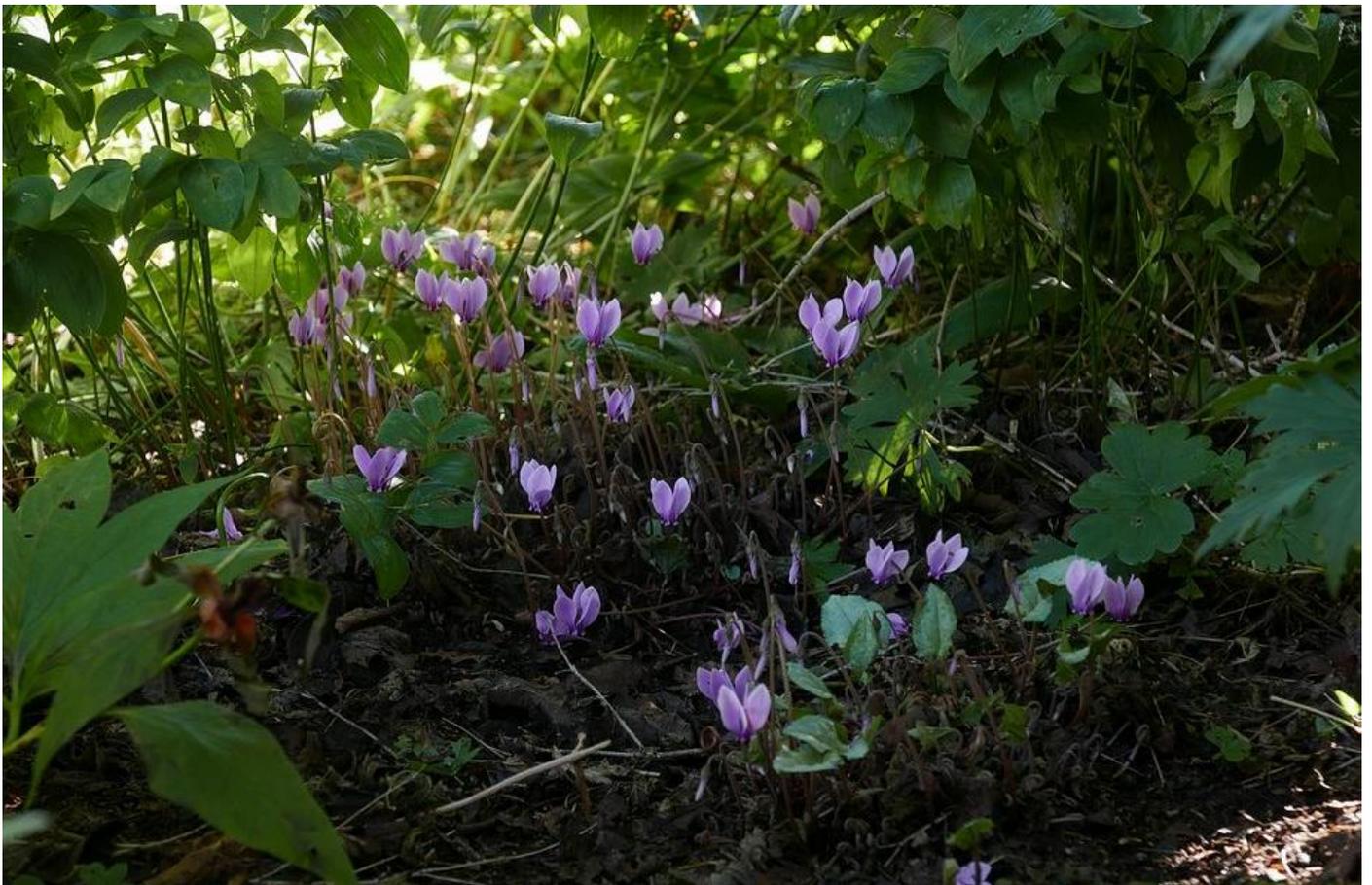
Observing a large number of **wasps** pollinating the **Allium wallichii** flowers gave me the opportunity to further test my new camera and, more importantly for me, to learn its functions so I can achieve the best possible images.



I took almost as many pictures as there were wasps - changing the settings and modes - I got the best results, which I share with you here, by using the flash to freeze the movement of the wasps which also allowed a mid-range aperture giving reasonably good depth of field.



While the wasps seem to be attracted to the Allium it is mostly hoverflies that I see around the Colchicum flowers however I have not seen so many of them around so far this year.



This grouping of **Cyclamen hederifolium** is growing in deep shade under a mixed canopy of trees, shrubs and the foliage of various herbaceous plants.



I have lost the label of this small *Colchicum* species flowering in a pot in the bulb house.



Out in the raised beds *Crocus speciosus xantholaimos* and other species are coming into bloom.



Crocus speciosus 'Orla' seedling



Crocus kotschyanus seedling



This pot of **Crocus vallicola**, which is perhaps my favourite species, spends most of the year in an open frame however I brought it into the shelter of the bulb house to both enjoy its flowers and encourage successful fertilisation.



Among the first bulbs to respond to the watering are the **Sternbergia** – their roots push down into the ground and sometimes if there is not sufficient weight above them the roots push the bulb out of the ground as shown here. As I had not topped off the pot with gravel the weight above the bulbs was not sufficient to balance the downward thrust of the roots so all the bulbs in this pot pushed up as their roots hit the bottom.



I am always excited when I replot a group of seedling bulbs for the first time and that is the case with these **Allium nevskianum** - seed sown in a 7cm pot in 2014.



Allium nevskianum bulbs

One of the most important observations to make when repotting seedling bulbs for the first time is the depth to which the seedlings have taken themselves. In this case the bulbs were all clustered at the very base of the 7cm pot so it is important that I replant them to at least the same depth. Above you can see how I use the 7cm seed pot to check the depth of compost to put into the 11cm pot before I place the bulbs.



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Fritillaria pinardii bulbs

I am still working my way through repotting the many hundreds of pots of bulbs we grow such as these *Fritillaria* which are nice and healthy having grown well but this is not always the case. It is very easy for some bulbs more accustomed to growing in hot drier environments to become be too wet and start to rot when grown in a plastic pot in our climate.



This is a method I developed to help the bulbs that prefer a drier environment adjust to the conditions of a plastic pot. I had observed that it was often just the bulbs towards the centre of the pot that were affected by rot those around the outside edge were fine so I thought to place a small clay pot filled with gravel in the centre to allow better drainage and air into the centre.



Here you see healthy bulbs clustered around the central hole left after I removed the 'air pot'.



Having already converted some of the bulb house plunges over to sand beds where I plant the bulbs directly into the sand I have now decided to do this with a lot of the *Fritillaria* in an attempt to bring the number of pots I need to replant annually down to an achievable amount. Since we first became interested in growing bulbs the number of pots we have grown has increased year on year and that is fine to begin with but there comes a point when you are no longer able to cope. Having removed all the pots from the plunge I added some more sand to the layer that the pots stood on and started to place the bulbs as I removed them from the pots.



Some like these *Fritillaria sewerzowii* already have the first roots emerging – I am also planting some *Tropaeolum* tubers around the edge near the glass.



Now I am almost finished the plunge is ready to be topped off with sand to which I will add a scattering of a 7-7-7 N-P-K fertiliser before I water it.



Fritillaria bulbs in sand plunge before being covered in sand.



I wrote last week how troughs are like small gardens and as such they require much of the same attention from the gardener such as managing the growth so one plant does not take over at the exclusion of all the others. I planted this trough with plants from New Zealand and it was to feature some of the dwarf **Aciphylla** species that I love so much however another plant **Acrothamnus (Leucopogon) colensoi** grows so well that to retain the balance I have to regularly trim it back – can you spot the difference between these before (above) and after (below) pictures.





The material I removed from the *Acrothamnus colensoi* will provide cutting material to root in moist sand over the winter.

No matter what scale we are gardening on it is a matter of managing the balance so that all plants can thrive. If we did nothing the bigger plants, trees and shrubs, would grow blocking out the light preventing the under plantings from thriving.



Looking across the raised beds and troughs towards the woodland garden - here we have to manage the canopy growth to allow sufficient light through to sustain the under plantings in the beds below.

You can see how dense the canopy of Rhododendrons and trees has grown – especially this year – so thinning on a regular basis is required. It seems very brutal to have to remove large sections of some plants especially the beautiful new foliage of some Rhododendrons however I am reassured that the material is going to be shredded, composted then returned to the ground as a mulch in the winter returning the goodness to the soil.



Click this link to watch a [Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement](#) of me and my shredder at work and the resulting material bound for the compost.



It is hard enough having to cut back all the lovely Rhododendron foliage but I also have to remove some fat flower buds and so deny ourselves these flowers next spring. It is all too easy to decide to do the pruning at the 'ideal time' after the flowers pass in the spring but all too often we intend to do this and for whatever reason we don't and so another years growth remains unchecked which leads me to one of my own answers to the question 'when is the best time to'.

There are two best times one is the best time for the plant and the other is the best time for the gardener when they have time and remember.



A section through this Rhododendron decorum bud shows the embryo flowers already formed.



Last image for this week is another look at a group of Colchicum flowering in the sunshine.....