



BULB LOG 27.....3<sup>rd</sup> July 2019



For many years I have thought of my gardening self as a habitat manipulator and indeed all gardeners, even by just digging the soil over to aerate and open it up, are by some degree manipulating the habitat. Rock gardeners more than many take habitat manipulation to a higher level and indeed the two tiny troughs shown on the cover are evidence that I have not only manipulated but created habitat. As an artist I have never seen the garden as anything other than another medium where I can express my creative instincts and of all the many mediums I work in this is the most challenging largely because of the uncontrollable influences thrown at us by nature. Art is not the finished work produced by an artist, that is the evidence that art took place; the art is the processes they went through from having the original inspiration to manipulating the medium(s) to create the work. For all the artists that I know the fun is in exploring and experimenting with the process and that is the same in gardening. I made the two small troughs, which are just free-formed shallow cement containers, to demonstrate landscaping and planting at a trough workshop and as I wanted to give the participants a flavour of how it could look when planted I had a bag of unrooted cuttings pulled from some saxifrages, primula and sedum which I placed in the sand medium between the rocks - that was around ten years ago. It is remarkable that all these plants are still surviving and flowering after all these years with little intervention except from a very occasional watering. The plants I choose are drought tolerant.



I do not have to leave my work area window to see how plants, if allowed to seed, will explore and exploit habitats that we create. Who would think to try growing other plants along with this poor pine tree that has been growing (only just) in this pot for more than thirty years? However nature teaches me that all areas are potential habitats where plants can grow as both *Papaver rupifragum* and *Geranium robertianum* have taken up residence in this somewhat impoverished and dry pot. I know many consider *Geranium robertianum* to be a weed but if I ever needed reminding just why we should continue to allow it to romp around our garden then early this morning watching a bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*) feeding for over ten minutes on the tiny seeds was it. It is very important to us that the garden is not just for our pleasure but it should also provide a habitat for the local wild life.



Raised from NZ seed *Geranium sessiliflorum* subsp. *novae-zelandiae* is growing alongside a number of plants of *Armeria maritima* which I raised from cuttings taken from plants growing at the Aberdeen seafront.



One of many gardening foibles is the urge to pull out plants that come free, such as *Geranium robertianum*, while actively seeking similar plants from other parts of the world that often prove very challenging to grow. *Geranium sessiliflorum* subsp. *novae-zelandiae* is not difficult to grow but it does not increase particularly freely - it has small flowers and to many the dark bronze foliage could appear to be dead - so why grow it and pull out *Geranium robertianum*?

That is why we choose to find a place within our garden for a wide range

of plants valuing them all equally no matter whether they are common and prolific or rare and difficult to grow.



We have created and manipulated a wide range of habitats in these troughs and raised beds and I am informed by nature, observing where plants will grow in nature, towns and gardens where I am often surprised to find them appearing in the most unlikely habitats.



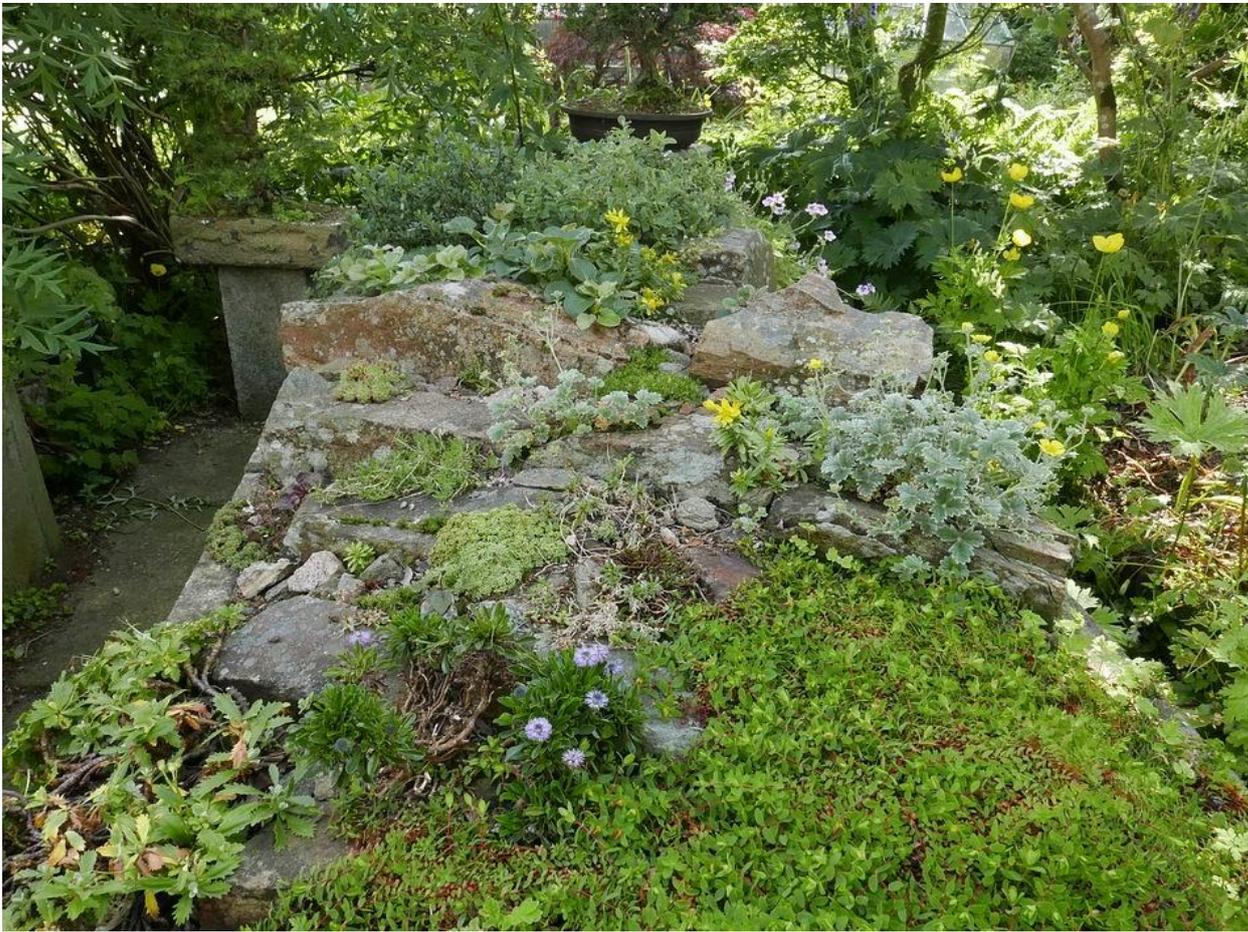
Our efforts should also be visually attractive and it is our mission in the garden to create a range of vignettes that reflect if not mimic nature.



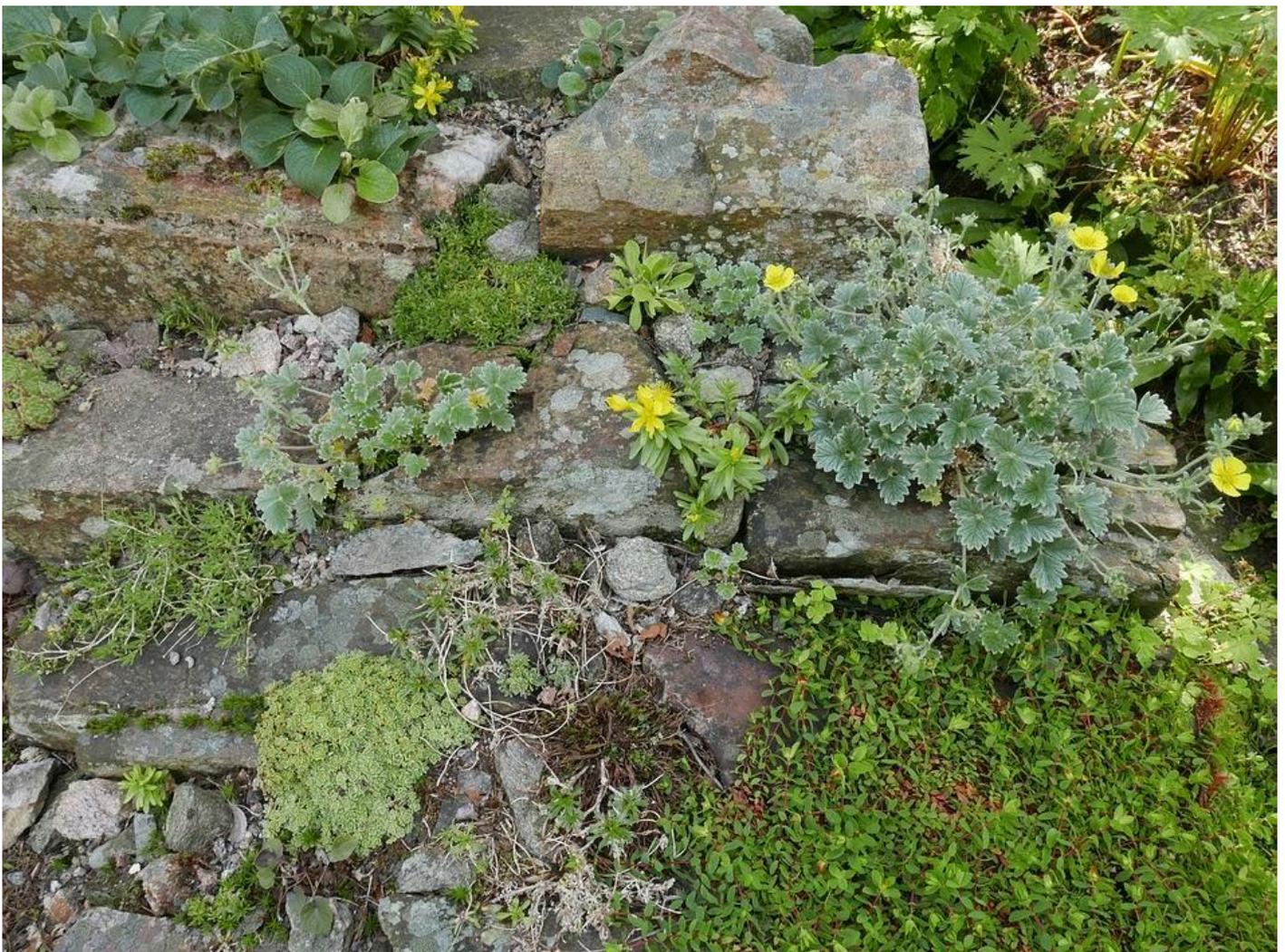
I cannot remember the species but this small **Hypericum** typifies our method of initiating a population planting a few seedlings in a bed or trough in the hope that we have provided a habitat where they will start to self-seed.



The same **Hypericum** along with **Potentilla pulvinaris** are both encouraged to seed around in this rock habitat.



Gardening is a journey not a destination so it is important to have patience where, rather than seeking the gratification of an 'instant garden' better to initiate the process by planting out some small seedlings or scattering seeds then appreciating the slow process as plants seed around establishing in a much more naturalistic way.



In some cases the larger rocks I used have started to split forming natural crevices into which the Hypericum and Potentilla have seeded. The growth of the plants forced the cracks to open further so I trickled in some dry sand before watering to settle it in.

## ***Erinus alpinus***

Guided and informed by the observations I have made in nature allied with the understanding that it is the process itself and not just the end result that is important led me to start just scattering seeds across a rock landscaped trough then watching the evolution as the plants first germinate before growing on to flower a process which in due course became self-perpetuating with the plants self-seeding.



***Erinus alpinus*** growing on a natural limestone marl landscape.



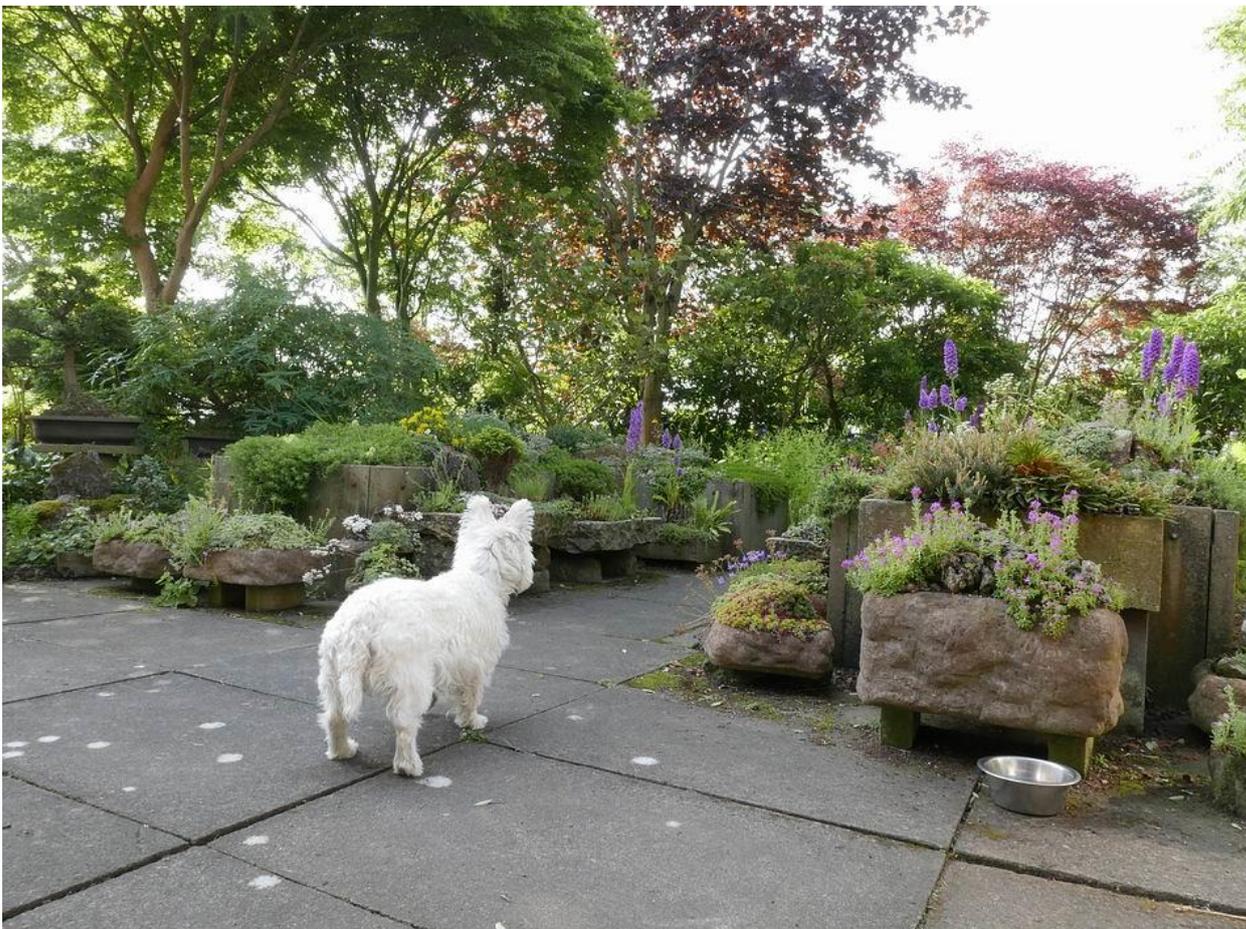
In this small trough is another more extreme habitat of a single large lump of limestone marl onto which I originally scattered **Erinus alpinus** seed. It has looked better in previous years but the plants struggled in the unusually hot dry summer we had last year: some died out completely but I will continue to enjoy observing the process as the surviving plants re-seed during the more typical cool wet summer we are having so far this year.



When you get the right combination of plant to habitat you will reap the reward of being able to watch the process of the plants thriving and spreading every year.



In the foreground one of the silver saxifrages, growing on its side, displays how the apparently long and ungainly flowers stems would hold the flowers out from a cliff or rock face habitat making it more noticeable to better attract pollinators.



Some types of plants, such as the many trees we planted, also manipulate the habitat in a number of ways, mostly by creating shade and using up the ground water. In much of our garden you feel that you are in a small woodland habitat and that is exactly what we have aimed to create where we can enjoy the canopy as well as exploiting the woodland understory.

Observing plants in nature, such as in a natural meadow, can be a wonderful inspiration and that was exactly what informed this planting in our front driveway where we introduced all the plants by simply scattering seeds across the gravel section between the slabs.



Initially I sowed the **Geranium sanguineum** then in subsequent years scattered seed of other suitable subjects such as the **Dactylorhiza** – the clover, **Trifolium repens**, arrived of its own accord and as it fixes nitrogen it will benefit the other plants.



We have two drives this is the one where my wee car lives and as it sits there most of the time the area underneath where it sits receives little light so is devoid of plants compared to this area in front which has a rich growth.

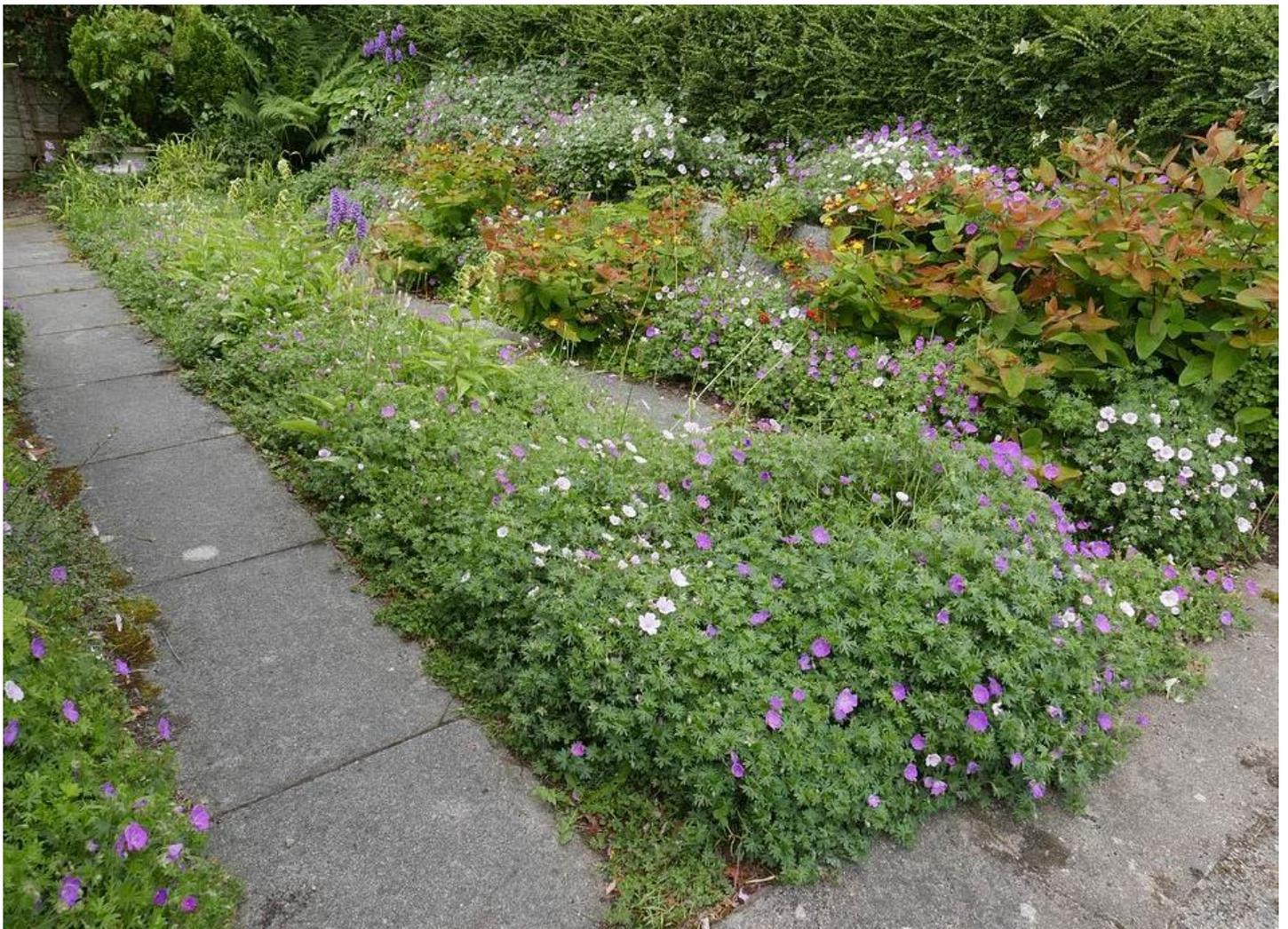


Nowadays there is rarely a car on the other drive allowing for some slightly taller flowering plants so we have a much more varied and extensive sequential planting here.



**Phytuma  
spicata**

As we no longer have a need for more than a couple of stems of *Phytuma spicata* to seed, we pull their stems off as soon as the flowers on the spikes turn brown: the picture below was taken within a few hours of this one after we had removed the stems.



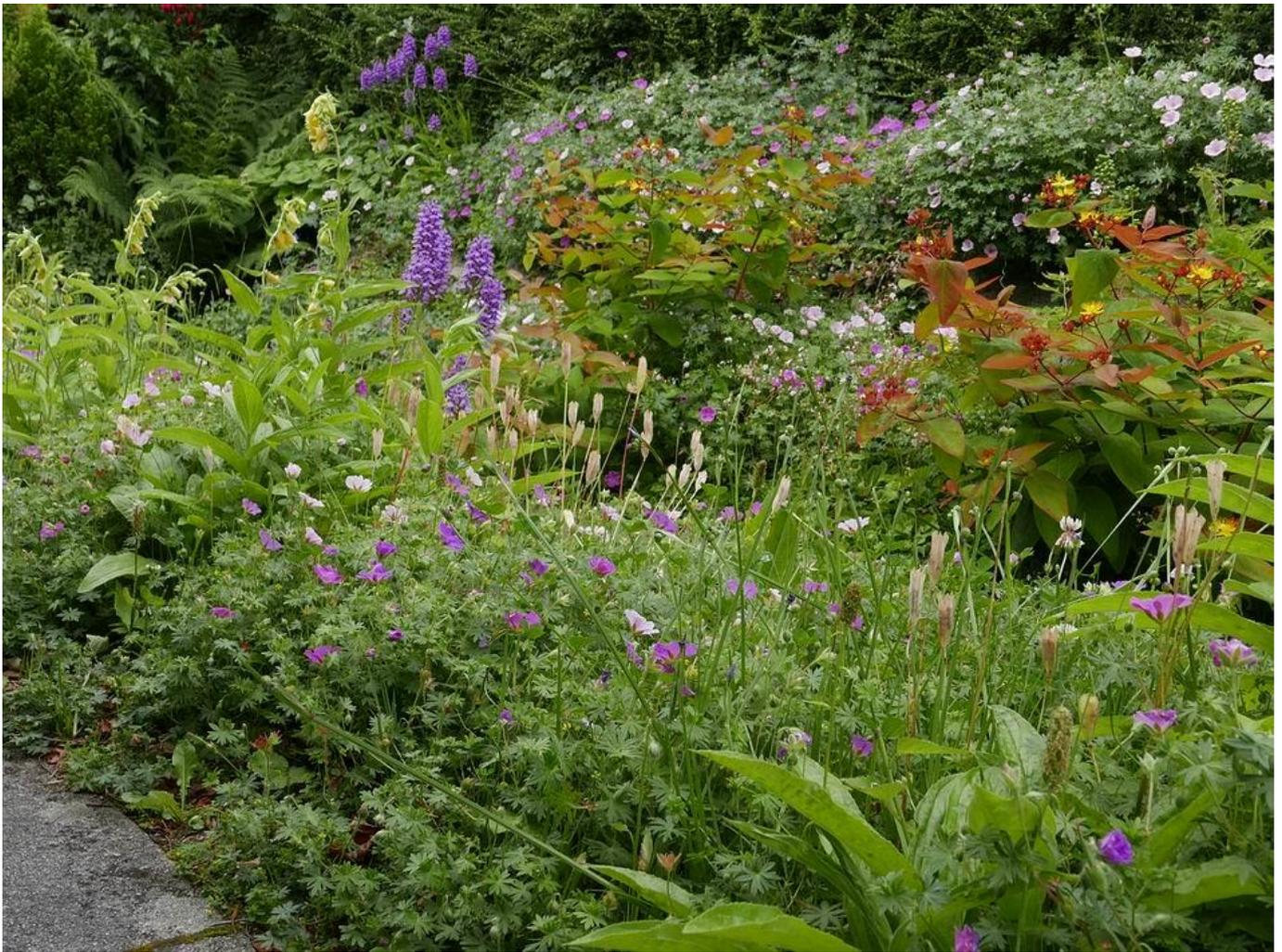
Note that the *Geranium* plants nearest the front of the drive are larger than the others – this is because it is enriched by nitrogen not this time from the clover but it is the bit that is visited by all the local dogs as they walk past.



A similar planting pattern is repeated in the narrow bed between the top of the wall and the hedge.



This illustrates how you can find growing opportunities in many habitats around your garden and home: many that you may not yet be exploiting.



With the *Phytuma spicata* stems removed the remaining taller flowering plants *Dactylorhiza* and *Digitalis grandiflora* become more prominent. Note also the many seed heads of early flowering bulbs such as *Narcissus*, *Fritillaria* and *Erythronium*, all of which were introduced here by scattering seed.



Choose the correct plants and they will thrive in this habitat and from this image you would never expect this to be on a driveway. We get a lot of mixed comments from passers-by some derogatory but most enjoy it.

***Dactylorhiza*  
and  
*Digitalis grandiflora***



Returning to the back garden we will transition from the rocky mountain derived habitats of the troughs and raised beds through the gravelly rock garden and bulb beds into the more woodland type habitats beyond.





We have imitated a natural woodland where we walk through some areas which have an almost complete canopy then emerge out to a more open clearing where the tall flowering spikes of *Digitalis purpurea*, a typical plant of open woodland, is a welcome volunteer.









One of the most extreme manipulations of the habitat we carried out was when we dug the 'new' pond in 1985 bringing water into the garden for the benefit of the gardeners and the wild life.



At the time of construction I made a column of bricks in the pond to support a pot, half in and half out of the water, in which we grew **Salix lanata**. Through the years a number of *Dactylorhiza* orchids along with some other plants have seeded in with the *Salix* which gave me the understanding that there were many more opportunities to exploit and create habitats around and within the pond. During the early part of this year the brick column collapsed causing the pot to sink becoming completely

submerged. The only way I could rectify this was to get into the pond, which at around a metre deep and freezing cold at that time of year meant that I decided to wait for some warmer weather.

The warmer weather came this past weekend when I got into the pond and rebuilt the column for the Salix pot in addition I made another column to fulfil an idea I have been harbouring for a few years now of having a trough within the pond between the Salix pot and the Pinguicula island. I am undecided whether I will plant the trough as it is or if I will make a rock landscape to give a range from wet and drier habitats. Of course there may be the possibility of placing further troughs or containers in the pond.



Pinguicula Island , Trough and Salix pot.



The journey of the pond continues from the newly built quite formal style in 1985; see [Bulb Log 2419](#), getting more wild and natural as the years pass by, with recent additions such as the marginal bed on one edge I added a few years ago. If I were building the pond today it would not have the formal layout but would be much more like a natural pond with rocky marginal edges however back then I did not have the ensuing thirty four

years of experience I have gained on the journey.



I have received news that due to changes in his personal circumstances Len Rhind is no longer able maintain the Bulb Log Index. The fact that there is an index at all is entirely thanks to the dedication of Len who contacted me many years ago to let me know that he was keeping an index primarily for his own use and that if we wanted he would be happy to share it with the wider community. We jumped at his generous offer and since then every January Len has sent us the updated index which you can download here [Index](#) or by going the [Bulb Log Index Online](#) thread in the forum. I want to thank Len Rhind for his support and all the work and dedication he has put into creating and maintaining the index for all these years and to send him and his wife all my best wishes into the future.

Of course we will always have Len's index complete up the start of 2019 but that would be it **unless there is someone out there that would consider keeping it up**, in which case I would be very happy to hear from you.



Now we are into July the first of the Roscoea are just starting to appear.

I will leave you this week with a link to the latest [Bulb Log Video Diary](#) and the suggestion that you go look to see if you are making full use of all the habitats within your garden.....