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Crocus mathewii 'Dream Dancer'



Once more I have been away giving talks for a large part of this week so I have not had time to do much in the garden despite the fact there is a lot that needs my attention.

I took the first few pictures of some of the flowers in the bulb house sand beds just before I took to my travels.

Crocus mathewii 'Dream Dancer' is shown on the cover and here are two images **Crocus laevigatus**, which is one of my favourites if for no other reason than, having many different seedlings, we will have flowers of this species from now all the way through to the spring. You only need to study the detail of a single bloom to appreciate the great

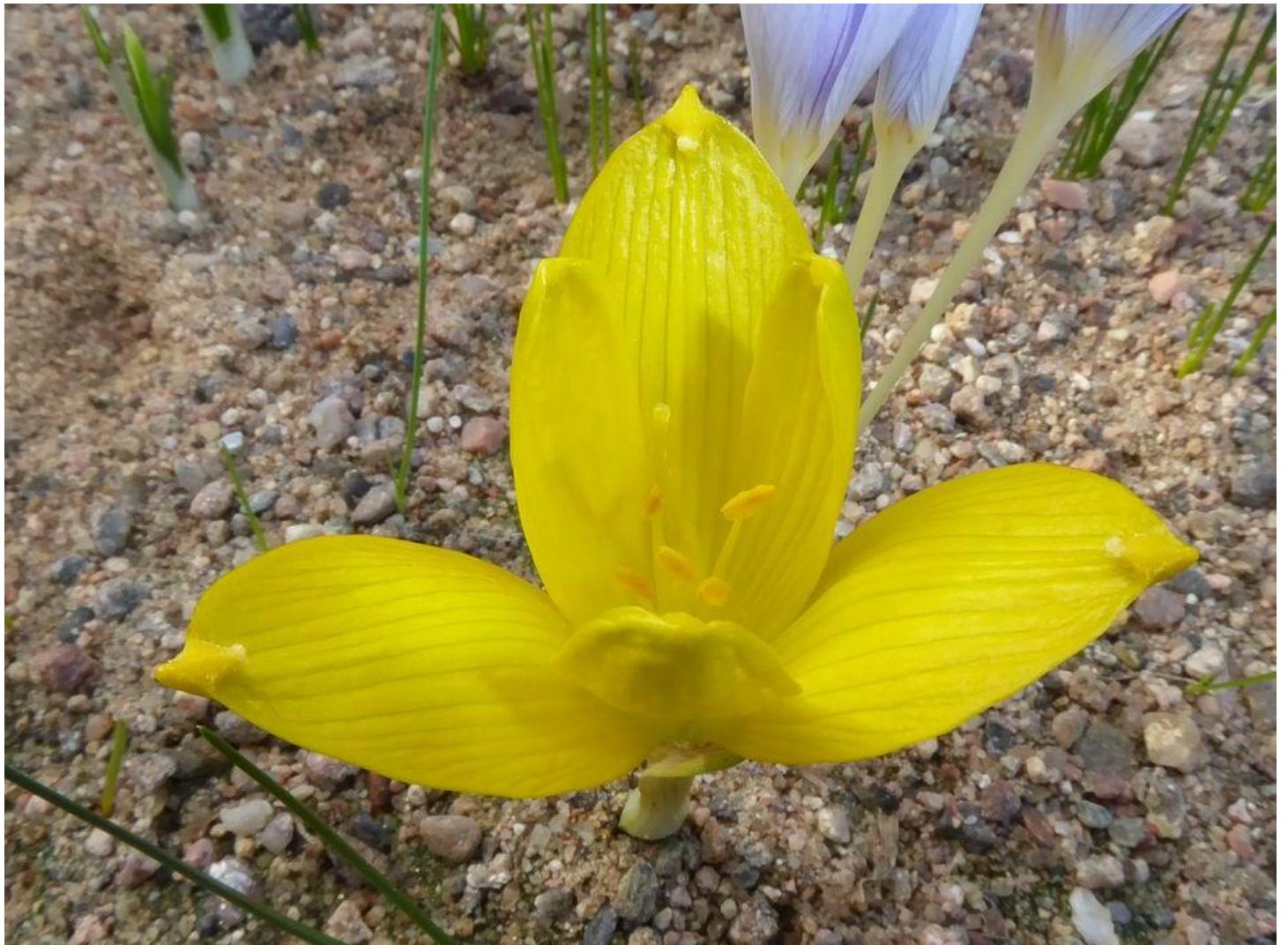
beauty of this genus in fact sometimes when viewing a large quantity you can become distracted by the mass display rather than taking in the individual beauty within each flower.



The reason I bought the compact Panasonic camera a few weeks ago was to have a smaller camera that would fit comfortably in my pocket making it easier to travel with – it was never my intention that it was to become my main camera however as I explore its capabilities I am so impressed that I have used nothing else since I got it.



The small built in flash is strong enough to enable me to use a small aperture even in low light and so capture better details in these flowers of **Sternbergia clusiana**, **Crocus pulchellus** and **Sternbergia lutea**.



I am especially fascinated by the diamond shaped structures on the outer three floral segments of **Sternbergia clusiana** the lower tip of which has a uneven structure that I speculate may act as a wick or similar as an aid to attract pollinators.



I left home early last Wednesday and travelled nearly 600 miles to the Southampton area where I was delighted to be taken to Exbury Gardens, principally to see their collection of Nerines. I am familiar with seeing **Nerine bowdenii** in the Aberdeen area where its bright pink flowers bring some colour to many a garden in our area. They often form a line along the front paths just like this one at Exbury.



I enjoy seeing the Nerines in flower especially as their colourful display comes at the time when many plants are shutting down for the winter. The reason I have never used them much in our garden is that they do not fit in with our type of successional planting. Nerine bowdenii does best when planted en masse with the top half of the bulb poking out of the ground, this encourages them to flower making a magnificent display in October but I have found that it is very difficult to find other plants that can share the same space as them.

I was about to be amazed and learn a lot more about this genus starting when I entered the Five Arrows gallery at [Exbury Gardens](#).



Here Exbury put on a stunning informative exhibition and display of **Nerine sarniensis hybrids** and cultivars.



Nerine sarniensis cultivars





The petals have gold or silver crystalline speckles that make their petals sparkle in sunshine or in this case under spotlights.

I was honoured to be shown around the collection by horticulturalist Theo Herselman who looks after the Nick de Rothschild collection and we had a very interesting conversation about his methods of raising and selecting new cultivars. I found many similarities between our methods, albeit that his are on a massively larger scale than mine. Basically this entire collection is cared for by Theo and his assistant Emma and it is a massive collection with thousands of pots to attend to.





A long time ago I realised that we could not grow every plant that we wanted to and I learned to appreciate plants in other people's gardens; like here where I can see the attraction of growing and exploring the range of these colourful plants especially when you see them in these numbers and can appreciate the variation.





Theo showed me how he sows the seeds individually in cells filled with a John Innes compost where they grow, with regular liquid feeds, until they flower at which time they will be assessed to see if they are worthy of moving into the collection. I was amazed that such a big bulb could grow to flower in such a small volume of compost: if you want to read more about this wonderful collection including the store where there is a great range on offer click the link to visit the [Exbury Nerine and Lachenalia Collection](#)



**Galanthus reginae-olgae**

Back home in my tiny glasshouses, which after visiting Exbury seem even smaller, there is still plenty for me to see and keep me busy.

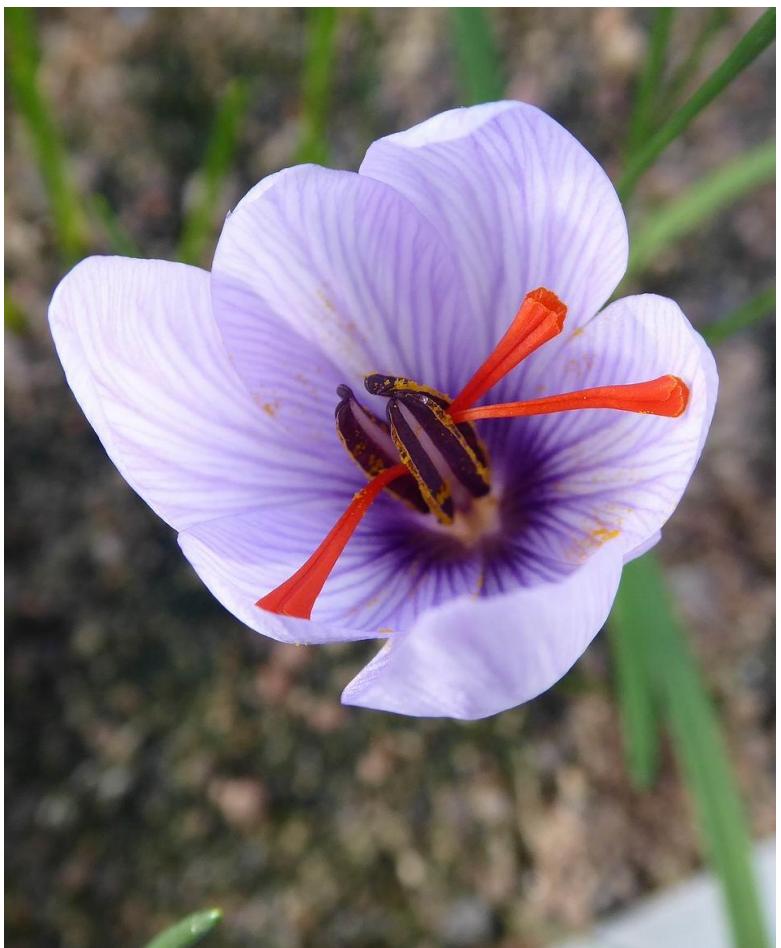


I saw many forms of **Galanthus reginae-olgae** flowering in the gardens that I visited in the south but all our attempts to establish it in the open garden here have failed, however we can grow it in pots under glass, plus I have some growing in the sand beds.



**Crocus pulchellus and Crocus wattiorum**

The next series of images are of bulbs growing in the various sand beds.



**Crocus hadriaticus and Crocus pallasii 'Homeri'**



**Crocus pulchellus**



**Crocus ligusticus**

## **Crocus ligusticus**

Gardening is neither a product nor a destination but a passage of exploration to be enjoyed and I am continually learning as I take that journey.

Rather than repeating exactly the same processes every year I like to have new challenges, which is part of the reason why I moved from growing so many bulbs in pots to growing some of them directly in sand beds. It is not necessarily a way of growing that would have suited us earlier in our gardening journey when our aims were different

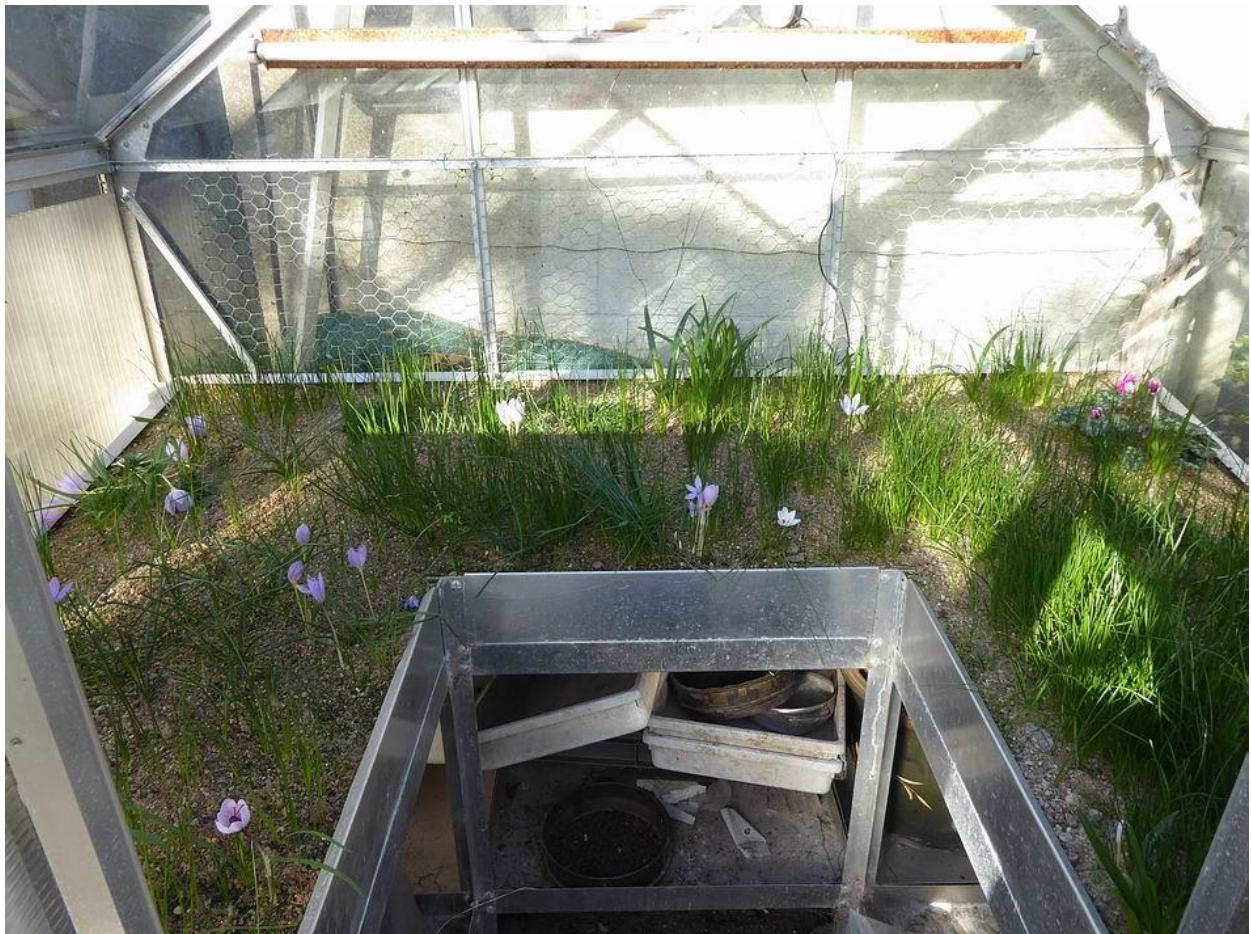
but now I am getting great pleasure from this method, learning as I go which plants are best suited to this habitat and how I need to adjust my watering and feeding regimes to maximise the flowering.



Crocus and Sternbergia flowering in the sand bed among the thin leaves of the many Narcissus which will soon take over as they come into flower and provide interest throughout the winter and into spring.



Bulb house sand beds.





Some seeds are best sown as soon as they are ripe such as Pulsatilla and Primula which is what I did with these some months back. Both went on to germinate within a few weeks of sowing and have up to now been growing unprotected outside however with the temperatures dropping I have moved them under glass where it is a bit warmer to keep them growing for as long as possible before they also eventually retreat underground.





Once more with nothing except me to distribute the seeds in our garden these Cyclamen seedlings are growing on top of the mother corm. Soon I will do as I did last year when I lifted and potted some of the seedlings.



After growing in a pot for the year these **Cyclamen hederifolium** seedlings could be planted out into the garden.



The final series of images are me playing with the camera settings firstly using the ‘back light’ setting where when you push the button it takes a series of images, three I think, which are bracketed plus and minus exposure then the on-board software combines them together so they sky and some of the shadow colour can all be captured.

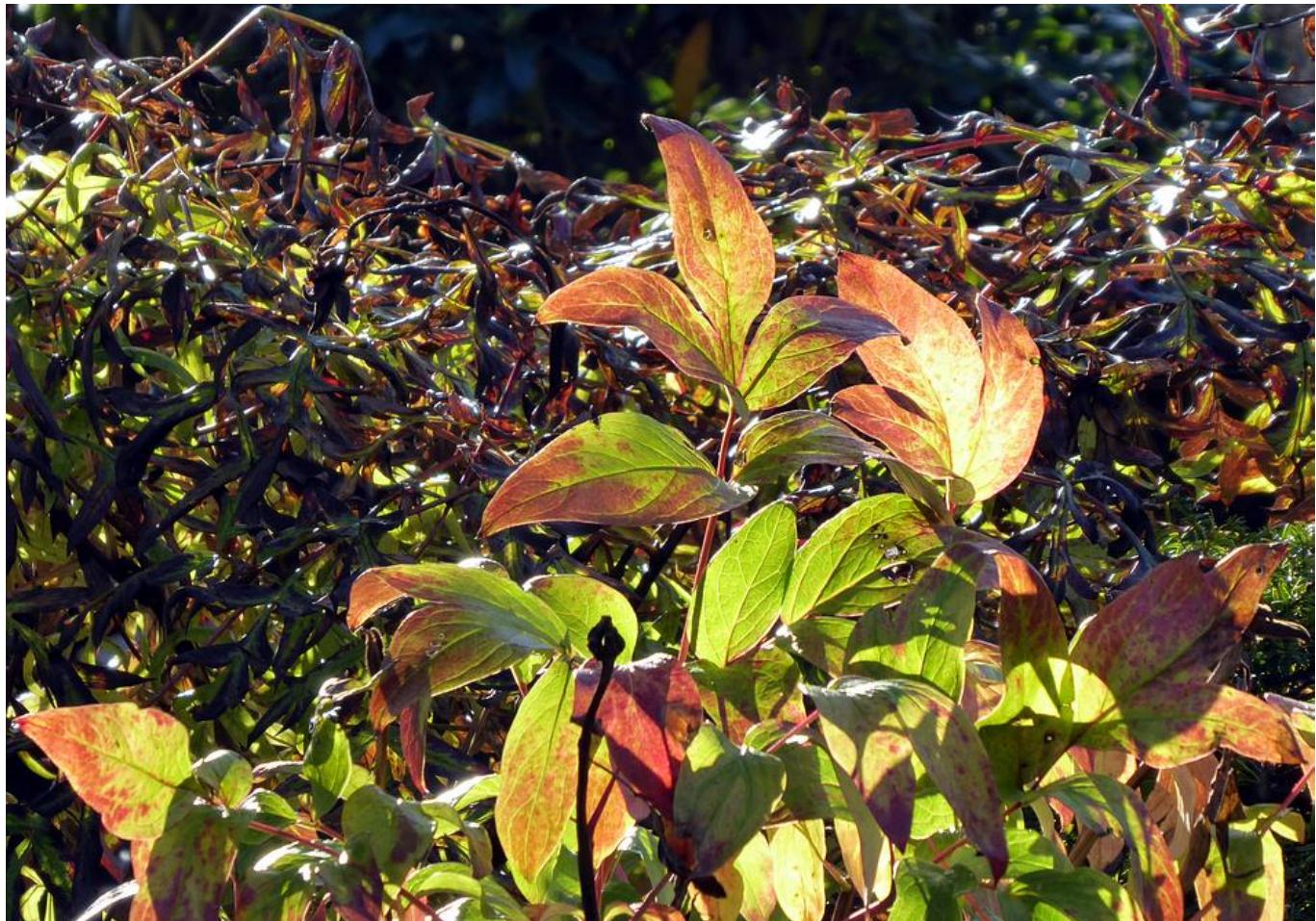




Using this setting the camera can produce decent images where there is a strong contrast between light and shade.



**Crocus speciosus** pictured in low light and deep shade.



Every year I am attracted to the stained glass effect as the low sunlight illuminates the peony leaves from behind.



I have used the 'back light' bracketed mode of the camera, Panasonic Lumix DMC-TZ70, to better capture the colours in this high contrast scene....