



BULB LOG 47.....18th November 2020



Narcissus



Now the Crocus and Colchicum flowers in the garden are all but over does not mean that we are without flowers until spring because now our interest switches to the bulb houses where the Narcissus are bursting into bloom. Switching from growing all these bulbs in pots, I now grow many planted directly into sand beds. This switch has given me a new challenge; firstly I had to adjust the watering and feeding regimes I had developed for bulbs under pot culture to suit those growing in sand which was not too difficult to do because whether the bulbs are growing in pots or sand their requirements are remarkably similar. Knowing when to water is judged by experience, observation

of the plants and the sand plus attention to the weather forecast. Rule one is I will not water in freezing conditions or when it is very wet outside – I like to water on a bright morning when the surplus water can drain away quickly and the foliage can also dry out.

Because there are no labels in the sand beds the next challenge is for me to be able to recognise and put a name to the plants and that is not so easy.

The more I look the more I understand how complex the Narcissus Section Bulbocodium is, largely but not least because the plants are highly promiscuous and the speciation process is still very active. All my observations have been done in our own garden using plants both received as bulbs plus the largest majority which we raised from seed. It is especially when I look at those we raise from our own seed that the problems involved in trying to classify this unruly bunch of flowers becomes very evident.



The group of flowers to the left of this image we received over thirty years ago as *Narcissus romieuxii mesatlanticus* but I have long suspected that it is not a form or variety of *Narcissus romieuxii* but a hybrid, as I believe many of the plants we grow under the *Narcissus romieuxii* label also are.



The pictures on this page are from our friend Rafael Díez Domínguez who shows us these images showing a group of flowers from one wild location and explains 'We have in the center *Narcissus Cantabricus*, on the far left *Narcissus bulbocodium* subsp. *bulbocodium* and right end *Narcissus blancoi*. Then to the left we would have *Narcissus x barrae* (name we probably need to check out too) and on the opposite side the *blancoi* hybrid with *cantabricus*.'

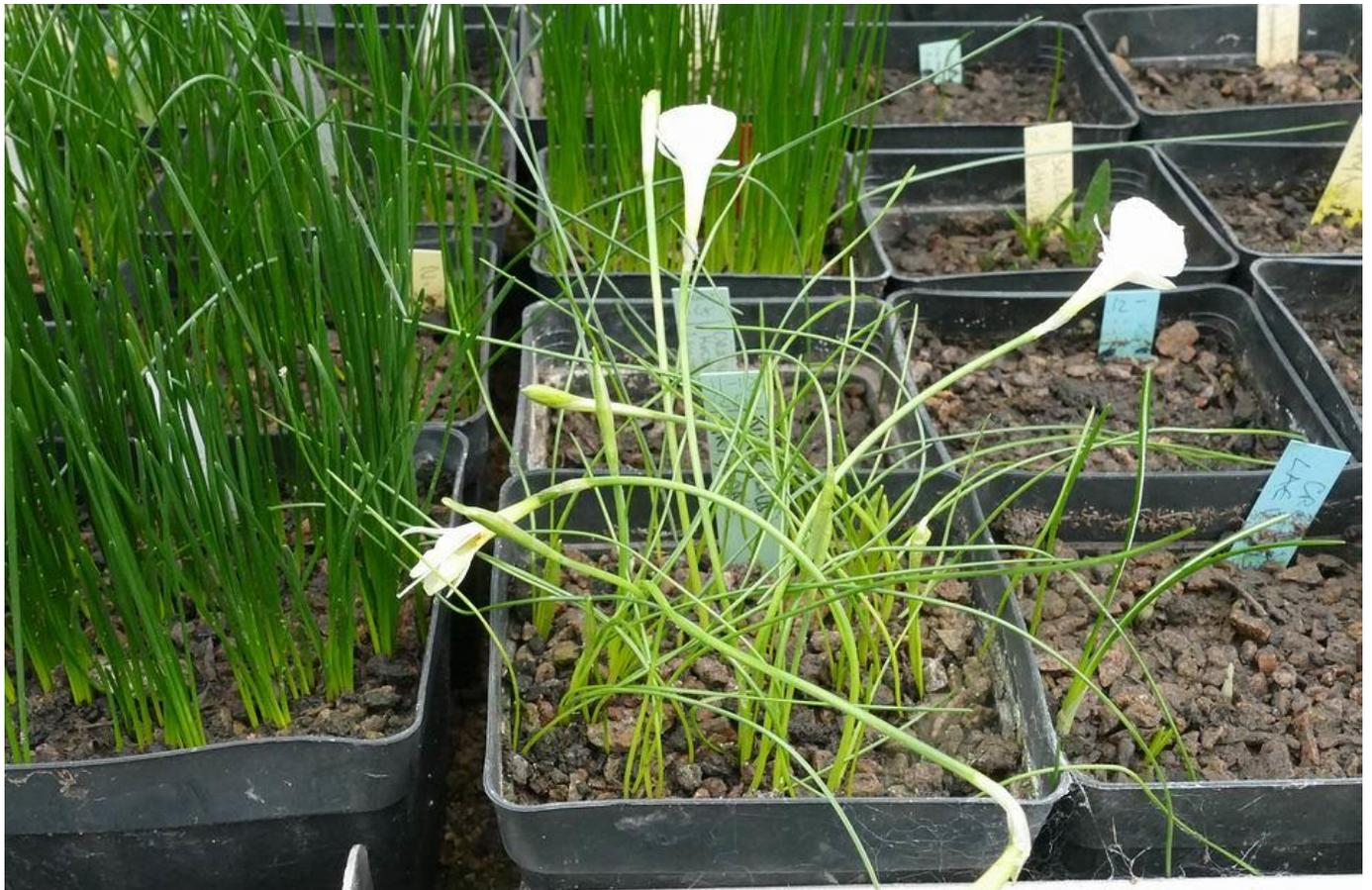
It is widely accepted that even in the wild there are many such hybrid populations of narcissus which Rafa has spent years studying, showing so well that the speciation process continues rapidly with plants that are geographically close enough for cross pollination to occur with the inevitable result of these hybrid swarms.



It is only by carefully observing such wild populations that we can start to understand this section and, as many of the hybrids are themselves fertile, I think trying to classify them is a huge fascinating challenge that can only be resolved by field studies and not as the tradition of describing plants from herbarium specimens. Thanks to Rafael Díez Domínguez for his ongoing work and for allowing me to use these two pictures.



We raised **Narcissus grandae**, a naturally occurring fertile cross between *N. cantabrticus* and *N. bulbocodium* subsp. *bulbocodium*, raised from wild collected seed and it is remarkably similar to many of the hybrids that we find when we raise plants from seed collected in our bulb houses.



The pot of *Narcissus grandae* seedlings does not enjoy our low northern light levels which cause it to grow tall on weak stems that can flop about. This problem is shared by many of the winter flowering *Narcissus* and is why we select plants from our many seedlings that have stronger stems.



I continue to raise bulbs from seed especially those of species from known locations. Depending when you sow the seed you may have to wait over a year for germination. If I sow narcissus seed by the end of August I will get germination the following spring; however these were sown later in November 2019 and are just germinating now.





Because I don't have labels to refer to I have been forced to look ever more carefully at the details of the Narcissus growing in the sand beds. The overall shape and colour of the flower is the first thing I notice then I look at details such as the length of the petals, how the stamens and style are held - are they exerted or contained within the corona, what colour are they, then other clues can be found in the length of the pedicel, the cross section shape of the leaves and all of these features can indicate possible relationships.



One problem of growing in the sand beds that I have encountered is it can sometimes be more difficult to get in close to take detailed photographs without the intrusion of the masses of leaves.

Another factor when taking pictures is the very low light levels I have to work in, just compare these with the light intensity of Rafa's pictures taken in sunny Spain.



Mixed Narcissus seedlings

Peer through the foliage and you will see considerable variation within this group, however with perseverance and using the macro-zoom function I did manage to get close enough to capture the pictures below featuring the individual flowers.

**Narcissus
'Craigton Chalice'**

I am very attracted to and been watching this seedling for several years - it has a distinctive cup shaped corona which makes it stand out from the crowd.

I have featured it a number of times in previous Bulb Logs and call it Narcissus 'Craigton Chalice' it increases reasonably well and I now have some growing in pots so that I can build up a small stock.



In contrast to the previous form this one has a wide crinkled, funnel shaped corona with exerted style and stamens.



The corona of this individual combines the cup and funnel shape of the previous two with the addition of a curved back flange at the mouth.

There are a number of synonyms within *Narcissus* such as this one which we originally received as (and is commonly called) ***Narcissus cantabricus* var *foliosus*** Maire.

From my observations in cultivation I thought it strange that this plant which starts to flower in October/November should be included in the much later flowering *N. cantabricus* and so I have some sympathy for Michael Salmon describing it as ***Narcissus albidus* ssp *foliosus*** M.Salmon.



Whichever name you adopt, this plants genes contribute to many of our hybrid seedlings.



Narcissus bulbocodium* ssp. *genuinus



We also grow many forms of *Narcissus bulbocodium* both in the bulb houses and out in the open garden - this is the earliest to flower others can wait until April before they flower.



I have always associated the forms with the more open flat face with *Narcissus romieuxii* and the yellow/green colour of the filaments and style also suggest a relationship to that species



Many of this type's flowers can be quite yellow as they emerge but quickly fade to a creamy white as shown.



The next sequence of pictures shows some more of the variations that are coming into flower in the sand beds and I do not have to know a name to enjoy their charm and beauty.





Narcissus seedlings





Narcissus seedlings





The very same Narcissus growing in pots flower a bit later than they do when growing in the sand beds: here in the bulb house the first flowers are only just opening.



I have been gradually increasing the number of Narcissus in the sand beds in the old Fritillaria house.



Narcissus romieuxii

I am fascinated to observe the variations that occur when we sow narcissus seed from our plants cultivated in the bulb houses and knowing that a similar evolution is happening in the wild where the species as we know them cross with each other to form often fertile hybrid swarms which, if stable, can become an entity. This process is speciation happening at a relatively rapid pace making the desire to classify them a very difficult task that will only be understood by studying the wild population in detail.....