



SRGC

# Bulb Log Diary

ISSN 2514-6114

Pictures and text © Ian Young

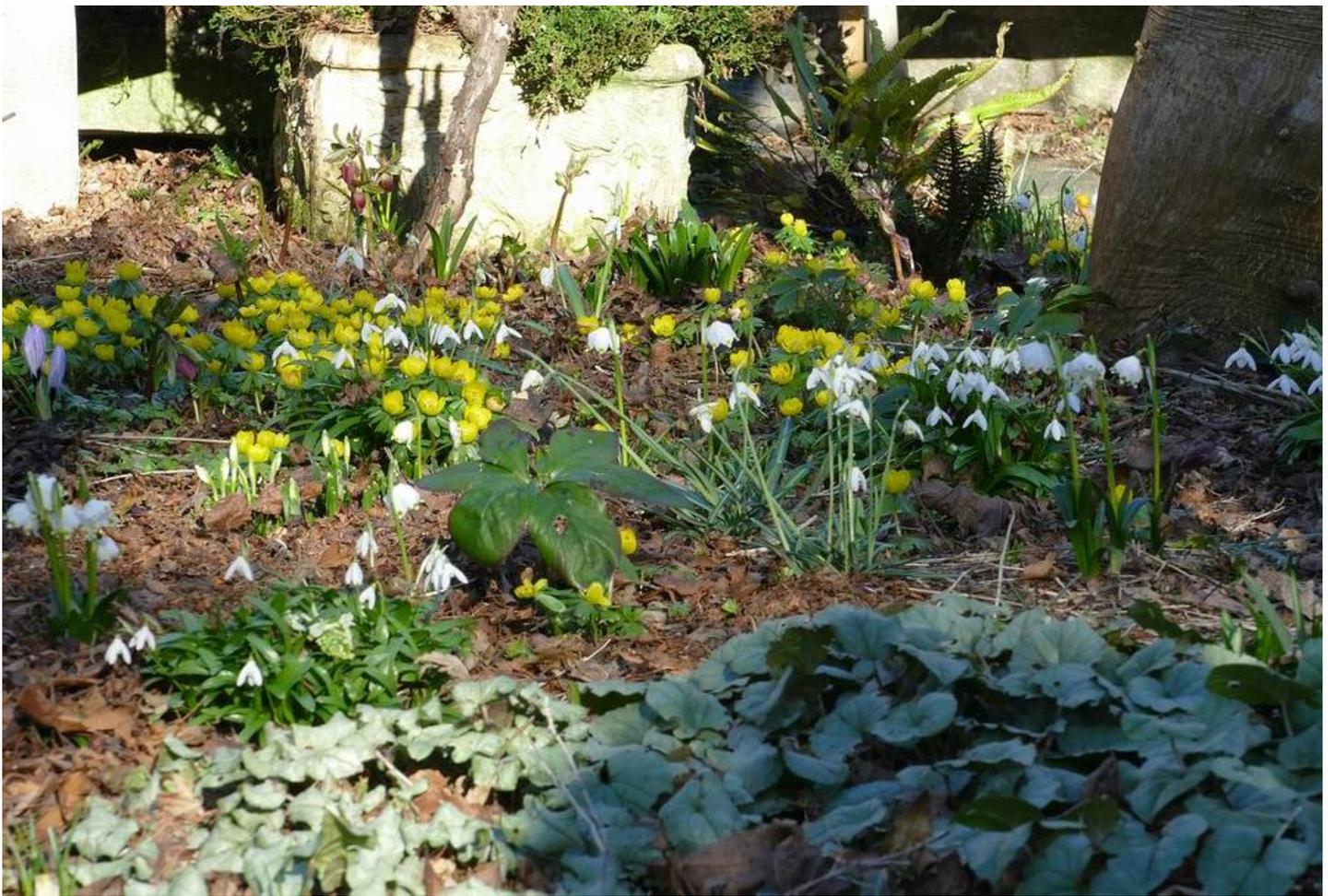
BULB LOG 09.....3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021





The cobble bed is nearest to the house and has come alive with colour – it is the flowers of *Galanthus*, *Crocus* and *Eranthis* that create the scene here and in the wider garden where these three genera are joined by *Cyclamen*, *Leucojum* and the earliest *Narcissus*. This week the sun shone for a number of consecutive days which was greatly enjoyed by the plants, the gardeners and the wildlife alike.





There are similar scenes all across the garden with the flowers opening as the sunshine warms them up.



**Galanthus plicatus 'Snoopy'** grows through a natural mulch of leaves with *Eranthis hyemalis* seeding around.



I have been interested to observe the movement of **Eranthis hyemalis** in the garden - it has moved away from the original area where we first planted a clump of seedlings given to us by the late Jack Crosland about 40 years ago. It has migrated by seeding and all the healthy clumps shown in these images are relatively young plants while there is not a single flowering plant left in the small area where it was first introduced. This raises the question why are there none of the original plants left? Has the ground condition been changed by maturing tree roots or the growth

of other plants, have the tubers got a set life span or have they depleted the nutrients and moved on to fresh ground? There are many possibilities but the most important lesson to take from this is that by leaving your plants to seed around you will ensure young, healthy vigorous plants into the future.



**Eranthis  
hyemalis**



The typical and most commonly seen form of **Eranthis hyemalis** is this sharp yellow coloured one which seeds around.



One of the paler coloured forms of **Eranthis hyemalis** 'Schwefelglanz' and I have found that seedlings commonly adopt a similar pale colour to their parent.



***Eranthis x tubergenii* 'Guinea Gold'** increases well by offset and division of the tubers but does not set seed which is the reason I use it in areas where I want the early colour but do not want it seeding around.



The slab beds are one of the areas where we use the early colour of *Eranthis* but do not want it seeding around and competing with other small bulbs we are trying to establish here. Note the small similarly coloured *Narcissus*.

Over recent years I have been trying to find small bulbs that will add early colour to the slab bed, shown above, to fill the period before the summer and autumn growing plants take over and this small *Narcissus bulbocodium* hybrid is a good subject to try. This leads me on to a question I am often asked - when is the best time to lift and split a bulb?

The simple answer is when the growth dies down and the bulb is retreating into hibernation because that way you will not interrupt the plant's growth cycle - however

things are not always that simple – the best time for the bulb is not always the best time for the gardener. If for example you have a congested clump of bulbs where the competition for food and water has become so great that they stop flowering and just produce leaves: every year you think I must split them up when they are dormant but out of sight is also out of mind and you forget so they become more crowded getting ever smaller. The best time for the gardener is doing it when you remember and have time. By lifting and dividing congested bulbs as carefully as you can, minimising any damage to the roots system then replanting them immediately, well spaced out in good



soil you will be giving them the chance to grow on better than they would if they were left in a congested clump.

### ***Narcissus bulbocodium* hybrid**

There is a similar scenario with this pot of *Narcissus bulbocodium* hybrid. I have built up several pots of this form and for a few years I intended to plant some out to try them on the raised bed, shown above, but in the summer when the bulbs are dormant the other plants in the bed are in full growth and I would damage them if I tried to plant the bulbs - so now is the time to do it.

The open gritty compost means that I can turn out the pot, shake off most of the soil revealing the bulbs and roots and now the bulbs can then be teased apart with minimal damage.





This was a pot of the smaller bulbs and that they have still all produced flowers is down to the application of potassium (K) feeding that I routinely apply to the bulbs as the flowers start to fade. This picture also shows that the roots are relatively undamaged and I carefully planted the bulbs and gave them a good watering to ensure they were in good contact with the soil

in the slab bed, with no large air pockets, especially around the roots.



Because I have more pots of the same **Narcissus bulbocodium hybrid** I will be planting some more of them in other areas of the garden when the bulbs are dormant in the summer.



Because the pot of bulbs was tucked in the back of the bulb house among a lot of other larger growth the stems and leaves are etiolated and floppy but now they are released to grow in the slab bed I hope next year they will be much more compact and upright.



**Crocus abantensis**  
with some of the  
newly planted  
**Narcissus bulbocodium**  
hybrid



**Crocus abantensis**



### **Feeding bulbs**

I briefly mention feeding with Potassium (K) as the flowers fade, the purpose of that is to build up the bulb and encourage the development of flower buds but many bulbs in the garden that are just starting to show growth now have a different requirement. Bulbs such as the Erythronium in the frames are just about to produce their above ground growth and at the same time their roots will extend further into the soil to support the plant. This type of growth requires Nitrogen and Phosphorous so I have scattered a light dressing of 7-7-7 N-P-K pellets across the Erythronium frames and around some of the larger bulbs in the garden such Fritillaria imperialis to help support the growth. Corydalis will also soon emerge and they have a very short growing season so I always give them a light feed as soon as I see the growth coming though.



Feeding *Fritillaria imperialis*





In recent years and after decades of trying I have found a reliable way to germinate **Tropaeolum azureum** seed and it works with both fresh and stored seed – it is so simple: sow it and leave it outside. This is some old forgotten seed that I found in the shed in January - there was some green mould on the seeds but I sowed it, placed it outside in all the cold and this week I spotted it had germinated so I moved it into a bulb house to prevent it being slug food. How often do we over complicate things, especially with some of the rarer more challenging plants, killing them with kindness by being overprotective when often the best thing we can do is to leave it to the plants and nature.



A few snowdrops that are taking my eye: first this tiny form of **Galanthus nivalis** 'Wim Boens' pictured with another flower to show scale – this wee plant will be perfect for a trough or one of the slab beds.



**Galanthus woronowii**  
with green  
markings on  
the outers.



**Galanthus woronowii**



A large clump of **Galanthus woronowii** is nice but I like the more natural look of just a few growing beside an exposed tree root, shown in the picture below.



**Galanthus woronowii**



**Snowdrops**





**Crocus and Galanthus**



We have a number of clumps of the yellow snowdrops – many are Anne Wright’s excellent Dryad Gold series.





I must mention the Snowflake – such as the yellow tipped *Leucojum vernum* var *carpathicum* 'Podpolozje'



You will find that the degree of yellow in a single clone can vary from year to year as well as across clumps or even a single flower where some tips can be yellow while those on the other side of the flower are green.



I will leave you with one more picture of Eranthis and Galanthus and a link to the latest [Bulb Log Video Diary Supplement](#) looking at these flowers in the sunshine with the birds singing around me.....