



BULB LOG 03.....19th January 2022



To stage this week's cover picture I picked around 20 different Hoop petticoat daffodils from the bulb houses. All are different, some of the variations such as colour are obvious while other variations in characteristics are more subtle. The species involved are *Narcissus albidus*, *cantabricus*, *bulbocodium* and *romieuxii*, all under the section *Bulbocodium*, and includes a few that could be the species but most are hybrids. Every year at this time I haul out our *Narcissus* books to re-read and refresh my memory to see if I can make some sense of this unruly bunch.



A survey of the Genus *Narcissus* by Michael Salmon; *Narcissus*, A guide to Wild Daffodils by John Blanchard, *Modern Miniature Daffodils Species and Hybrids* by James S Wells and *Miniature Daffodils* by Alec Gray.

What you will learn from these books is that the *Bulbocodium*s have always been a problematic group to quote Alec Gray from 1955 "The *Bulbocodium* are by far the most difficult group of daffodils to describe because it is nearly impossible to know where one so-called species ends and another begins. Not only are they very variable plants in themselves, but where, in their native habitat, various species grow in proximity to one another interbreeding is common." I could not agree more.

The first two books give the best views of classification but do not expect a definitive answer because what they do highlight is how such work is, not surprisingly, based to some degree on opinion.

The second two books give some interesting cultural and historical content to the more cultivated forms.



Since I have been growing the Narcissus planted in the sand beds without labels it has encouraged me to look even more carefully at this promiscuous horde which has led me to the conclusion that I can differentiate the species where they conform to the type but there is a whole range of variations in the hybrids that form a continuum from one species to the other.





Narcissus romieuxii JCA 805

It is always nice to get your feedback and questions across the various platforms and this week I was asked if *Narcissus romieuxii* was still a valid species and yes it is: I have not shown it before because the first flowers of the year have only just opened.

I suspect that true *Narcissus romieuxii* as a species could be quite rare in the wild as well as in cultivation where it is being diluted by hybrids. Much of the material in cultivation arose from a Jim Archibald collection *Narcissus romieuxii* JCA 805 which gave rise to quite a variable group of flowers from these many clones were selected and named, from the wide open petunioide form that Jim himself named 'Julia Jane' to others with a more funnel



shaped corona in varying shades from pale to deep yellow.

**Narcissus romieuxii
JCA 805**

It has been speculated that the JCA 805 seed collection itself possibly contained a range of hybrids.



Narcissus romieuxii JCA 805



I should point out that the recent unusually mild weather has given me the perfect opportunity to water the pots and sand beds in the bulb houses. Apart from a few individual pots this is the first watering since November but now I am seeing signs that while they are still moist, they need more water to be able to grow both above and below ground. I added 1/3 strength tomato feed to each of the cans to supplement the nutrients in the sand beds but just used water for the pots this time round.



Another question concerned how to get **Eranthis pinnatifida** into your garden which because of its scarcity has been difficult to find and expensive when you do. The best way is to go for seeds – these are best sown while they are fresh which for us is in April/May.



Eranthis pinnatifida seeds

As a guide any seeds which, like *Eranthis pinnatifida*, resemble a miniature version of the mature tuber, should ideally be kept moist at all times and sown as soon as possible. If the seed is dry when you receive it then soak it in water with a tiny amount of soap to break the surface tension which will allow the seeds to absorb it better – after some hours the seeds have plumped up and are ready to be sown.



Our seed pots are placed in an outside frame that is open at all times where they will take whatever weather we get.



The pots of *Eranthis pinnatifida* seeds have yellow labels and if you look carefully they are germinating now in January. Despite the cold they have always germinated for us in January or early February and we try to keep them growing until May. To do this we often have to shade them when the sun hits the frame because they seem to have a low tolerance to heat and if they get too hot they will quickly go dormant. The longer the growing season you can give them especially in the first year the sooner they will produce their first flowers with three years being the quickest we have flowered them from seed.



In the first year ***Eranthis pinnatifida*** only produces a single leaf so you need to ensure that it stands the best chance of growing for as long as possible. One year I did move plants including a pot of seed into a bulb house thinking that would help protect them and allow them to grow better but that turned out not to be the best method because even in our northern cool garden the temperature swings under glass were not to the plants liking and all the plants inside had a shorter growing season than those in the open frame.



I will also apply a very dilute liquid tomato feed but not until at least March because the very young tuber and roots can be damaged by the chemicals if they are given too soon.

As that single leaf is all that will feed the tiny new tuber for the first year you have to protect it from being eaten and I have been lifting every pot in the frame to check for them remove any slugs and snails that I find.



These are the enemy and can devour a pot of precious seedlings overnight so vigilance is important.



Many years ago we bought our very first three *Eranthis pinnatifida* tubers at great expense - they were described as naturally small tubers and when they arrived damp packed among shredded sphagnum moss they were so small it took me a long time and a magnifying glass to find them in the moss - from experience I can now see they were first year seedlings. We did establish them and after three years got flowers followed by our own seed and the pot above is some generations on from those original plants which still retain the green leaves that the parent forms had.



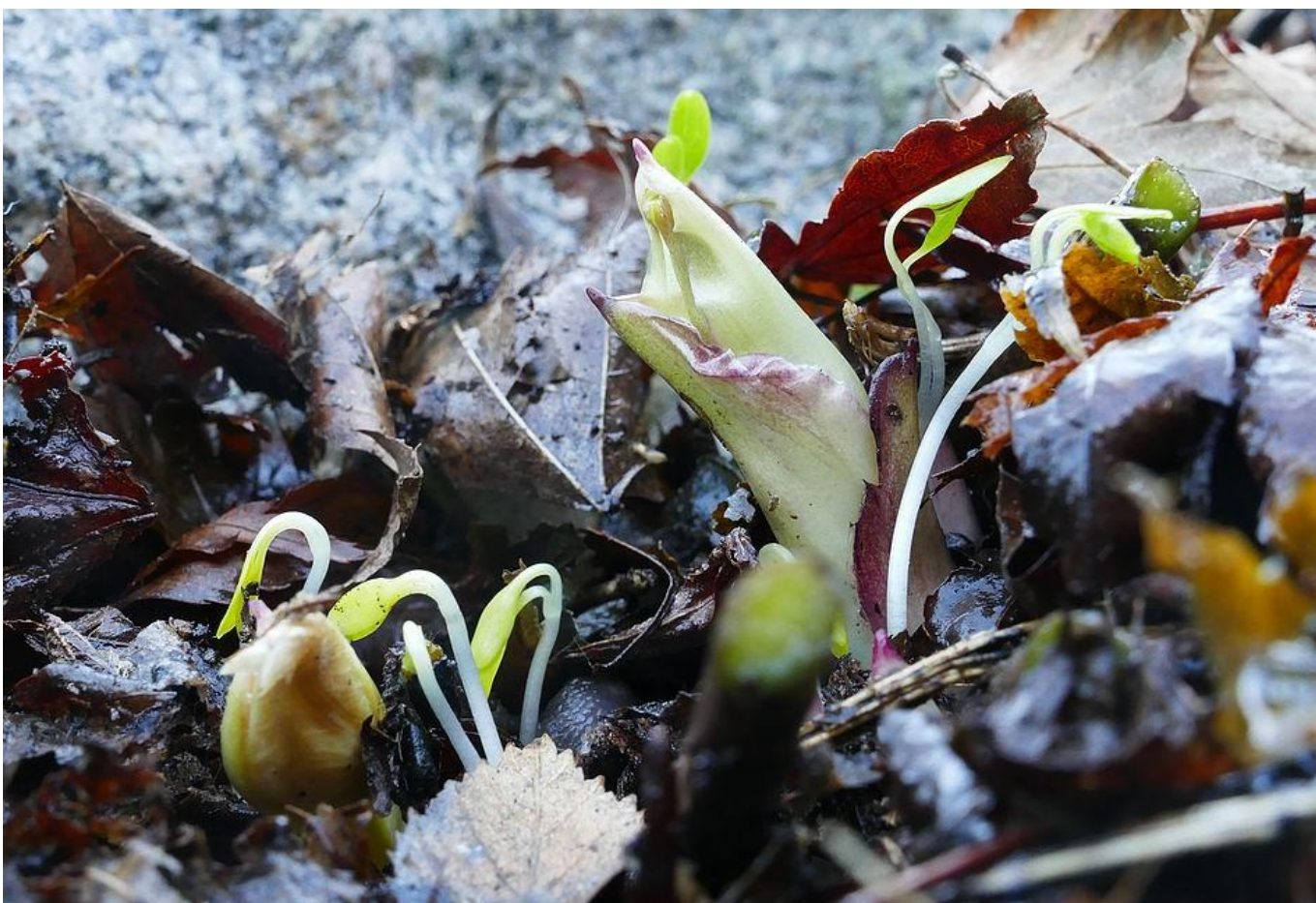
Over the years and with gifts of seed from a kind friend in Japan we have built up a number of pots of different forms from first year seedlings to mature flowering plants and in a good year these pots provide us with more seed. These have a bronze foliage with pinkish flowers and like the others my aim is to establish them in the garden. We started to plant out a few flowering sized plants two years ago and if they do well more will follow.



We keep seedlings growing together so that they can cross pollinate which gives us the best chance of getting a good seed set and they seedlings tend to carry similar features to the parents.



In the garden we see the first signs of the **Eranthis hyemalis** appearing when the birds disturb the mulch.



The birds also reveal some pale Hellebore shoots and seeds which now they are exposed to the light will soon green up.



When time and the weather permits I continue with the winter clear up of the beds before applying a fresh organic mulch. Above I have spread some of last year's hedge cuttings that were shredded and composted.



Another bed received a mulch of pine needles in the autumn – the dark patches are where the black birds have been foraging.



Here I have simply applied the newly lifted and shredded leaves back onto the bed as a mulch.



Leaves composted for two years form a lovely humus rich leaf soil which I have used to mulch this small area.



For the final few images of the week I am returning to the daffodils the first two of which I believe to be forms of **Narcissus bulbocodium**.



Narcissus bulbocodium



There are plenty more flowers still to open that I can share with you in the coming weeks.



Narcissus hybrid



Narcissus hybrid



Narcissus hybrid



Narcissus hybrid



Whatever their parentage these small Daffodils provide us with get great pleasure and interest though the winter months while the garden is sleeping. I will continue to read about them in the books and the large amount of online information especially about the species and hybrids being studied growing in the wild. There is a large amount of posts in the Narcissus section of the [SRGC Forum](#).....