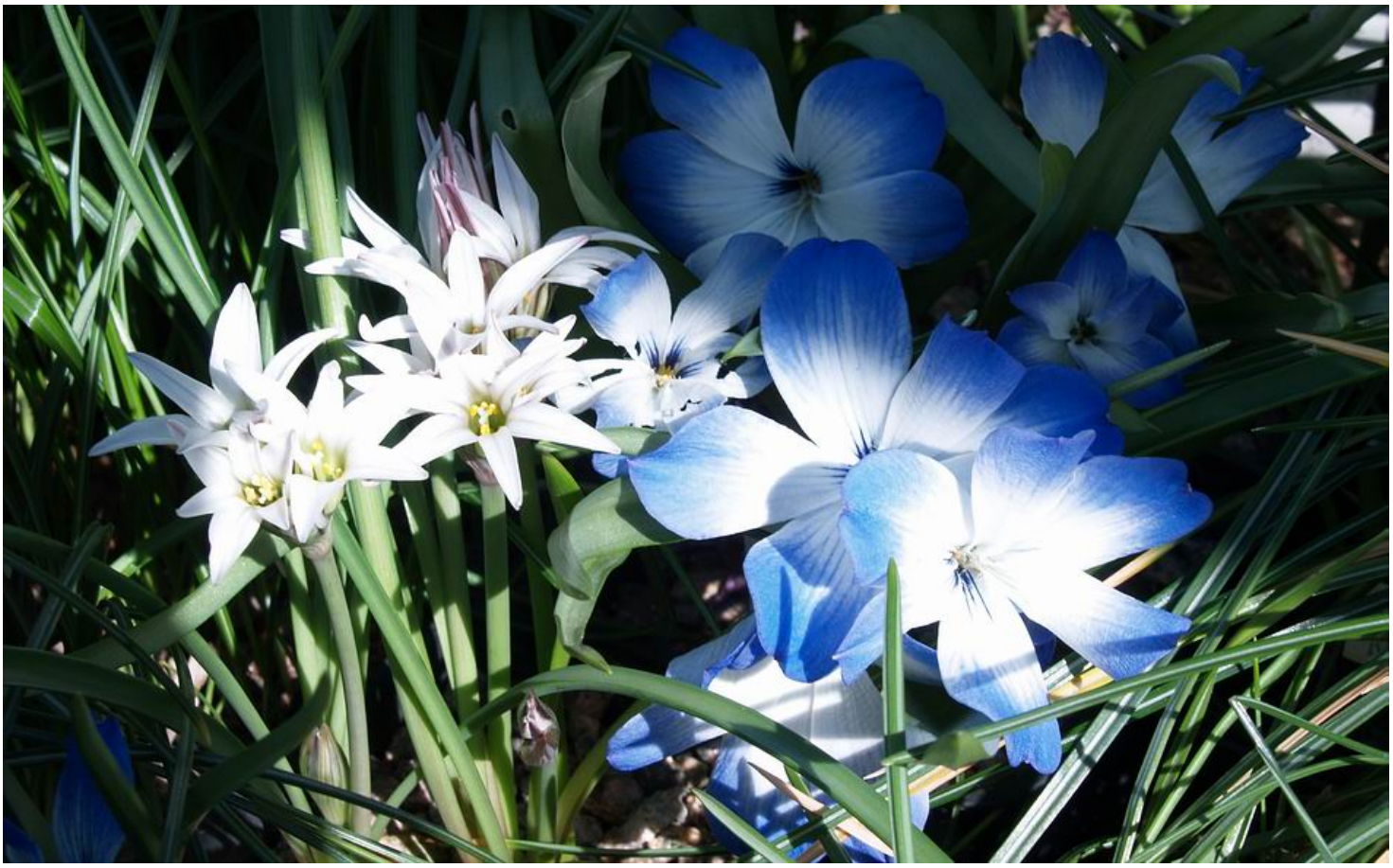
SRGC ----- Bulb Log Diary ----- Pictures and text © Ian Young

BULB LOG 14…….....…8th April 2009



Tristagma leichtlinii and Tecophilaea cyanocrocus

Above you can see two South American bulbs, Tristagma leichtlinii and Tecophilaea cyanocrocus, in its variety leichtlinii, enjoying a shaft of Scottish sunlight in our bulb house.

Tristagma leichtlinii

I have grown this interesting bulb since February 1996 when I sowed the seed collected by John Watson under the number FW8485 if I read my writing on the label correctly. There are a lot of very beautiful bulbs in South America and it is good that at least some can adapt to grow well under cold glass house conditions in Aberdeen.

Tristagma leichtlinii Seedlings

If there were to be only one message that I could send to the world's gardeners about growing bulbs it would be to grow as many of them from seed as you can.

My main objective with all the bulbs I grow is to get them to flower and give me a crop of seed.

Sown 2008 **Sown 2007**

On the left are last years seeds just germinating while on the right 2007's seed crop is into its second year of growth now.

Tristagma leichtlinii first flowers

After a few more years of growth they will flower, these were sown in 2002 and are flowering for the first time. I would expect them to flower after three or four years good growing conditions – these have taken a bit longer because I gave away the biggest bulbs in the seed pot a few years ago. One thing I do notice is that there is apparently very little in the way of variation in these flowers.

Tecophilaea cyanocrocus seedlings

These are a group of Tecophilaea cyanocrocus seedlings raised from our own garden collected seed that are also flowering for the first time this year and as you can see these show a lot of variation. The variation in this picture is less clear than in real life as I find it almost impossible to get the purple hue of Tecophilaea cyanocrocus var violaceae to reproduce in digital pictures. The flower on the left has more red in it when you see it in real life and if you compare it with the colour of the flower on the top right you can see that the image does show it to be a different hue it just does not pick up the red in the mix that gives the violet/purple colour.

Tecophilaea cyanocrocus

Tecophilaea cyanocrocus has the deepest blue flowers of any plant with a white area in the throat. There is a considerable variation in how far the white zone comes up the floral segments and at some stage it becomes known as Tecophilaea cyanocrocus var leichtlinii but I am not clear, and doubt if anyone is, exactly how much white it needs to have to become the var leichtlinii.

Tecophilaea cyanocrocus flowers

Here are two extremes selected from our own seed raised plants. The one on the right is typical of Tecophilaea cyanocrocus while the almost white one is an extreme form of var leichtlinii with only a hint of blue on the tips of the petals.

Tecophilaea cyanocrocus white

The top flower of this pair shows what I would call var leichtlinii and the lower one is the nearest seedling I have got to a pure white.

It has just a hint of blue on the reverse of the petals which starts to show through as the flower fades.

I think it shows just how obtuse we gardeners can be when a plant is famed for its incredible piercing blue we try and raise a white form. And when a flower is a stunning white as in say Trillium grandiflorum we all want the pink form.
My answer is a bit simpler than that and it is to do with the fact that when you cross pollinate Tecophilaea cyanocrocus in its different varieties you get a range of variations and white is one of them. I do not know many white forms occur in the wild, perhaps they do not persist as they are not attractive to the pollinators but in the garden they stand out and take the eye of the gardener and so will persist.

Tecophilaea cyanocrocus flowers size

This picture of Tecophilaea cyanocrocus is to show the size of some of the flowers – some are really pretty large.

Tecophilaea cyanocrocus clones

When I get a good looking variation that is also vigorous I will separate it out and grow it on as a clone as you can see in this picture.

I have named and distributed a few of the blue and white forms such as Tecophilaea ‘Craigton Cloud’

Muscari mcbeatheanum flowers

Now for a few of the choice dwarf *Muscari* species like this one named after the great Ron McBeath – not the biggest most noticeable plant to bear this name but in my mind one of the finest.

Muscari mcbeatheanum

I managed to collect a few seeds last year when our few bulbs flowered and you can see the resulting seedlings poking through the gravel on the top of this pot. As I have often mentioned when I only have a few seeds and bulbs of the same species I often sow the back in the pot with the parent to save space. It was only when I was editing the pictures that I noticed the aphid – I will wipe that out straight away.

Muscari species

Here again you can see last year's seeds germinating at the base of the parents. These were raised from collected material that I got from a generous friend a number of years ago and now they are flowering I can collect my own seeds and grow them on. There has been much discussion about the ethics of collecting plant material from the wild and I would like to remind everyone that our gardens would be very much the poorer if no collection of wild material was ever allowed. It is my belief that collecting is important and should always be done in a responsible and sustainable way that takes into account any laws and regulations of the countries involved. I prefer that most collecting should be in the form of seeds but I also appreciate the need for occasional plant material to be introduced where it is not possible to introduce a desirable or beneficial form or clone by seeds. Collection from the wild should always be in modest quantities to establish a 'parent' population in cultivation from which further stocks can be raised and large scale collecting for the purpose of retailing the collected material should not be encouraged. That brings me back to my message that as gardeners our prime aim should be to collect seeds from our plants as it is our responsibility to preserve and conserve all the plants we have in cultivation.

These two pictures of this **Muscari species** again illustrate the variation that you will get when you raise plants from seeds.

If you get a very desirable form you can then work on increasing it vegetatively as a clone or you may prefer to have a pot or colony in the garden showing the diversity of colour and form we can get from a single species.

Tulipa cretica

My interest in the smaller species of Tulips was re-awakened by the publication of the excellent book ‘Tulips’ by Richard Wilford. I have been acquiring as many as I can mostly as bulbs and again my aim is to get seeds from them so that I can establish a good seed raised stock of each species in our garden. I have seedlings sown last year of this Tulipa cretica growing in the pot with these few flowering bulbs. Careful and regular pollination with a paint brush or similar implement greatly increases the chance of getting a successful seed set.

Tulipa altaica

Tulipa altaica is another species that I have not grown before and again I have been transferring pollen on a daily basis in the hope of getting some good seeds of this delightful flower. Another big advantage of getting your own plants to set seed and then sowing and raising the offspring is that you get good quantities of bulbs and the chance to experiment with where you grow them – I will try some of these in the open garden.

Tulipa humilis 'Albocaerulea Oculata'

I think that Tulipa humilis 'Albocaerulea Oculata' has to be one of the most stunning of all bulbs with that dramatic combination of colour and form.

Tulipa humilis 'Albocaerulea Oculata'

I have not had seeds from it yet and I don’t know if it is fertile or if the seedlings come true to the parent or revert back to Tulipa humilis but it has got to be worth persisting with my efforts.