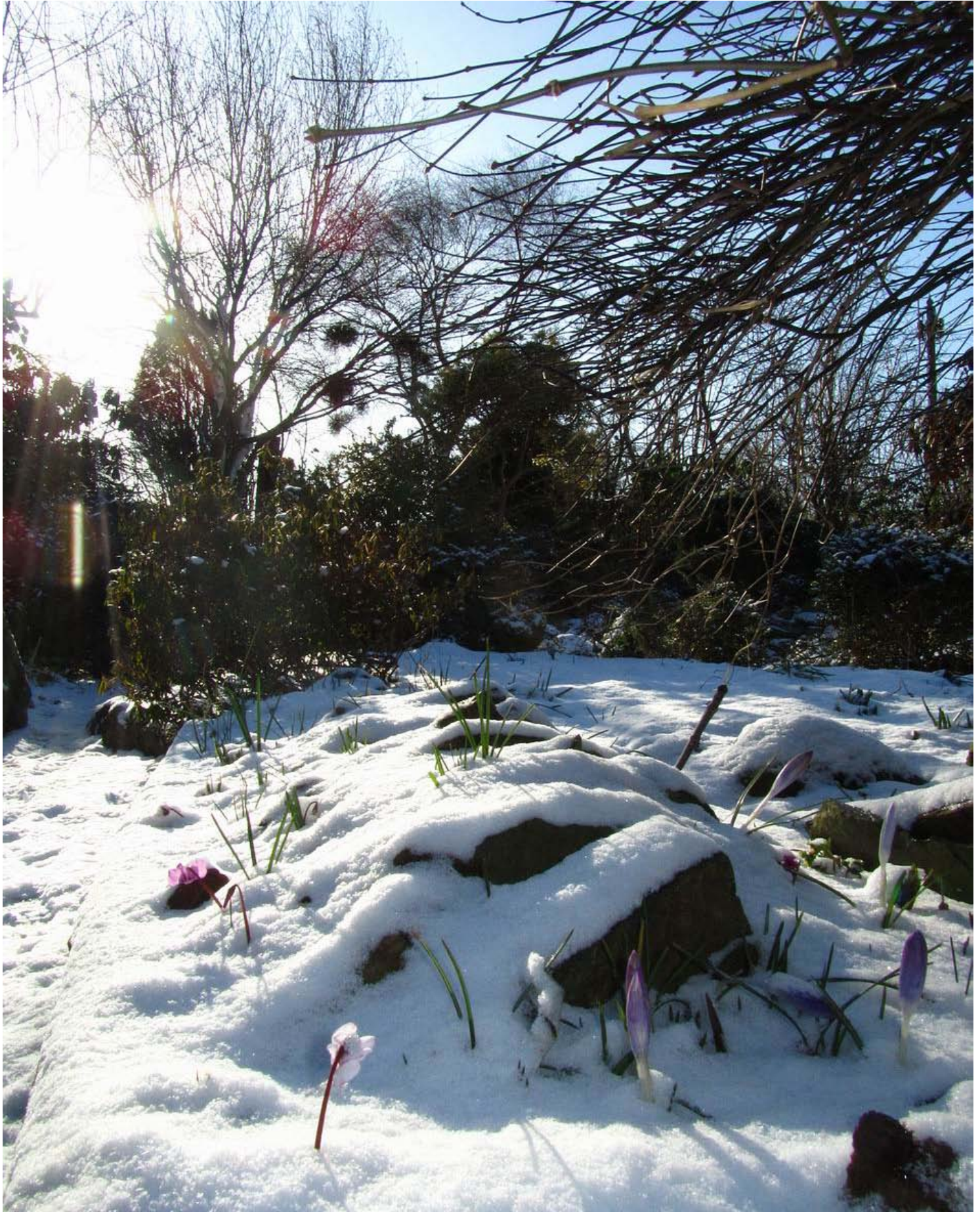




BULB LOG 08.....22nd February 2012



Snow



Galanthus 'Castle Green'

After a few weeks of milder temperatures than average for this time of year Saturday afternoon saw winter remind us that we are not yet out of its grip.



28 of us went down on a bus to Dunblane on Saturday to the Early Bulb Day which is always such a fun sociable event. We were well entertained and informed by a series of talks on Cyclamen delivered by Melvyn Jope and Martyn Denney of the Cyclamen Society. As always there was a wide range of plants on display but unfortunately I was kept busy and did not get time to see them never mind take any photographs. Not surprisingly Galanthus were very prominent in the display. Down south the Galanthus season draws to a close while here in the north is it just getting started.



Galanthus 'Elizabeth Harrison'

The interest in Galanthus has been gathering steadily over the years and it has now reached such an extent that thousands of people from all over the country attend garden visits and Gala Days to celebrate these early flowering bulbs that herald the end of winter. Not surprisingly the market for snowdrops has also grown massively and to service this growing market an ever increasing plethora of named forms are appearing in sales lists. Whether they are all different enough to justify all these names is debateable. In my view as long as there is a demand for them then it does no harm to have all these forms named and indeed it will be interesting to see how many of them will survive the test of time and still be around and recognised in twenty years. I have always been amazed at the prices people are willing to pay for named snow drops – much more than they would consider paying for most other plants. Last week a newly released form of Galanthus woronowii, with yellow ovaries and apical markings, named 'Elizabeth Harrison' sold for a world record £725.10 on Ebay. Surely this reflects the instinct of collector of rarity rather than a true love of plants. This plant was found in a Scottish garden and is a good strong growing plant that does increase and form clumps so in time it will become more widely available (and affordable). The purchaser of this most expensive snow drop is a major name in seed and plant retail and I can see the economic sense here - the publicity they could receive on the back of this could not be bought for such a sum as they paid out plus they have the resources to micro propagate the plant. I do not know if that is their intention but if successful it could make this wee beauty available to many more gardeners in a few years time. A word of caution – I have seen a number of plants that have been micro propagated over the years and the offspring of this laboratory process while superficially similar to the original often seem to lose the very charm that was their desirability. Chipping or chitting the bulb is an alternative and a method that I sometime use and when done well you can produce around thirty cuttings from a single bulb but with that price tag it will now be as nerve wracking making the cuts as it must have been to split the Kohinoor Diamond.



Eranthis hyemalis

Another early flowering bulbous plant is Eranthis hyemalis; it too can cope with the snow picking itself up as the weight of the snow melts away.



Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'

The best way to encourage any bulb to increase is to lift and replant it into fresh compost each year during its dormant period : to better enable this I have a couple of fish box troughs of Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'



Eranthis 'Guinea Gold'

Because of the very wet summer I did not manage to get them replanted last year so instead I have just removed all the weeds and debris, scattered some bone meal and lightly worked it into the surface before top dressing with some leaf mould.





Eranthis 'Guinea Gold' with snow

Two days on more flowers are pushing up through the new top dressing and we will soon be able to enjoy a sheet of gold flowers. I would have said that it is expensive to buy this plant but the average cost pales into insignificance when compared to the cost of many snowdrops.



Corydalis cashmeriana trough

Another plant that I grow in troughs for the same reasons is *Corydalis cashmeriana* – you can see this needs cleaned up to remove the liverwort and weeds.



Corydalis cashmeriana roots

Corydalis cashmeriana makes strange little rosettes of scales on top of swollen roots: if they are happy with the conditions will quickly form clumps. I have found it essential to lift and divide them every year if possible as they soon seem to go backwards and disappear quite quickly if the soil is not replenished on a regular basis. The ideal time to spilt it is after the foliage dies down in the summer and before it produces the second flush of leaves in late summer early autumn – having missed that opportunity the next best time is now. A humus-rich soil suits them best.



Crocus korolkowii seedling

Crocus are yet another of the early flowering bulbs that are well used to coping with snow when they are in flower.



Crocus herbertii

The white of the snow really shows up the egg yolk yellow flowers of *Crocus herbertii* – although sadly we do not see many eggs with that colour of yolk nowadays, except when generous chicken keeping friends share theirs with us. We are all more familiar with the previous name for this plant *Crocus gargaricus* subsp. *herbertii*.

One of the main features that defined it as a subspecies of *Crocus gargaricus* was its habit of producing stolons with new corms forming on the tips but recent DNA work shows them to be more distant relatives and so separate species. It grows very well in our garden where rather than forming dense clumps it spreads itself around making colonies as you can see clearly in the picture below.



These were originally planted in a mesh basket in the sand plunges but have escaped and are invading all the adjacent baskets. As none of the other baskets are planted with *Crocus* these invaders are a welcome addition.



Bulb house

A section of the bulb house plunge shows how much competition the bulbs have to cope with from their neighbours. This way of growing is far from ideal if you want perfect show plants that stay compact and evenly flowered all around but as my intention is to grow as many forms that I can in the relatively small glasshouses this is a compromise I am willing to accept.



Crocus biflorus issauricus

Ideally I try where possible to place the shorter growing bulbs towards the front of the plunge but in reality there are so many that fall into that category it is not possible. Another way around this situation would be to move the pots around shifting those that have flowered towards the back but the roots will have grown out into the sand of the plunge and I do not want to damage them and check the growth of the bulb.



Crocus sieberi 'Hubert Edelsten'

Crocus 'Hubert Edelsten' is one of the many wonderful forms or hybrids that involve *Crocus sieberii* – it is said to be a hybrid between two of the subspecies of *C. sieberi*.



Crocus sieberi ssp sieberi



Crocus sieberi ssp sieberi



Prop house plunge

All the bulbs in this prop house plunge are growing in 7cm square plastic pots - some of them are shown below.



Narcissus bulbocodium hybrid



Narcissus sp. Morocco shown last week but I cannot resist showing you more as the flowers open.



Narcissus cantabricus petunioides seedlings ex J&JA



Last picture this week is another of Galanthus 'Elizabeth Harrison'.