



BULB LOG 34.....23rd August 2017





Crocus vallicola and **Cyclamen hederifolium** are now flowering in this sand bed – you will also see the growth of mosses and *Sagina procumbens* that have covered the sand. In previous years I have spent hours hand weeding this small sand bed to keep it clear of such growth but now I am going to leave it to see to see if it has any effect on the growth of the bulbs. From other observations and trials I have made around the garden and in the wild, I see the benefit of plants growing in communities.



Crocus vallicola and Cyclamen hederifolium

I have a suspicion that the growth of moss and pearlwarts bothered me more than it does the plants and for now I like the more natural look.



Every time I go out and observe nature I come back refreshed, inspired and full of ideas that I can translate into the garden- last week I took some visitors, Kenton Seth and Tori Miner, down to one of my favourite areas of the coast where I am fascinated by the geology, the plants and the especially way they combine and interact.



Kenton, from Colorado, is an expert on crevice gardens who gave two excellent talks at the SRGC Summer event in Dunblane. He shared my enthusiasm for the rock structures and the way the pebbles were arranged on the shore.



I have long been using big bold rock work that would fall into the 'crevice' style as I have tried to mimic nature and this slab bed landscape is long established but some of the planting is becoming tired and showing signs that they are lacking in nutrients so I have applied a light dressing of an NPK 7-7-7 pellet fertiliser.





I am happy to allow some moss to grow so that I can observe the process but when it shows signs of overwhelming other plants I will take some action. There are two ways I can approach the issue; one is to tackle the symptoms of the problem and that is removing the moss as far as I can but for the moment I am going to go down the other root of feeding the plants. Moss often grows in soils with low levels of nutrient and feeding the plants will allow them to grow better and be able to outperform the moss.



Mosses are fascinating plants and while I am not that familiar with their names I do know that we have a number of different types in the garden,



Mosses are of great benefit to plants in rocky environments in the way that they establish a foothold where seeds of other plants can germinate. Some seem to specialise in growing in tiny cracks in rocks, forcing them open and filling them with humus into which seedlings can root.



The moss came first in this tiny crack, opening it up and forming a habitat where a birch seedling could germinate.

I am not sure it is a good idea for me to leave this *Betula* to grow in the slab bed- it could be interesting in the short term but would become a problem through the years.



Slab Bed

Some plants seem to be able to cope better with the low nutrients than others until you consider how their roots form and then it becomes clear that the plants that are growing better all have roots that search deeper into the ground where they will find more food.



Many of the alpine type plants such as the saxifrages take a summer holiday –once they have flowered and set seed their growth seems to stop as the warmer drier conditions prevail - even those of an Aberdeen summer have this effect. As we near the end of August there is a notable change in the weather as it turns autumnal with cooler nights when these plants take on another spurt of growth so I have fed all the troughs lightly with the same fertiliser.



There is a strong growth of mosses on many of my broken concrete rock landscapes and that growth is allowing other plants to seed onto the concrete also the saxifrages are spreading out from the crevices where they will root into the moist mosses.

Most of the trough and slab beds have been established for a number and over the years the plants do start to show signs of ageing and their growth is no longer as vigorous as it was when they were young and newly planted. The soils in troughs of all sizes are limited in how they can be replenished and over time they become less able to support the plants which are also ageing so we do have to be proactive in feeding when we see signs that the plants are suffering. With saxifrages and other cushions it is often the colour of the leaves that display the first signs of starvation - when they become pale and yellow looking I will add some fertiliser. On the occasions in the spring when I need to water I will always add a liquid tomato type fertiliser but at this time of year we usually have plenty of rain so I will add a pelleted fertiliser.





This rock in another of the slab beds has a growth of mosses, some opening the cracks, as well as a jelly-like slime mould. The mosses are growing on the exposed rocks in this bed but are unable to grow so well under the vigorous growth of the *Cyananthus*.





A well-established trough containing a silver saxifrage has been joined by *Erinus alpinus* and *Dactylorhiza* that have self-seeded – the saxifrage is waking from a summer rest and shows signs of growth so I have given it a light feed.



Over the long term some plants will do better than others – in this trough some saxifrages struggle to grow, some have simply been unable to tolerate our wet weather and have died out while some are coping very well and growing nicely.



Looking edge-on you can see the growth of the plants that like us is spreading up the crevices and over the broken concrete rocks – some have even seeded onto the mossy parts of the rock. I find that there are two times when I have a good success with rooting cutting from these plants and that is in the spring immediately after they have flowered and again now when they start to grow again after the summer rest – I have not had good results from cuttings taken during the peak of summer.



I use a polystyrene fish box filled with sharp sand to place my cuttings in at this time of year – the cooler days and plenty rain means that they do not lose moisture so quickly and I rarely have to water them – I will give them a missing of water on the odd hot day. They will root slowly through the autumn, winter and spring.



This is a cutting box that is a few years old now and the majority of the cuttings have already been removed and planted out directly into their new location in the garden – a few wait ready to be relocated.



A box of *Primula marginata* cuttings taken last year – see [Bulb Log 1616](#) – are very well rooted and I have already relocated an number into troughs around the new bed I created at the top of the garden near the pond.



I am satisfied with the landscaping of this new bed now and have been planting it up with the smaller growing Erythroniums, Trilliums and other plants that will grow and work well together – I will continue to add more in the coming weeks and months but the effect will not become apparent until the new growths and flowers emerge next spring.



I have some more planting to do in the trough in the foreground and I have also found a satisfactory resolution to the corner between the two troughs where the bed came to an abrupt edge.



By continuing the crevice style planting down onto the slabs I think this now looks like a natural outcrop. As it sits on a slab and will be subject to drying out I have planted it with *Primula marginata* and a saxifrage that I know from experience will be able to tolerate these conditions – I will water it until the winter sets in by which time the roots should be established.



Lysimachia paridiformis* subsp. *stenophylla



I always enjoy when the *Lysimachia paridiformis* subsp. *stenophylla* comes into flower and I must remember to take some cuttings when the flowers fade – unfortunately we have never managed to get seed to set but others in warmer areas who we have passed plants onto have.

Crocus nudiflorus

It looks like I will have to stop lifting the *Erythroniums* for this year as the flowers on *Crocus nudiflorus* are usually an indication that the soil conditions will be cool and moist enough to trigger the *Erythroniums* into rooting.

As you will see below, this *Crocus* was not planted in this sand plunge but has made itself at home running between the mesh baskets of *Erythroniums* in the plunge.



Above *Crocus nudiflorus* flowering in the *Erythronium* plunge bed and on the left the first flower to bloom in the new bed is one of the *Crocus nudiflorus* corms that I planted out when I was repotting the *Erythronium sibiricum*.

Crocus nudiflorus



Cyclamen hederifolium and Colchium are also detecting the early signs that autumn is fast approaching as their flowers start to emerge.



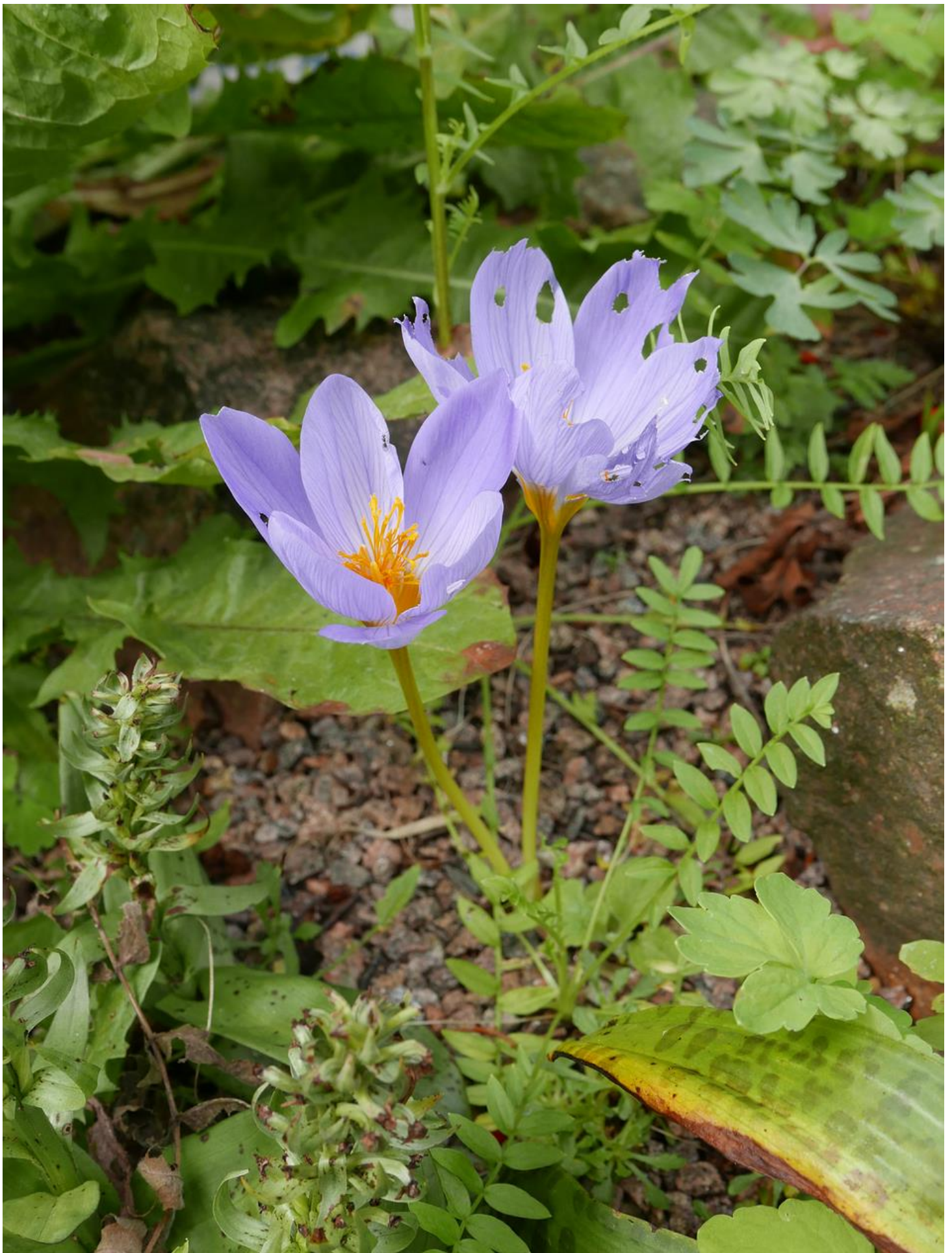
Colchicum



Late summer flowering Lily hybrids put on their display in the front garden but for me they do not come close to the beauty and purity of *Lilium* shown below.



Lilium candidum



Crocus speciosus xantholaimos

We should not expect perfection in the garden and we do need to learn to accept and live with the many other diverse life forms that share the habitats we create: some of these are more welcome than others and while I do not mind the odd Crocus flower being chewed by slugs a time comes when we need some element of balance.....