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# Bulb Log Diary

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## Narcissus 'Craigton Chorister'

Narcissus 'Craigton Chorister', one of my own hybrids, is in full flower now.

Unfortunately due to our low light levels the stems of all the winter flowering bulbs are drawn up in a futile attempt to find better light. There is a solution, that is to move to central Japan, or similar lower latitude, where winter light levels are high and Narcissus flower on beautiful short stems. To see this click the link to the forum and see how

well Narcissus 'Craigton Chorister' grows for [Tatsuo Y.](#)



Studying the many Narcissus flowering in the sand beds highlights how promiscuous this group are as there are so many variations. The keen-eyed can spot *Narcissus romieuxii*, *romieuxii* var *mesatlanticus*, *albidus foliosus*, 'Camoro' among the many variations and hybrids that these forms have given rise to in our bulb houses.



A closer view to look for the subtle variations of this hybrid swarm.



I like this hybrid for the way its longer petals stand out around the corona like a star – note the yellow style and filaments.



Those with more yellow generally indicate *Narcissus romieuxii* as one of the parents –the style and filaments are also the same colour but other features suggest it is a hybrid.



***Narcissus romieuxii***



It is not only the plants and flowers that struggle with this low light it makes it very difficult for me to take good pictures. There are various ways to tackle such low light - one is to use a tripod to hold the camera steady which will allow a long exposure but it is not possible for me to focus in on the individual flowers in the mass plantings from a tripod so for the majority of pictures I take the camera is hand held. Hand holding a camera leads to problems of sharpness

so no matter how steady you think your hand is, there will be movement, which will become most noticeable at low shutter speeds.



One adaptation I have used when appropriate for many years is to place a sheet of grey card behind the subject to isolate the subject from a distracting background.





**Narcissus romieuxii seedlings.**



No Flash



With Flash

I will often use flash, in the form of the small simple flash unit on my camera, to get sharp images but this leads to problems with exposure as you can see above right where the flash has burnt out the detail of the flowers. There are ways to control this - one method I use is to place a bit of white tissue over the flash to reduce the intensity, the tissue can be folded into layers to increase the filtering, this can produce acceptable results. Another way is to move further away from the subject and use the zoom lens to frame the flowers this also has the effect of reducing the intensity of the flash light falling on the subject.

We are all familiar with how the aperture value and exposure time affect the image – fast exposure times minimise camera shake giving nice sharp images while a small aperture (largest value) gives the maximum depth of field but reduces the light falling on to the sensor. I find the image sensors of modern digital cameras are so good now that I can also use the ISO as a third parameter of exposure. The digital camera I mostly use is a compact Panasonic Lumix DMC-LX100 which has an ISO range from 200 to 12800 and in ideal conditions I use the lowest ISO setting which gives the best quality ( less grainy) image however I often push that up to 1600 in the low light conditions.



1/60S, f6.3, ISO 200



1/2000s, f16, ISO 25600

It is well worth while exploring the extremes and limits of the camera you are using - these two pictures using the extremes of ISO show the range in quality of the image with the lowest on the left and the highest, more grainy, on the right. Except in extreme circumstances I would not use the highest ISO setting but in many of the pictures I use in the Bulb Log I regularly use up to ISO1600.







I have been experimenting with another method to help in low light – using a small hand held torch. With my camera in one hand and a small LED torch in the other I can cast some added light onto the subject. The background of the image gives a good indication of how dark it was at mid-day when I took this picture also I find that the light from the LED torch is pretty neutral in colour so does not affect the white balance. The next few pictures were also taken this way.



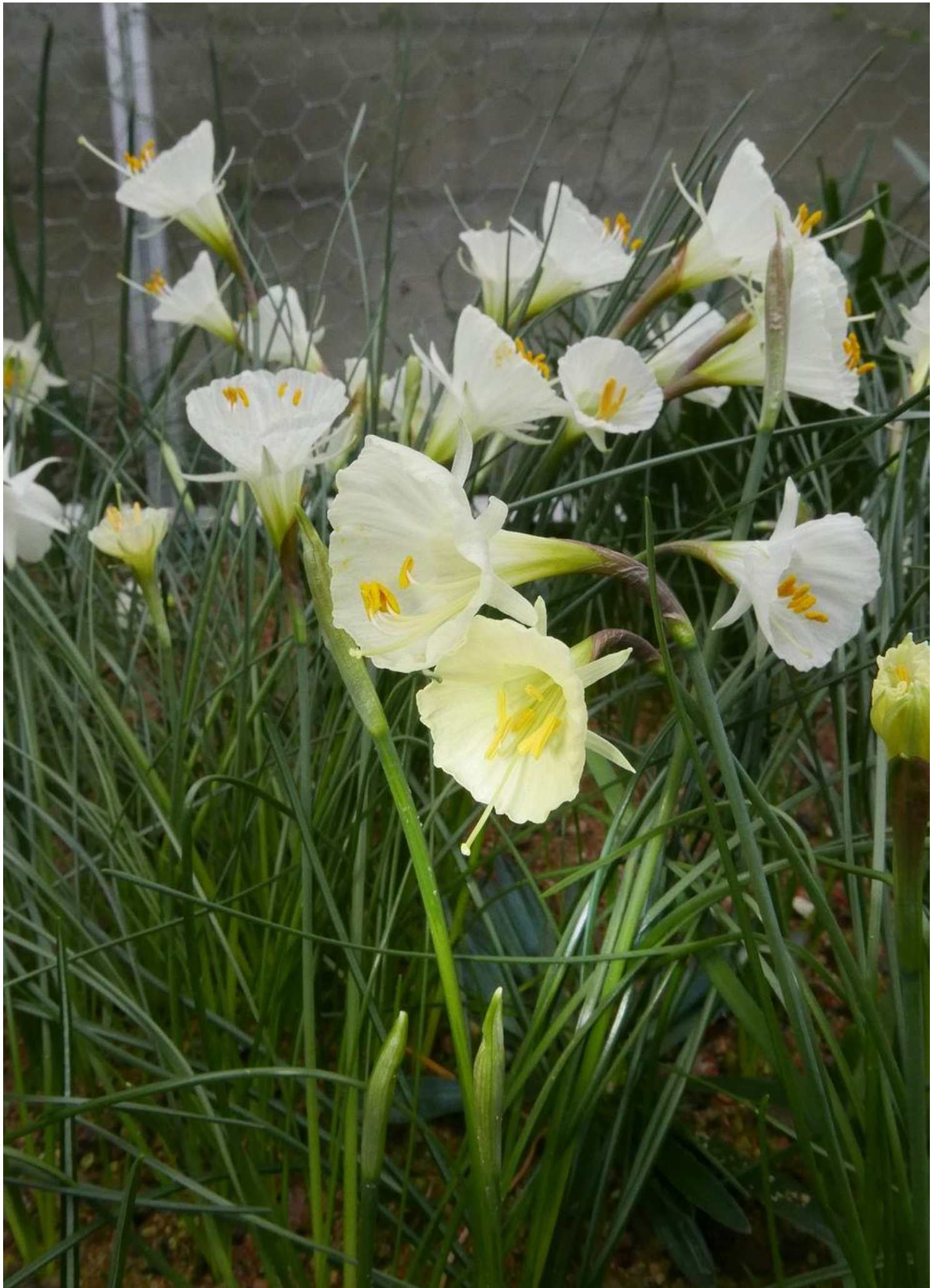


**Narcissus  
'Craigton  
Clanger'**

The first of this year's flowers on Narcissus 'Craigton Clanger', a hybrid between *Narcissus romieuxii* and *bulbocodium*, are opening.



I pictured this group of Narcissus seedlings in low light using an ISO of 1600.



The main subject of two different Narcissus seedlings is picked out in light from the torch.



When the weather permits I continue clearing up what remains of last season's growth and preparing the ground for the imminent burst of growth for which there is already evidence. Most of the clearing involves removing the dead stems and fallen leaves where necessary. Some plants like the Helleborus and ferns still have attractive green leaves and I like

to leave them for as long as possible but there comes the time when I have to weigh up the benefit of enjoying their decorative value in the winter garden against them lying on top of and obstructing the new bulb shoots emerging.

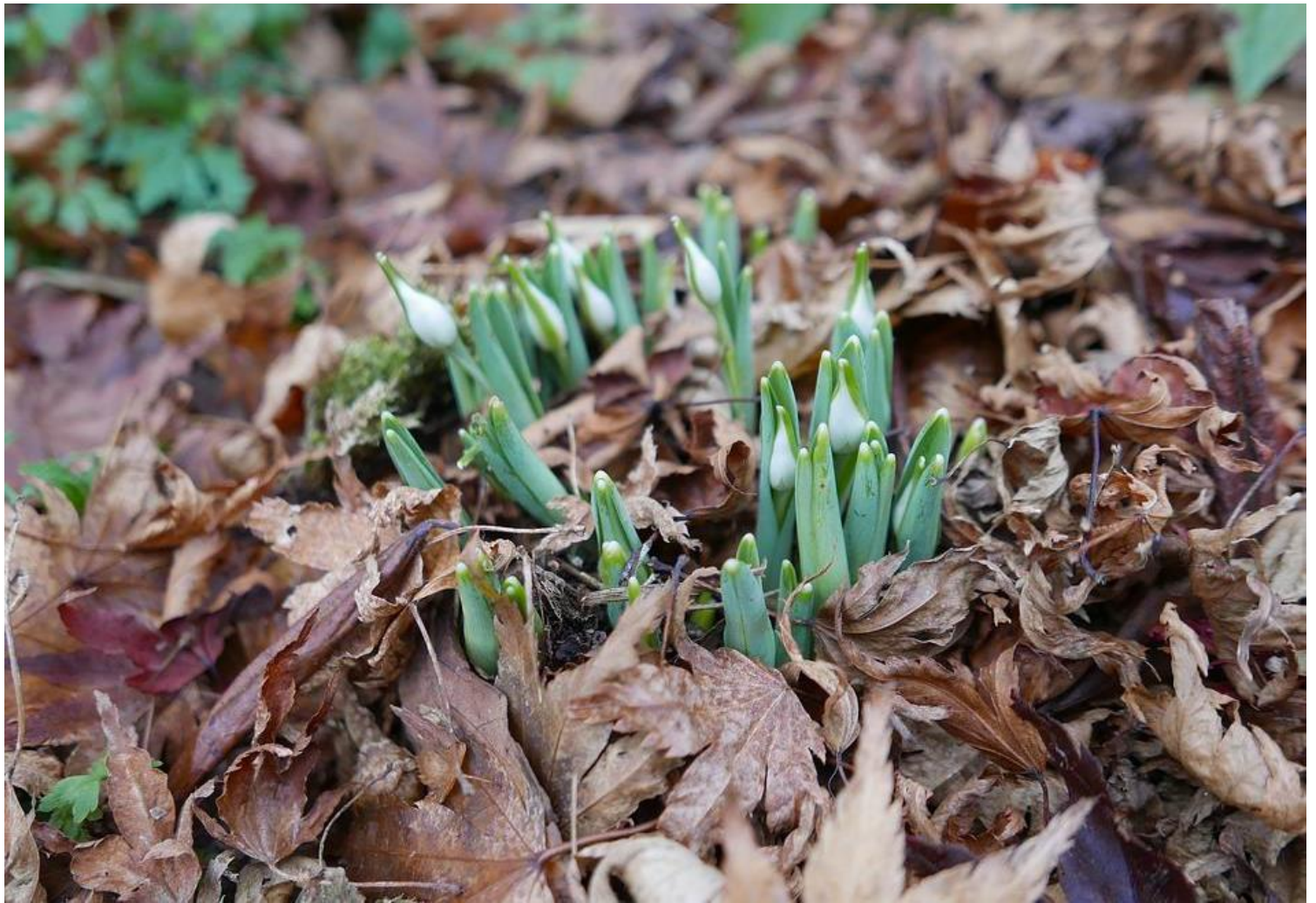


Here you can see that I have made the decision and removed the Hellebore and fern leaves.



I find it a hard to remove the beautiful fronds of the many winter green ferns we grow such as this narrow crinkly edged form of *Asplenium scolopendrium* but on revealing a clump of *Galanthus* shoots which were hidden below the arching fronds I am reminded of the necessity of this task. I also find that the new growth of new fronds on the fern grow better when the old growths are removed.





The group of *Galanthus* that emerged from under the shade of the fern will now grow all the better in the light.



I have also removed last year's fronds from the *Asplenium scolopendrium* seeded along the edge of this path.



Above and below are pictures before and after the removal of some Hellebore leaves – their removal will allow the Eranthis that share this area to grow as well as letting more light into their own flower buds that are already showing signs of growth.





Even troughs need a clear up as I remove the *Dactylorhiza* stems that have shed all their seed and cut back the fern and grass in this wild natural style planting.







*Crocus laevigatus* is the first to start flowering on the rock garden.



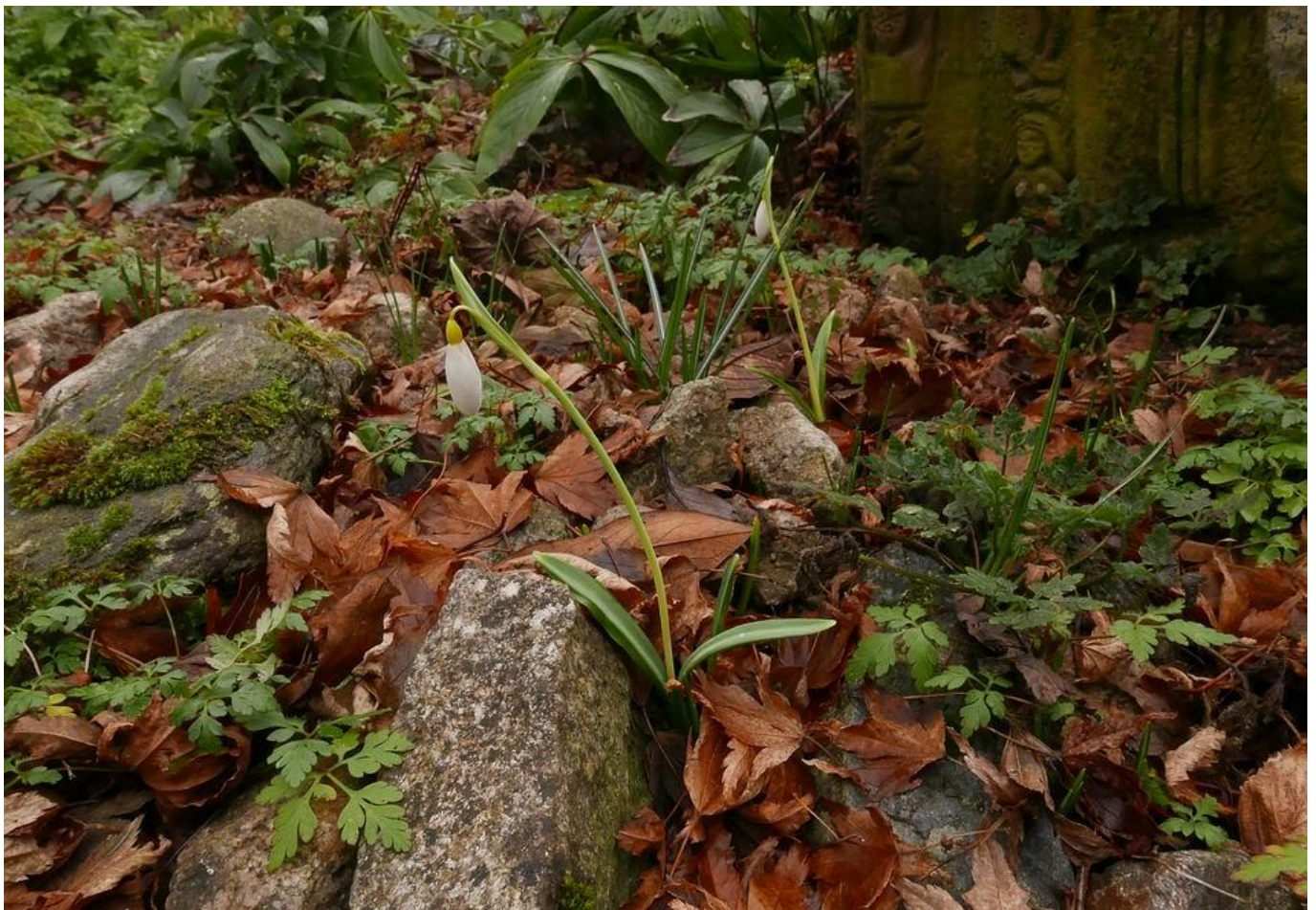
Snowdrops looking very natural growing through a mulch of fallen leaves.



Snowdrops forming clumps that I would like to split up and spread out before next year.



I much prefer spread out individuals or small groups of bulbs to massive clumps and this small group was part of one of those large clumps that I lifted and replanted in late summer making many such small groups.



Some yellow snowdrops that I planted into the cobble covered sand bed making a welcome appearance.



**Galanthus 'Glenorma'** is a lovely robust snowdrop found by Sue and Wol Staines at their Glen Chantry garden. As not all Galanthus survive in our garden we grew the 'special' ones in pots until the number of bulbs increases to around five then I will try a couple outside. This is the first year outside for 'Glenorma' and so far it is doing well – I like the size and shape of the flower and the fact that the flower seems to open at a lower temperature than do many of the others we grow. Here the ground temperature is  $-3.5^{\circ}\text{C}$  and the air temperature  $+0.5^{\circ}\text{C}$ .



The rest of our **Galanthus 'Glenorma'** are still growing in a pot in the bulb house (above and below) however if those planted outside continue to do well then these will in due course follow.



Finishing this week photographing in the low light which challenges the bulbs and this photographer.....