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Bulb Log Diary

ISSN 2514-6114

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BULB LOG 40.....3rd October 2018

Autumn Crocus





I return again to the flowering stars of autumn, Colchicum, Crocus and Cyclamen. Last Wednesday, as I prepared to load Bulb Log 39, we had an unusually warm sunny autumn day which resulted in all the flowers opening and delivering the best day for autumn crocus flowers I can remember in our garden.

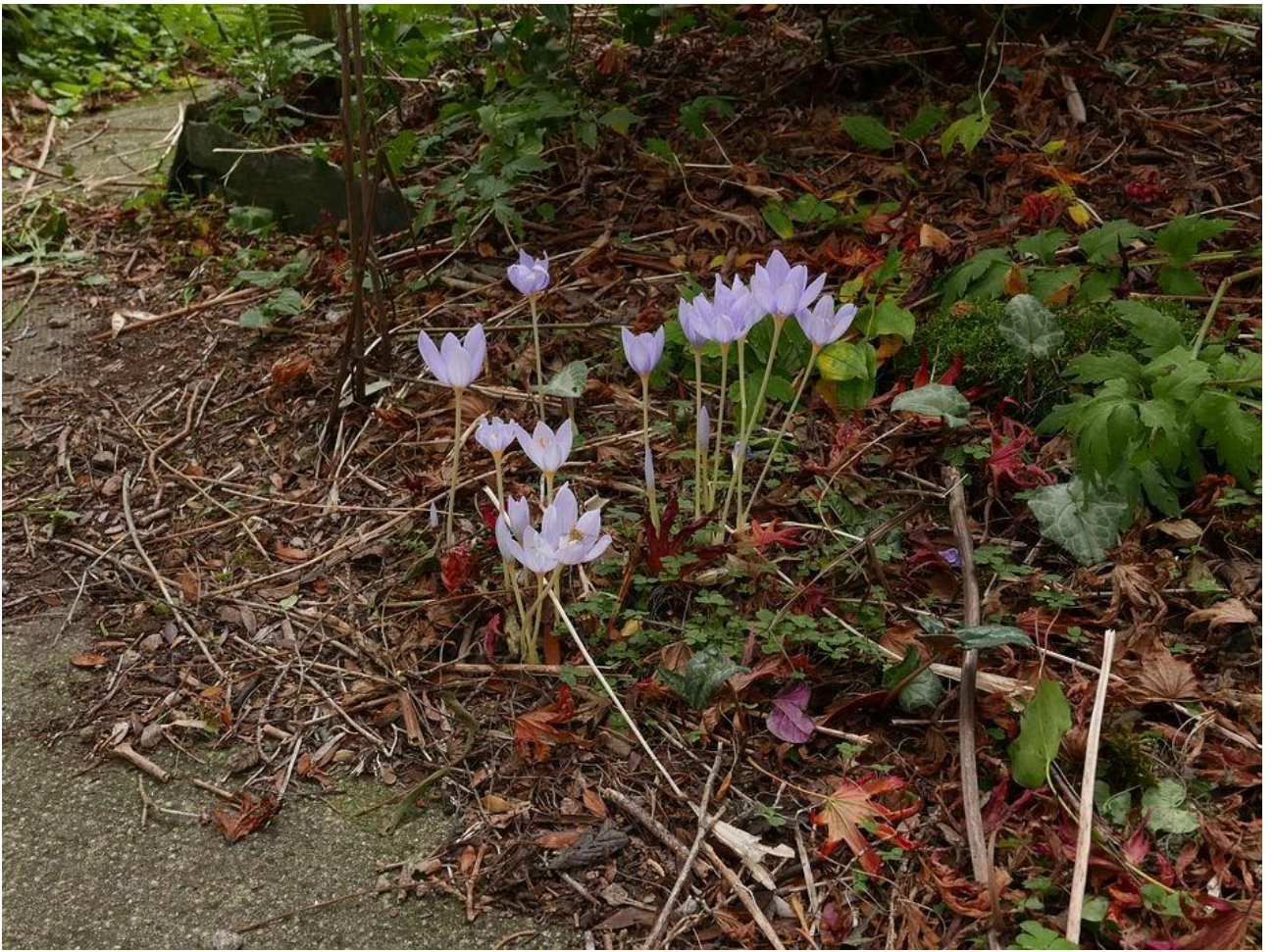


One week on the two flowers of **Crocus kotschyanus** in the foreground had become five: the subject of this week's cover - one of the character features of this species is the shape of the central yellow zone at one time it was known as *Crocus zonatus*.



Crocus pulchellus seeds around the garden often hybridising with other species.

Here another group of **Crocus pulchellus** seeded at the edge of a path. The warm day also brought out many pollinators, mostly hover flies, and I hope that will result in a good seed set in the spring to sustain further generations and keep ahead of the predation by mice.

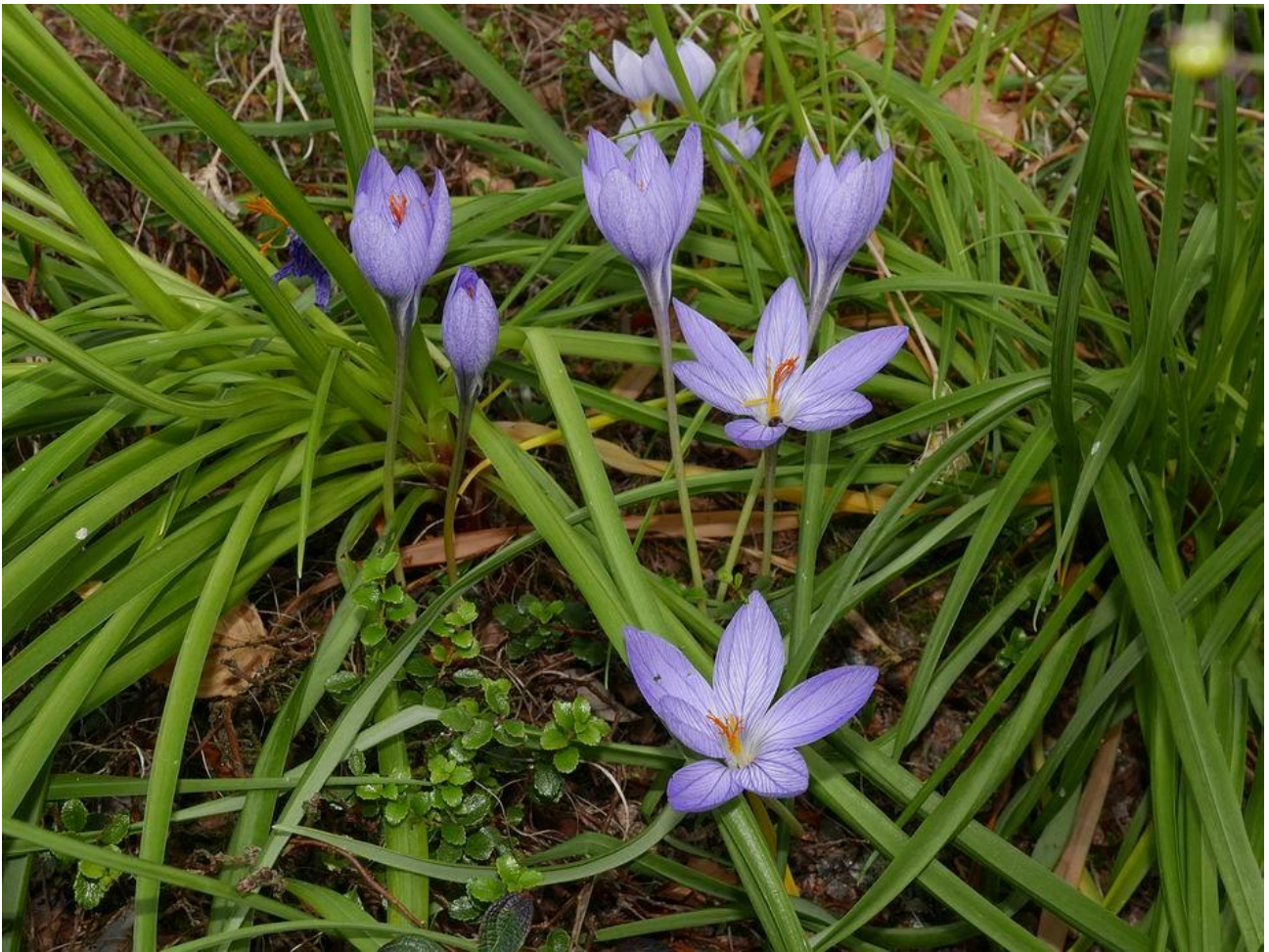


Crocus nudiflorus flowers open in the sunshine.

Many bulbs will form clumps in the garden but I prefer to plant them individually as I did here in the new bed I created last year. In time many will form clumps which I can choose to leave or split up replanting the corms singly again.



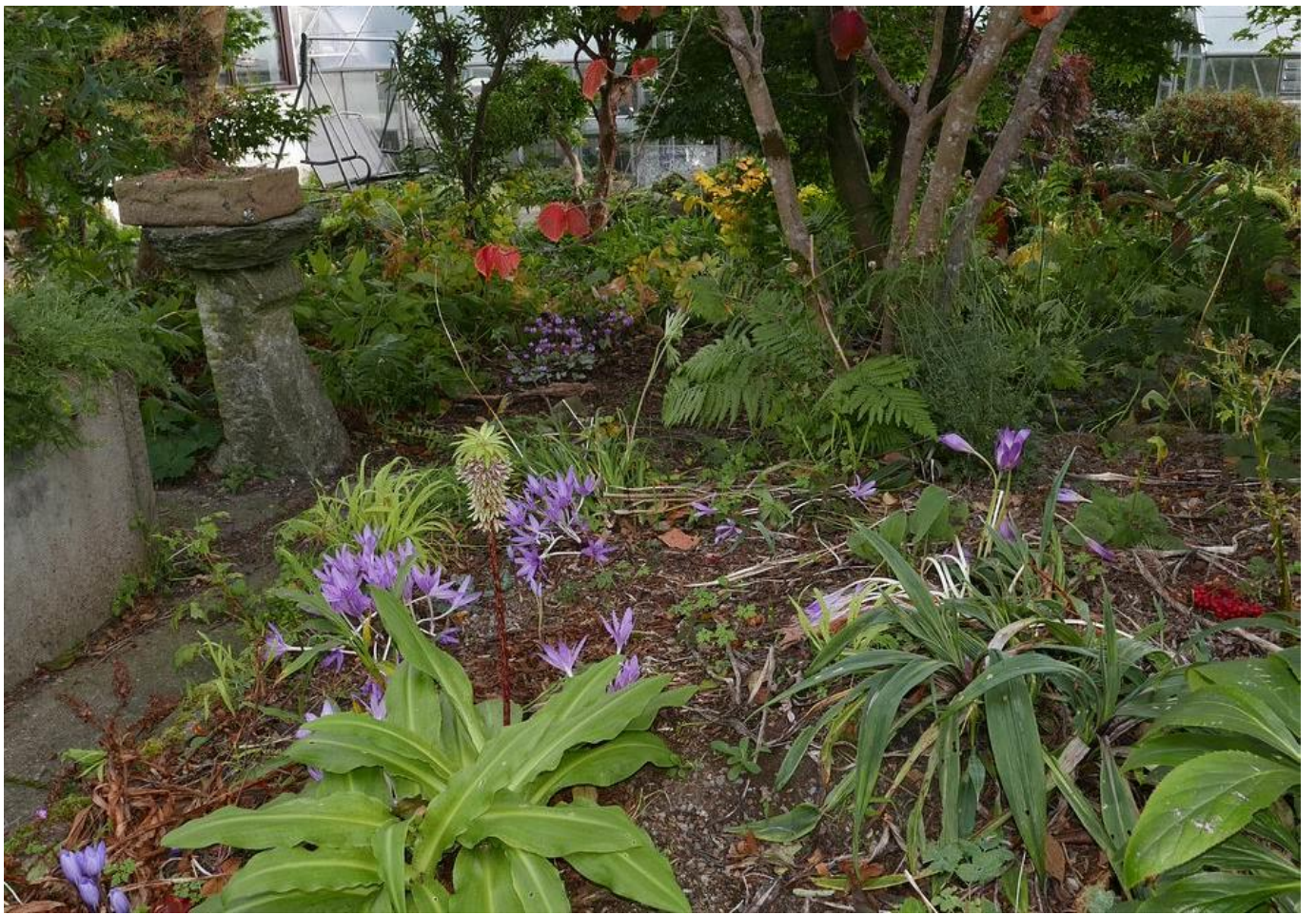
Crocus banaticus



Crocus speciosus



Crocus speciosus dark form



Autumn Colchicum and Autumn Crocus growing together in the rock garden bed.



Colchicum agrippinum



Colchicum agrippinum



Colchicum speciosum album





Colchicum speciosum

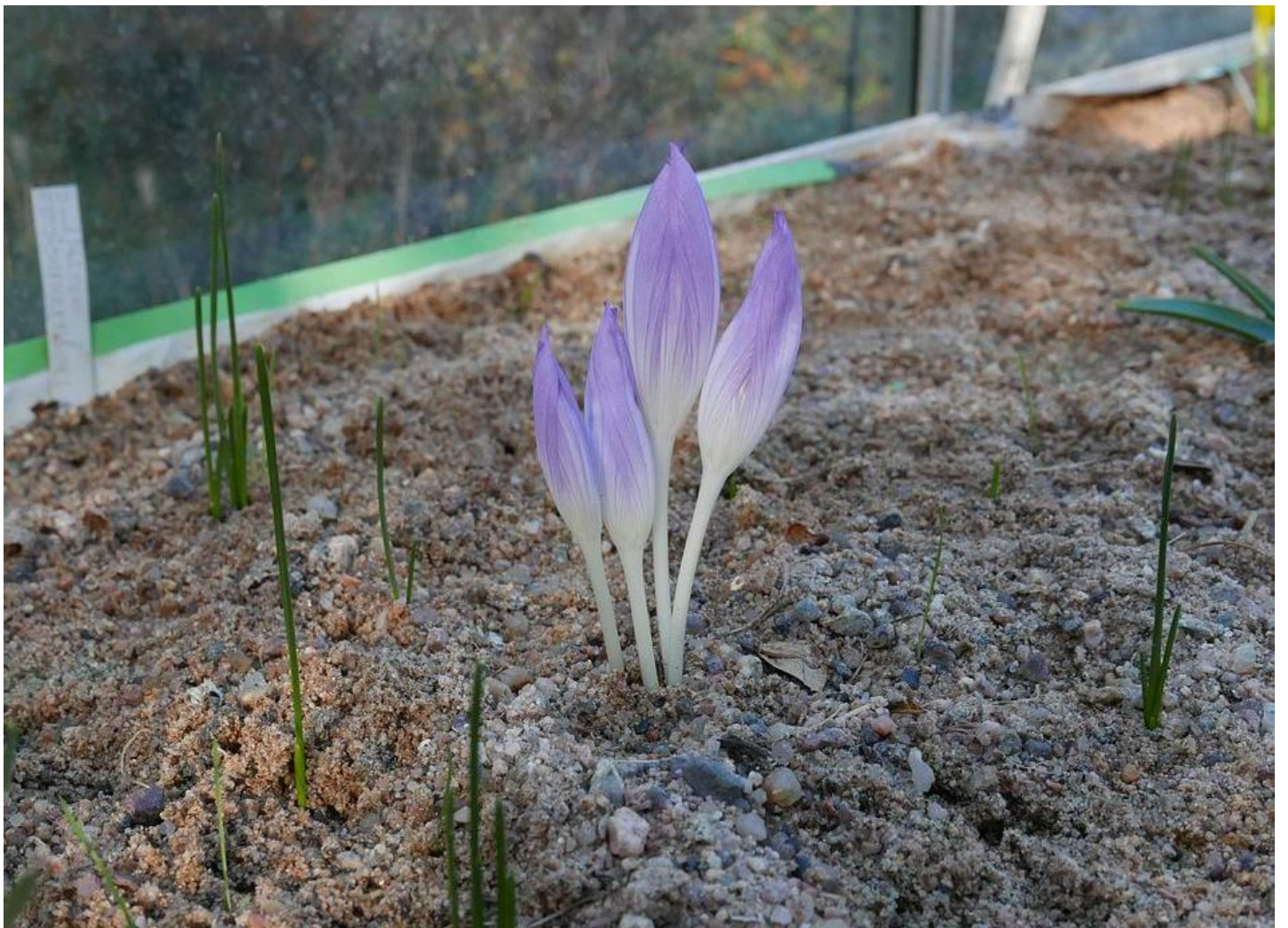


Colchicum montanum and Cyclamen cilicium

Moving in to the bulb houses where new growths are emerging every day.



Crocus karduchorum is increasing well in the sand doubling up in a year so one last year became two this, above, and two became four below.



Crocus karduchorum



Sternbergia sicula



Sternbergia sicula



Sternbergia clusiana



Sternbergia clusiana is flowering again this year and I am using my finger to transfer pollen onto the stigma in hoping for a successful pollination and some seed.

While I had the pollen on my finger I also cross pollinated it with the Sternbergia sicula flowers that are also flowering in this sand bed.



Sternbergia clusiana

Perhaps I did not need to bother as a group of hover flies arrived working between the various flowers. I suspect that the hook like appendages on the outer three floral segments which are tipped with 'hairs' have evolved to wick the scent and help attract pollinators. I have observed this feature on the flowers of many other genera of bulbs.



Sternbergia sicula

I do not know if these two species will hybridise but I have nothing to lose in trying the cross.



Regular readers will know that having watered the bulb houses at the beginning of September I always apply a second complete storm on the 1st October. The precise timing of these two soakings is not critical and indeed in warmer areas it may be best to delay them for around a month but you should deliver two complete, thorough waterings to ensure that there is sufficient water to support the growth of a good root system. In between these two storms I have been giving additional water to some individual plants in the sand and pots as I gauged

necessary. From now on my general guide is to water in proportion to the amount of leaf growth – more leaves will use water up quicker. The frequency of watering also depends on the temperature –warmer conditions lead to more transpiration and evaporation so that water usage and loss needs to be replaced.



A day or so after watering the sand beds I will carefully go over the sand with a small implement of some kind to break the surface back into a crumb – if I do not do this an impervious crust will form and patches of fine material wash to the surface which can lead to the growth of moss and algae.



When roughing up the surface of the sand I take care and pay great attention not to damage any emerging growth and am always delighted when I find a germinating bulb seed of some kind.

The leaf growth is quite advanced in this sand bed and the above ground growth will be reflected in a good root system below hence the need to ensure that there is always sufficient moisture throughout the growing season and especially at times of active growth.





The pots have also received their second storm and from now on each pot will be watered individually according to need.



The more leaves there are, the more water is needed.



Sown a few months ago and left outside this pot of *Narcissus cantabricus* seed is germinating well – I have moved it under glass now to protect it from the frosts which could kill the seedlings at this early stage of growth.



In the week since I was pollinating *Sternbergia clusiana* the flower has faded and I am noticing a swelling where it breaks through the sand, this the seedpod and I am encouraged by the swelling to think that I may get some seed. If I do get seed it will be five to seven years before I know if it has come true to this species or if a cross with *Sternbergia sicula* has occurred.



I took these Saxifrage cuttings in mid-August, [Bulb Log 3318](#), placing them in a box of sand in a shaded spot and this week I could not resist having a look to see how they were doing so I lifted the one that looked to be growing the most.



Indeed this cutting has rooted sufficiently to be planted out or in this case I potted it on.



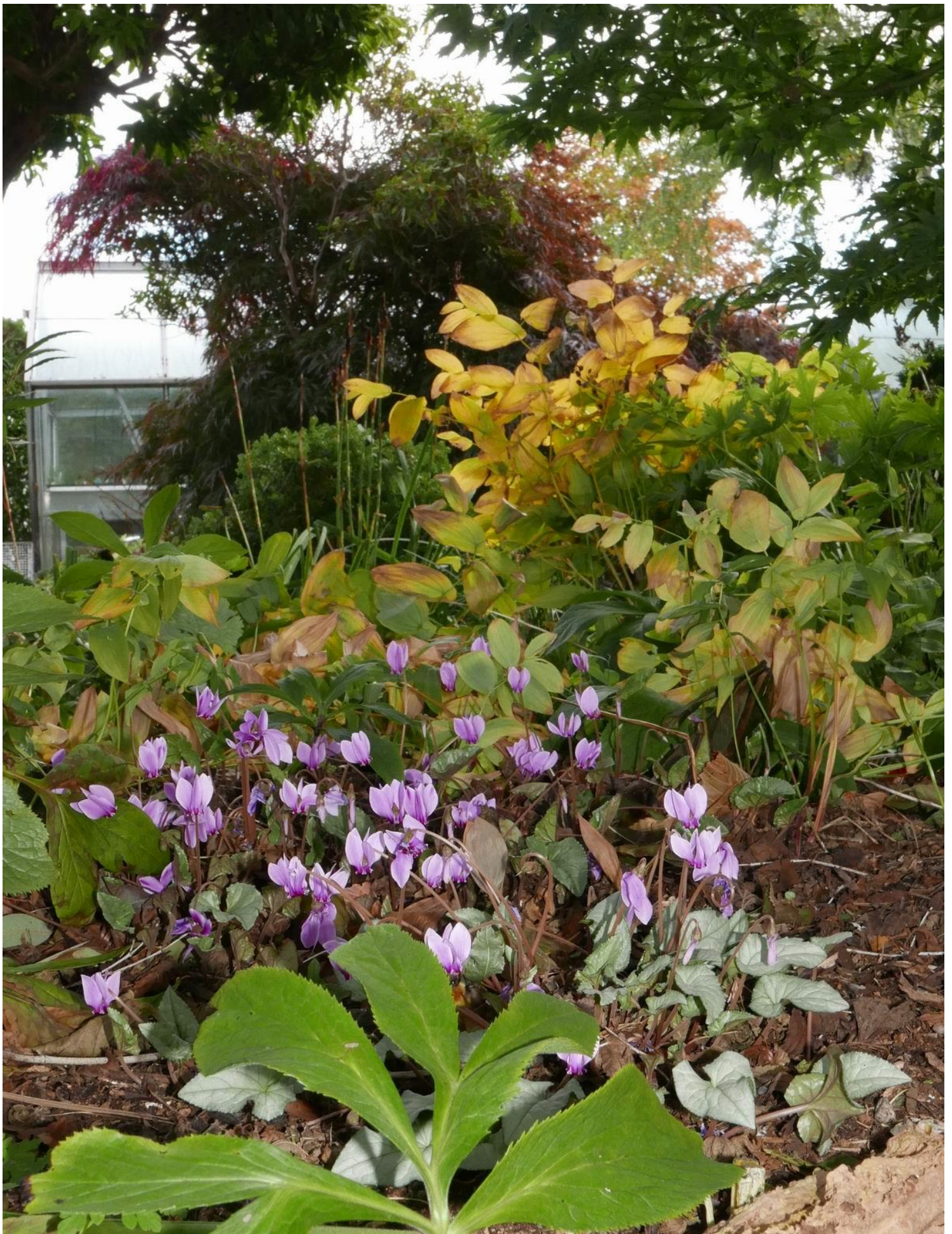
Moving back into the bulb house sand beds to see **Cyclamen mirabile**, above and **Cyclamen cilicicum**, below.





Both these forms of **Cyclamen hederifolium** have been flowering for a number of weeks before the leaves appeared now in response to the increased level of moisture their leaves are growing.





These autumn Cyclamen, Crocus and Colchicum come into flower and growth just as the herbaceous plants and tree leaves turn colour prior to falling for the winter – autumn is seen by many as the end of a growing year but for me it is the start of the next cycle.....