



BULB LOG 13 .....30<sup>th</sup> March 2022



*Corydalis malkensis* and *C. solida*



**Corydalis malkensis**, native to the Caucasus, has been in UK gardens since at least the 1960's and in 1993 it was given an Award of Garden Merit by the RHS. I agree it is an outstanding garden plant but since those early days many have changed their minds or formed the opinion that it is a 'weedy' species on the basis that it is self-compatible and when it likes your conditions it will seed around freely covering areas with its beautiful creamy white flowers, which I love. I find it strange how some people will change their opinion of a plant when it seeds and grows well like this while these are the very characteristics I try to encourage in plants. The dictionary definition of a weed is a wild plant growing where it is not wanted and in competition with cultivated plants which in an agricultural context I can understand. In the garden for the benefit of wildlife and biodiversity we should encourage wild plants to grow alongside cultivated ones. I accept there are some plants of wild and cultivated origin that grow so readily and intensively that they prevent other plants from growing, these should be avoided. *Corydalis malkensis* flowers early, covering large areas of our garden before or just as other plants are coming into growth then, within a month or six weeks, the corydalis will have set seed and retreated to an underground tuber until next year, leaving the space for the next sequence of plants to delight us.



These early flowering tuberous *Corydalis*, such as *Corydalis malkensis*, have the shortest active growing period of all the bulbs we grow with their foliage disappearing quickly after the flowers and seed is set.

***Corydalis malkensis***





None of the **Corydalis malkensis** in the garden were planted as a tuber, in fact I can't remember when or how we first introduced it, they are all now self-seeded - sometimes I do help by gathering and scattering some seed to introduce it to other areas. It will start flowering from seed in two or three years and then it is self-perpetuating. Here it is growing in quite dry, very gritty soil in the shaded leg of the rock garden.



Here in a sunnier bed **Corydalis malkensis** is currently the star show having taken over from the Eranthis, Galanthus and Leucojum which have already flowered and before the Erythronium, Fritillaria and Trillium come into their season.



The yellow flowers of **Erythronium tuolumnense** just starting to show among the sea of **Corydalis malkensis** which will collapse when it sets seed, as the stems of the other subjects push their flowers up to attract attention.

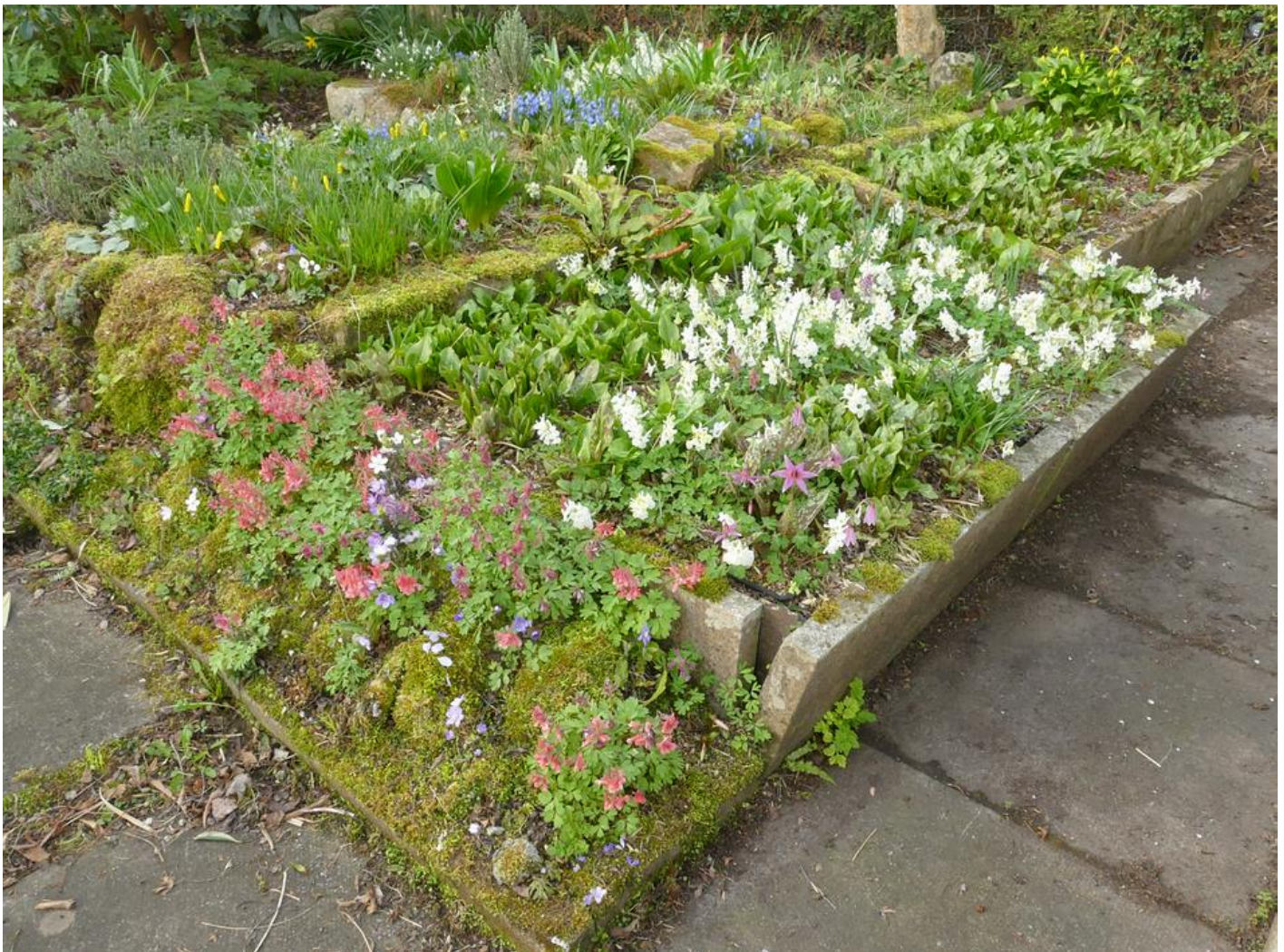
**Corydalis malkensis** associates so well with Erythronium that I grow it in the sand plunge among the baskets of erythronium and I think you will agree this is much more attractive than looking at just bear sand before the erythroniums come into growth. Here rather than being a 'weed' the corydalis growth inhibits the growth of other less desirable plants that seed around such as Hairy Bittercress, which I do wonder if we worry too much about!





The **Corydalis malkensis** causes no harm at all to the emerging growth including *Erythronium dens-canis* the first species to flower in this sand plunge. It seems irrational to me that people would exclude this beauty from their garden just because it grows so willingly while at the same time trying to coax other plants that are unlikely to ever grow in their conditions to establish. Such self-seeding

plants, that are also gentle with their neighbours, often bring a benefit that supports and encourages a wider plant community like we so often see in natural habitats.



Soon the Corydalis will be gone and this plunge bed will be bursting with the colour of *Erythronium* flowers.



This pink forms is one of the earlier flowering of our many **Corydalis solida** forms which I am sure I will show in the coming weeks.



As the snowdrops fade, Corydalis grows in perfect harmony with the small white, sometimes pink washed, flowers of **Hepatica nobilis var. pyrenaica** flowering in advance of many other small bulbs that will soon appear.



I occasionally find violet tinted flowers among the otherwise creamy white flowered population of **Corydalis malkensis** and I am not sure if these are just a genetic variation or if they may be hybrids.



Now let me introduce you to another species - this one native to Ukraine - we got our first plant of **Corydalis paczoskii** in 2007 and since then, being self-compatible, we have encouraged it to seed freely around our garden.



With smaller pinky violet flowers **Corydalis paczoskii** is a more subtle plant than *Corydalis malkensis*, so being less showy it does not jump out the same but it is none the less a good addition. In the right place it is a very welcome plant at this time of year - here we have encouraged it to seed around one of the raised beds among small shrubs and other plants which are still very much in their winter state then by the time they start to grow and flower *Corydalis paczoskii* will have flowered, seeded and retreated underground.



**Corydalis paczoskii** is a gentle plant causing no problems to the cushions or shrubs that it grows among.





***Erythronium hendersonii***

Growing in one of the smaller sand plunges *Erythronium hendersonii* is among the earliest of the Western North American species to flower each year – take a look at what is among the plants growing around its base.



**Corydalis paczoskii** seeds around in the sand and the plunge baskets flowering before most of the erythronium get going.



The long thin leaves of *Crocus nudiflorus*, an autumn flowering species, also volunteered to grow in this bed - bringing us flowers when all the erythronium are back underground and the bed would otherwise be bare of plants. The long thin seed pods have already formed on the earlier flowering *Corydalis paczoskii* and the seed, which will be shed within

weeks, will survive in the ground until it germinates this time next year.



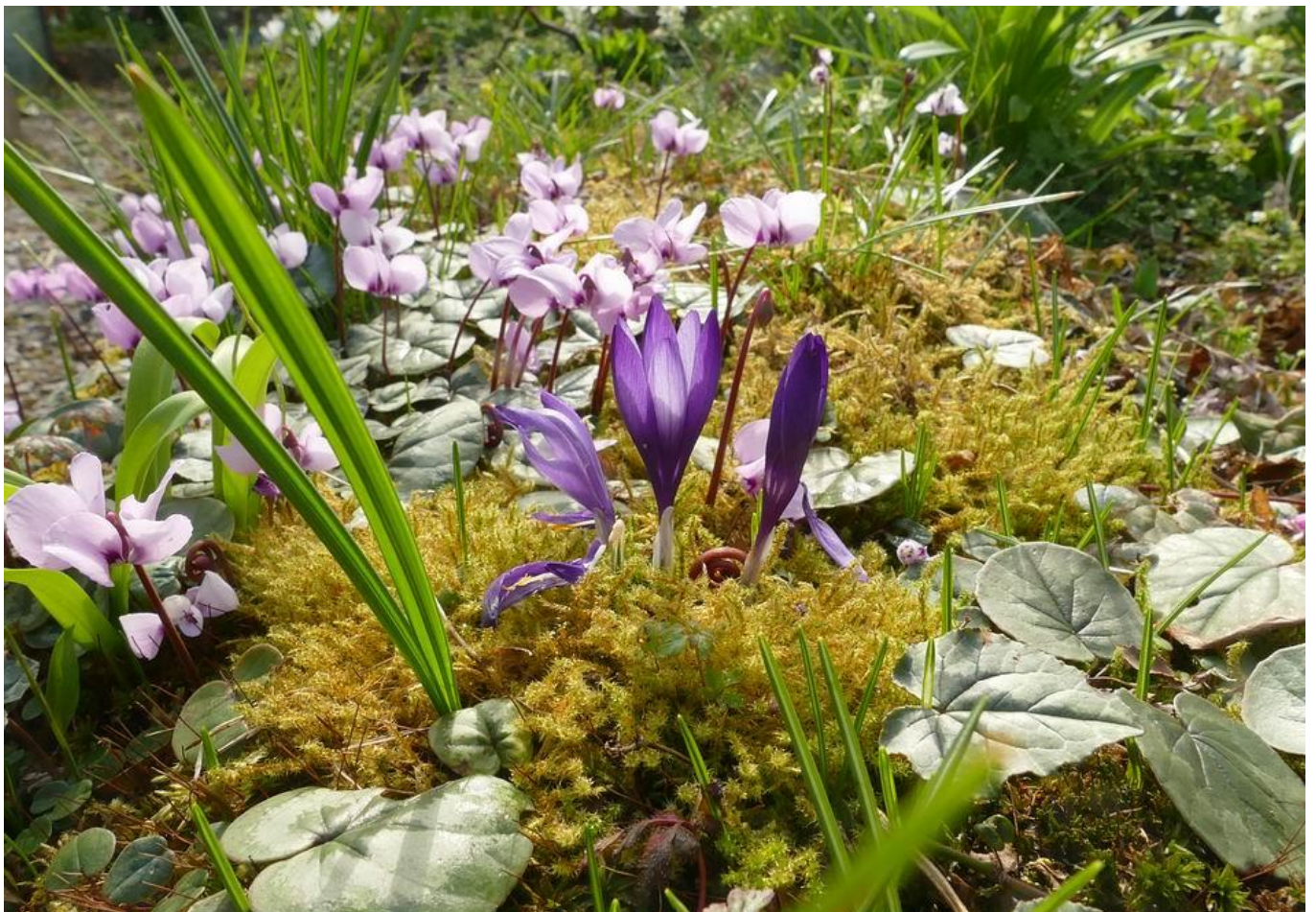
A group of first year seed leaves can be seen in the top left of this picture and this success is what leads some people to describe both *Corydalis paczoskii* and *Corydalis malkensis* as a weedy species. Should you wish, it is very easy to prevent excessive seeding by removing the stems as the seed pods ripen.



Here it is (Pseudo)Trillium rivale that is seeding around generously – would they also call this a weed?

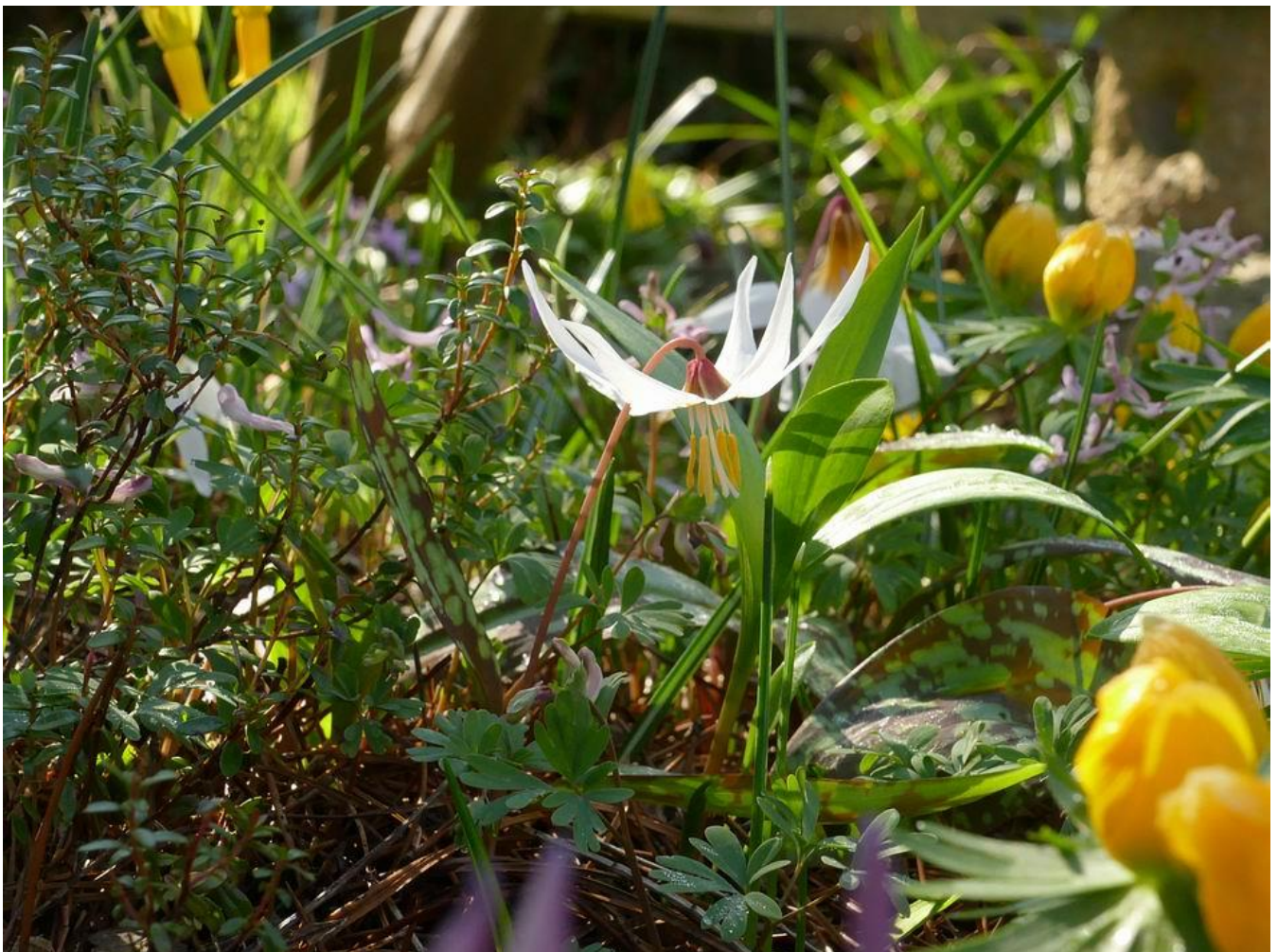


Moving on the first flowers of **Crocus pelistericus** are opening in a number of areas - above in a sand plunge bed where the flowers are appearing among a forest of *Crocus nudiflorus* leaves while below, they look at home in the moss covered sand bed with *Cyclamen coum*.





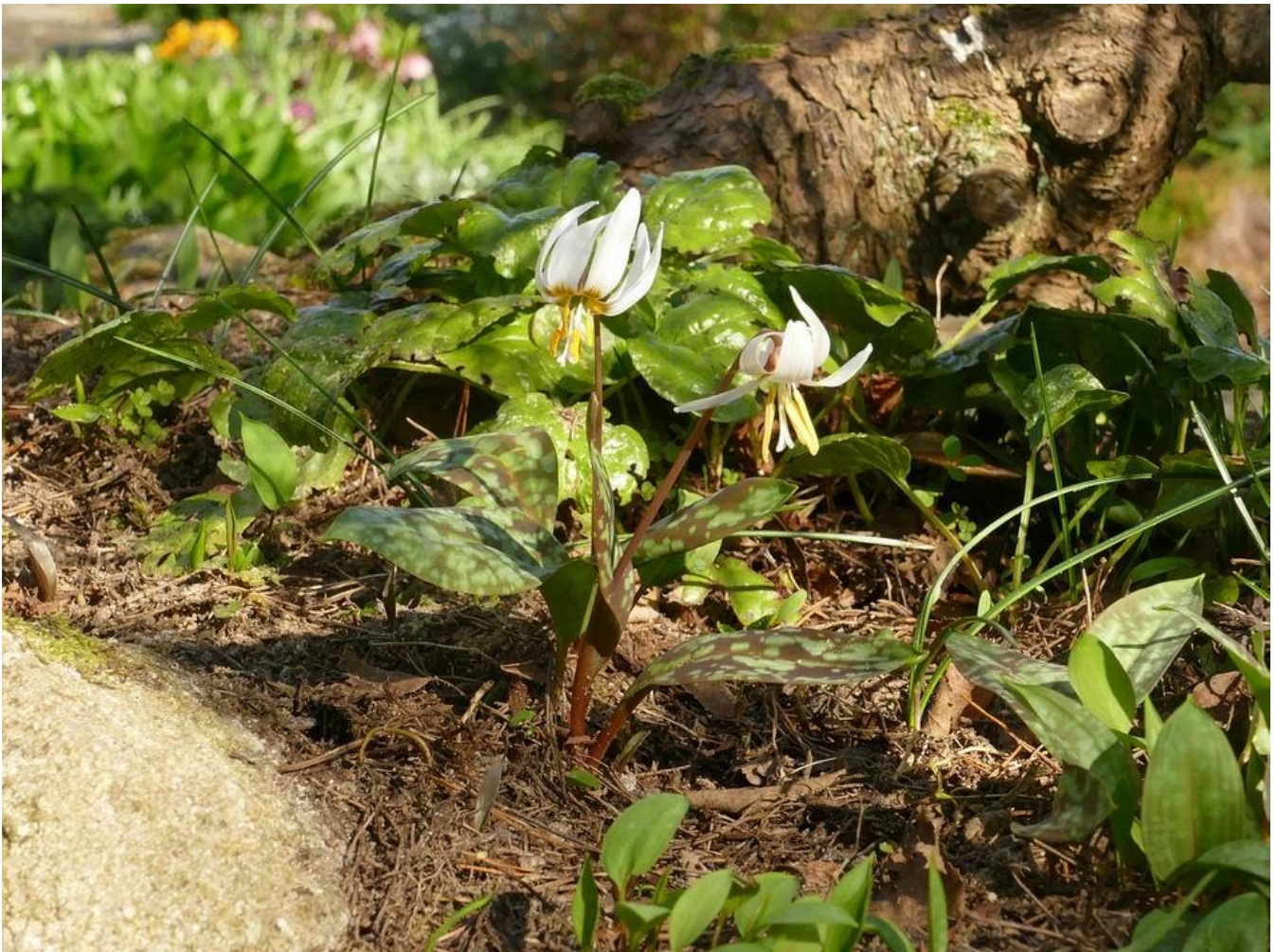
I introduced **Corydalis paczoskii** to the new bed where it grows, flowers then seeds and having such a short growing season it will be gone by the time the *Trillium hibbersonii* and *T. (pseudo)rivale* growing below appear.



Another plant native to the Caucasus, **Erythronium caucasicum**, which with some effort and patience we are making good progress at establishing in our garden.



**Erythronium caucasicum**



I feel we have successfully introduced a plant to the garden when they start to seed around. Seedling leaves of different ages can be seen in front of this **Erythronium caucasicum** deposited where the stem flopped over.



**Erythronium caucasicum** with two clusters of seedlings - the smaller plain green leaves on the left are a year younger than those on the right which are now mature enough to show the markings.



It is the darkest forms of **Erythronium dens-canis** that are first to come into flower in our garden.



**Erythronium dens-canis**



The earliest of the paler coloured forms of **Erythronium dens-canis**





The typical and familiar forms of **Erythronium dens-canis** have dark violet anthers, sometimes showing brown when they dehisce and pollen is ripe.



Some years ago a friend sent us seed collected from a population of **Erythronium dens-canis** in Eastern Ukraine - these have brown anthers, some with yellow pollen- the markings in the flowers also vary from all the other forms we grow. This is one of that first generation and I am working to establish them further from our garden seed.



**Erythronium dens-canis**



**Erythronium dens-canis**



Just to show that not all the flowering action in the garden is happening at ground level here is the beautiful *Rhododendron uvariifolium* in full bloom.





I will return to my main topic for this week's final two pictures first **Corydalis paczoskii** harmonising both colour wise and horticulturally with **Primula marginata**.



The creamy white **Corydalis malkensis** is being joined by the pinks and purples of **Corydalis solida** all of which merge to form wonderful carpets of colour during their short growing season - I will undoubtedly share more images of them in the coming weeks.....