



BULB LOG 05.....3rd February 2010



Aberdeen

This was the view as I took off towards the North, because of the wind direction, from Aberdeen last Friday; the pilot then turned and headed south to Birmingham and the World of Bulbs 4. After our last snow had all melted another batch of wintery weather arrived on Thursday bringing heavy snow overnight.

Aberdeen Airport are good at keeping the runway open and I was only delayed by 50 minutes as they shut the airport to clear the runway of snow – the pilot made up a lot of the delay because of the strong tail wind.



Scottish mountains under snow

After the blizzard conditions that were prevailing as I made my way to the airport the skies cleared before we took off giving me a superb view of the Scottish mountains covered in snow.



Cyclamen at Ashwood

The one day conference on bulbs was a great success as many of you will have seen from the reports in the forum and I enjoyed meeting lots of enthusiastic gardeners. On the Sunday Diane Clement, my kind host, had arranged to take me to the famous Ashwood Nursery. Of course I know all about this mecca for plants and the work that goes on there but this was the first time I have visited and I was not disappointed – even though the snow had followed me south. The Cyclamen glasshouse was massive and immaculately kept and you could spend hours studying the forms and variations that they are breeding. The same is true for the famous Ashwood Hellebores below.



Hellebores at Ashwood



Hellebore flowers

The magnificent variation that Ashwood have bred into Hellebores has to be seen to be believed and it just shows how a skilful and methodical grower can develop any natural variation and turn it into flowers of great beauty. It is best illustrated here with the famous Ashwood bowl of flowers floating on water. Beauty as they say is in the eye of the beholder and I have never been a big fan of double flowers but I can see that in the hands of a good breeder good clean doubles which do not just look like a mutated flower can be selected. Thank you to all at Ashwoods for the very kind hospitality I was afforded.



Skein of Geese

I flew back home on Sunday evening to land in yet another snow storm and was lucky to get down. When I went out the next morning to check the bulb houses I was aware as this large skein of geese flew overhead that it was not just me that was flying around the country. This is a very common occurrence through the winter as they fly back and forward at all times of the day and night in search of some food or safe resting place.



Bulb houses

My first task was to remove the snow from the roofs of the bulb houses to prevent them collapsing under the significant extra weight the snow adds to their flimsy structure.



Covered frame

Now some pots of seed and other early flowering plants are starting into growth I selectively put some cover on the outside frames. I placed this cover over the frame where the *Eranthis pinnatifida* and its pot of seedlings are which I showed last week. Just as well I did as I am not sure that being covered in a deep layer of snow would be their best introduction to life. I have been wondering if I should move the seedlings into a bulb house but I do not want to force them to grow too quickly; plus you increase the risk of damping off under glass. It is these sorts of choices that make growing plants interesting as there is no definitive answer and we have to continually make decisions that can make the difference between success and failure of the plants and seedlings.



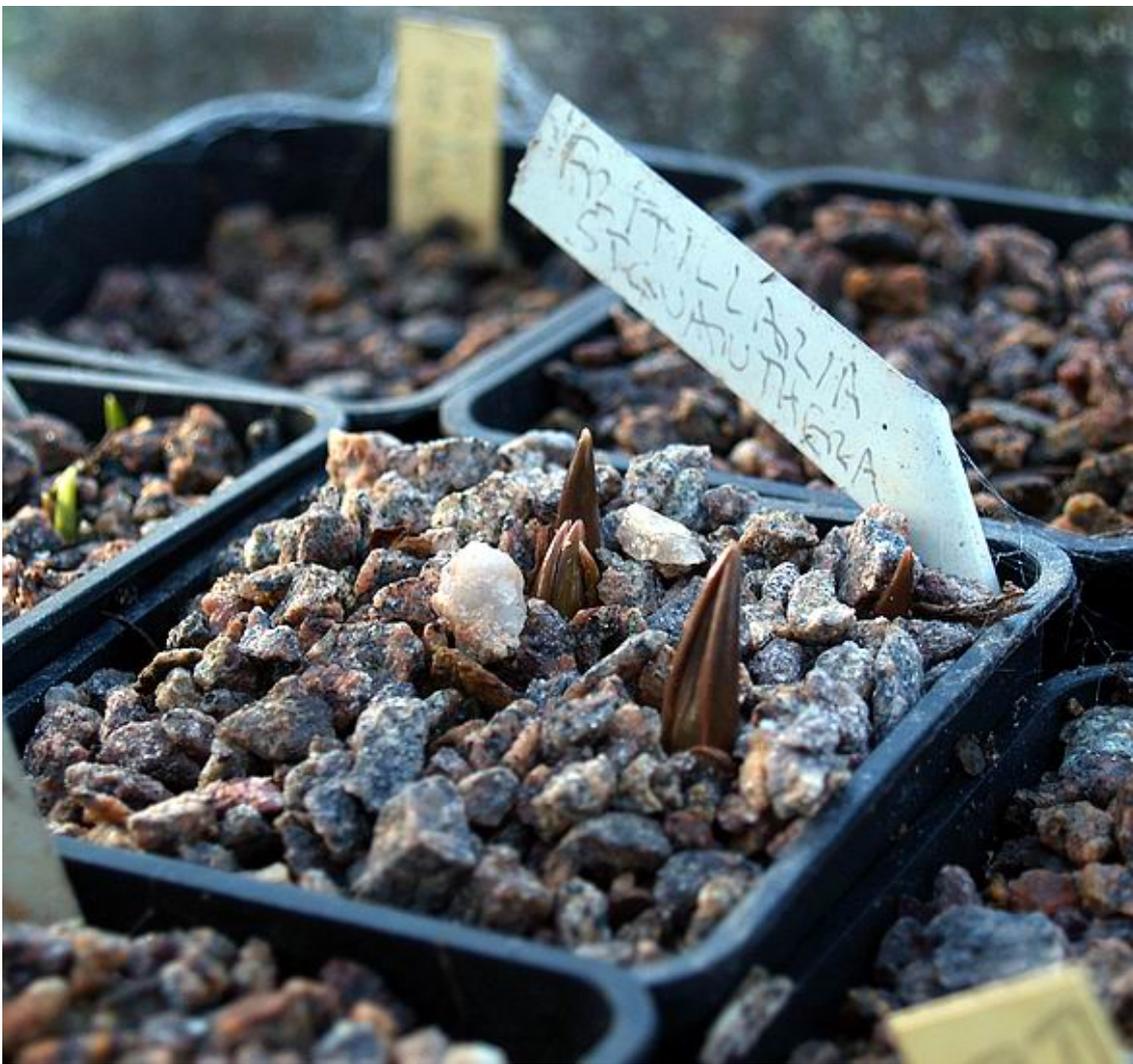
Fritillaria chitralensis

The shoots of more of the early frits are now pushing through; as you can see above on these pots of *Fritillaria chitralensis*. It is interesting to me why, despite being similar sized bulbs, one has two shoots while the other has just one. Two shoots means that I will get two bulbs at the end of the season – the fat single shoot may yet produce a secondary growth as the season develops. Another interesting factor will be how many of these shoots will flower.



Fritillaria chitralensis bulb

You may remember that way back last summer I cut up a *Fritillaria chitralensis* bulb in an attempt to stimulate any dormant buds and speed up the rate of increase of this great rarity. Well as promised here are, or should I say *is*, the result. The basal section of the bulb has survived and is now in growth but I am afraid that all the other sections I made from cutting up the rest of the bulb rotted away before any buds or growth could form. I am not put off with this failure and will try again next year. This time I will have to be more careful to ensure that the medium that I place the cut sections into has the correct moisture level – just enough to prevent desiccation but not enough to cause wet rot. This picture also shows that *Fritillaria chitralensis* is one of the species that produces a branched root system along with *F. korolkowii* and some of the other Asian species.



Fritillaria stenantha

Fritillaria stenantha is another early flowering species with us and it is often in full flower by mid- February. If the conditions stay as cold as it is just now, it may be later before it flowers this year but it only takes a few days of bright sunshine to warm up the bulb houses those few degrees and these bulbs react very quickly to that.



Iris reticulata seed germinates

I cannot remember if these Iris reticulata seeds germinated last year or not so this may be their first season of growth – which ever I am delighted as this is my favourite group of Iris.



Narcissus through glass

It might be cold and snowy outside but the Narcissus are peering through the glass to entice me into the bulb house where I am soon captured by their cheery faces and subtle variation.



Narcissus romieuxii

While I love to have the Narcissus flowering all through the winter I remember a time when it was the end of February before the first flower used to open for us. The shift in flowering time is entirely due to the warmer autumn temperatures that we have been getting which encourages the Narcissus to flower immediately after their roots detect the moisture. When we had cold autumns the roots began to grow but the flowers waited until February before they emerged.



Narcissus romieuxii

Different clones respond in different ways as this flower is now fully open with ripe pollen while the pot above is just starting into bloom – other forms of this same species have buds that are only just coming through the gravel now and will not flower for a month.



Narcissus seedling

More flowers in one of my many pots of seedlings which I am never sure if they are just another variation of the very variable *Narcissus romieuxii* or if they are hybrids and have some other species involved in their parentage.



Narcissus romieuxii

It is because I have so many clones and forms of this charming little species along with all the other bulbs that I grow that I needed to revert to smaller pots. When you can get this many flowers in a 7cm pot why would you need to go bigger?

Because the sun is still low in the sky when it does shine it makes for a very strong contrast in levels between the highlights and the shadows. This makes it very difficult to get good pictures as cameras find it difficult to cope with such extremes of contrast in a single image.

This is why it is best to take your photographs when there is high white cloud giving an even illumination of your subject with a lower variation between shadow and highlight.



Prop house

As I need to get a number of pictures every week for the bulb log I cannot always wait for ideal conditions to take the pictures and recently I am either having to work in very high contrast conditions like this week or in such low light conditions that I have to revert to using the flash to capture an image.



Crocus 'Sun Spot'

Even though the snow and cold stays around it will only take a few more days of sunshine hitting the bulb house to raise the temperature sufficiently to reveal the dramatic shiny black stigma of this pot of Crocus 'Sun Spot'.



Field of sheep, hares and pigs

I will leave you this week with another image that fascinated me at Ashwood – not of plants this time but these sheep grazing the grass under a light dusting of snow. I will post more images from Ashwood in the bulb log feedback pages in the next few days.