



SRGC

Bulb Log Diary

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Iris sibirica



I am always trying to analyse the way we 'see' – then trying to work out how I can best capture an impression of what I think I am seeing. Our eyes and brain work together, stitching together multiple glances, balancing out the extremes of light and shade as well as bringing everything into focus at one time.

Much is written about how to lay out a garden with various rules or guides such as avoiding straight lines but I cannot remember any mention of the importance of light on a garden other than the need for it to be present.

Observing how dramatically the garden changes as the passing clouds switch the

strong light on and off must be familiar to us all even though we may not think about it. I loved the way the light illuminated these ferns providing a dramatic background for the group of *Iris sibirica* which were in shade. Now my eyes darted about and brain made the necessary adjustments of exposure and focus allowing me to see them all but this picture is what the camera saw, not the dramatic image I was imagining for the cover.



I could focus and expose for the Iris flowers but then the background lost sharpness and was over exposed so I needed another solution. For this and the cover picture I exposed for the background and forced the compact cameras small built in flash to shed light onto the flowers recording an image closer to what I thought I was seeing.



Much later in the day the sun moved round casting its light directly on the flowers of this constantly changing scene. Although we may not appreciate it, light is critical to the plants and garden not just for the energy of life but also to the colours and the way we see it.

A garden is not simply about the individual plants we grow, that would be a collection of plants. A garden is about the way all the plants combine together to form compatible communities. Some plants grow simultaneously, others inhabit the same space but their growth is separated by time. Whether by design or accident colour combinations are important and we enjoy having plants of similar colours scattered through the garden. Take this pink Bluebell which has self-seeded into the edge of the path.



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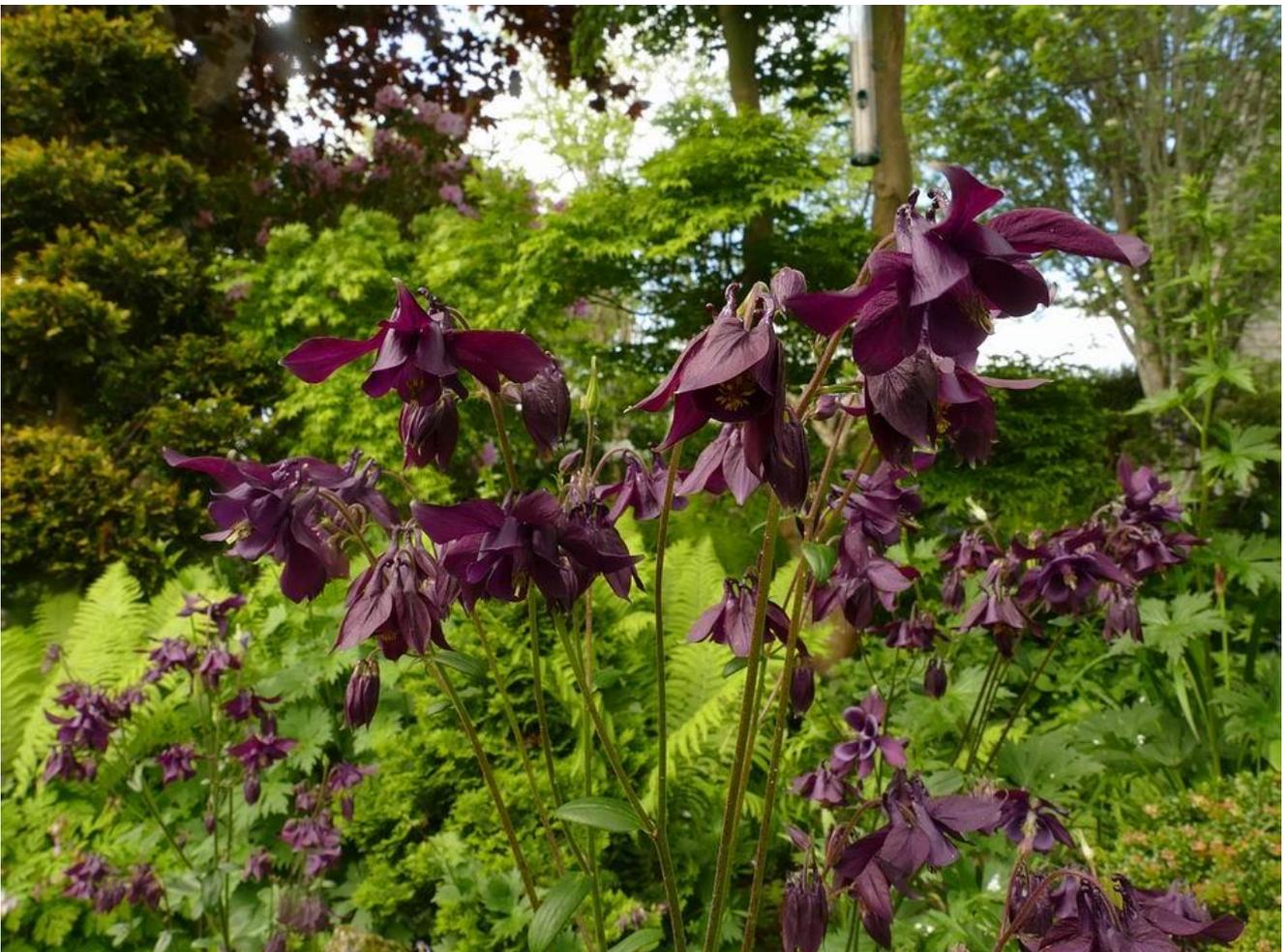
From the pink Bluebell my periphery vision detects a similar pink in a nearby Aquilegia, one of many we allow to self-seed, and following such links and associations I am drawn round a garden.



The colour of the Aquilegia flowers in combination with the shape and form of the plant link up, leading me off around the garden.



Dark Aquilegia flowers have a tendency to hide from our view in low light but the numbers of insects that are attracted to them indicate that they see in a very different way.



In certain lights we can better appreciate the drama and beauty of the dark forms.



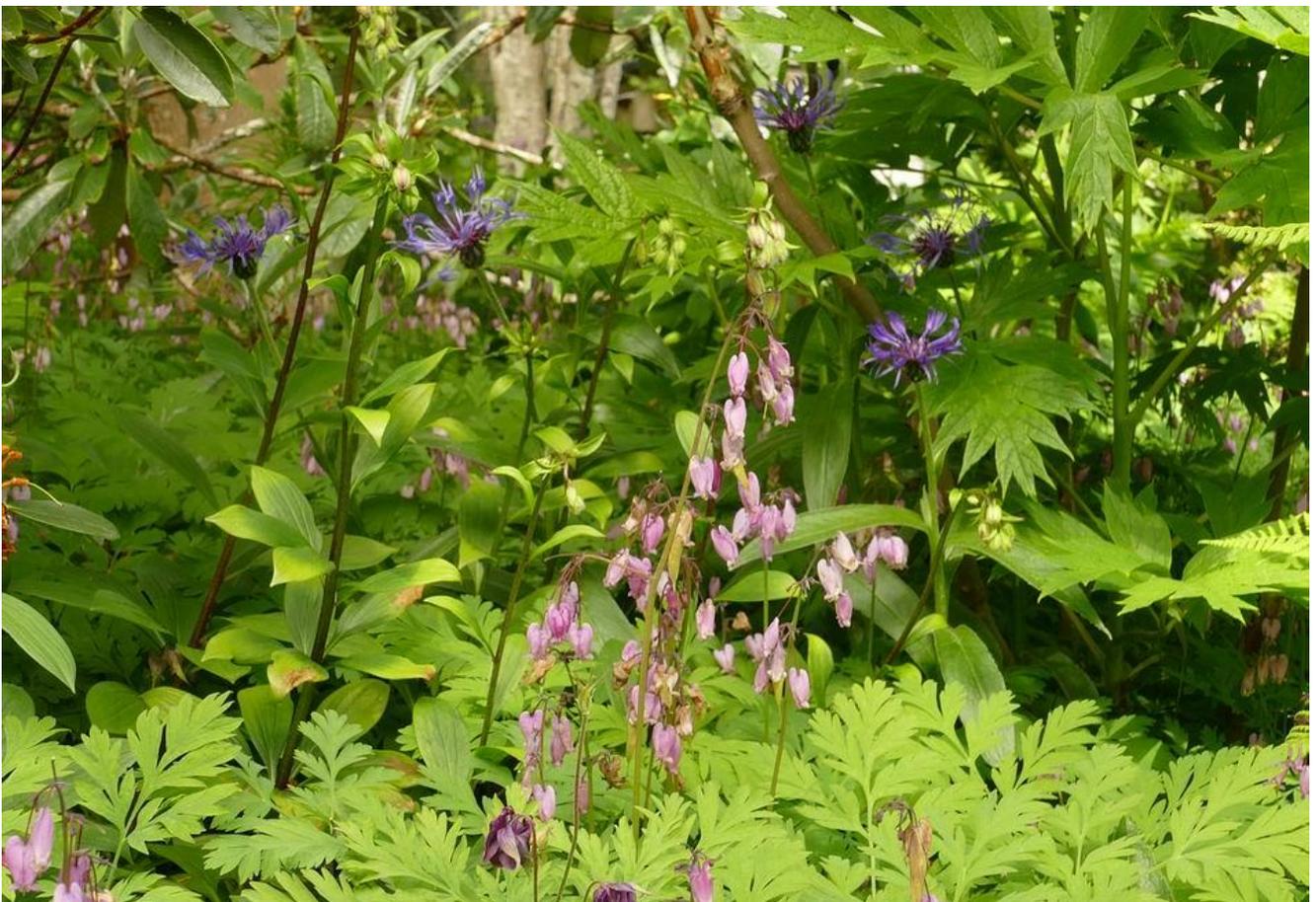
The dark coloured flowers are most dramatic when the light shines through them causing them to glow like a stained glass window - this colour also links up to the dark red leaves of an Acer high above.



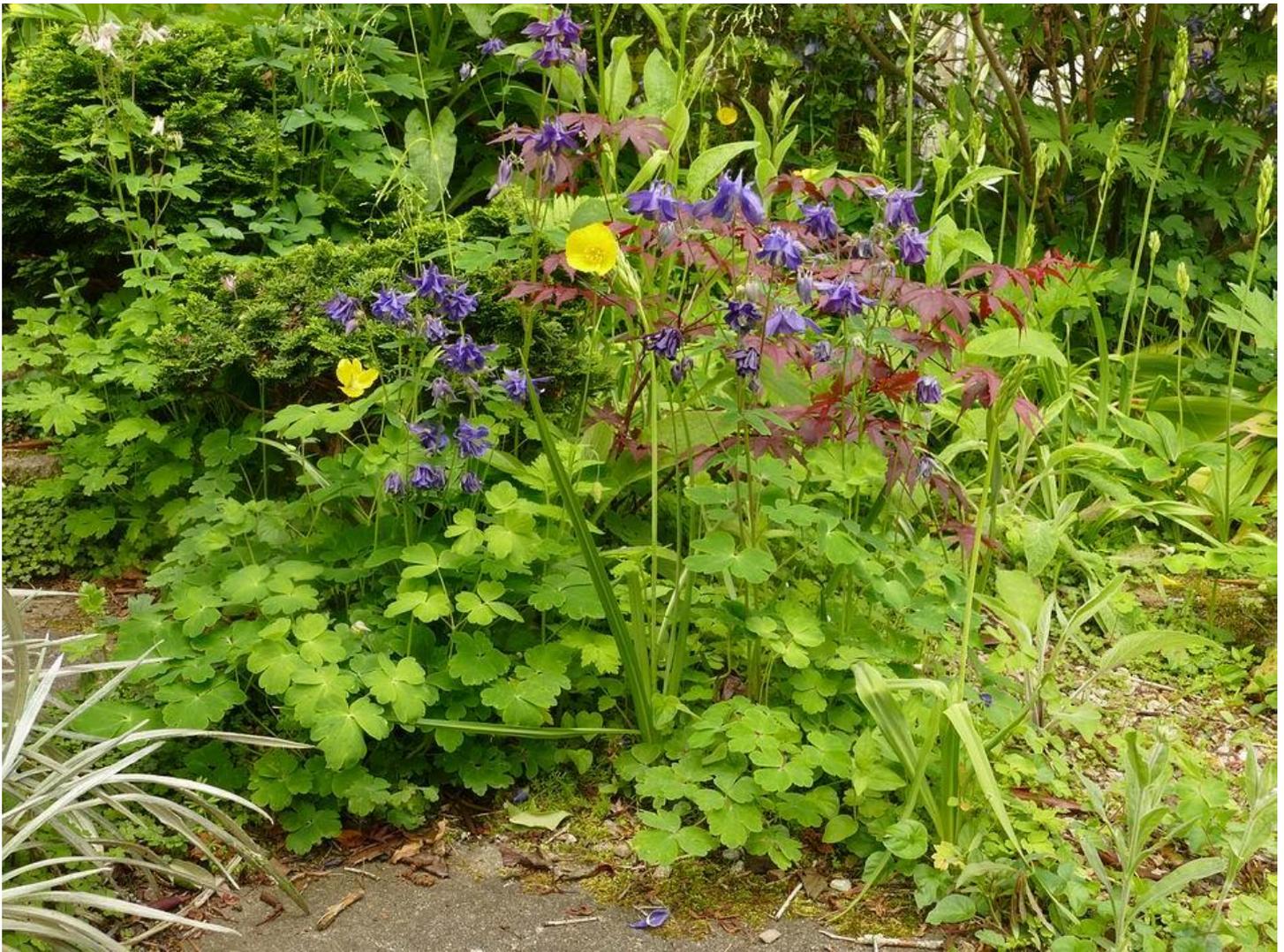
As with all flowers it is worth examining the shape and form in some detail: only then can they be fully appreciated.



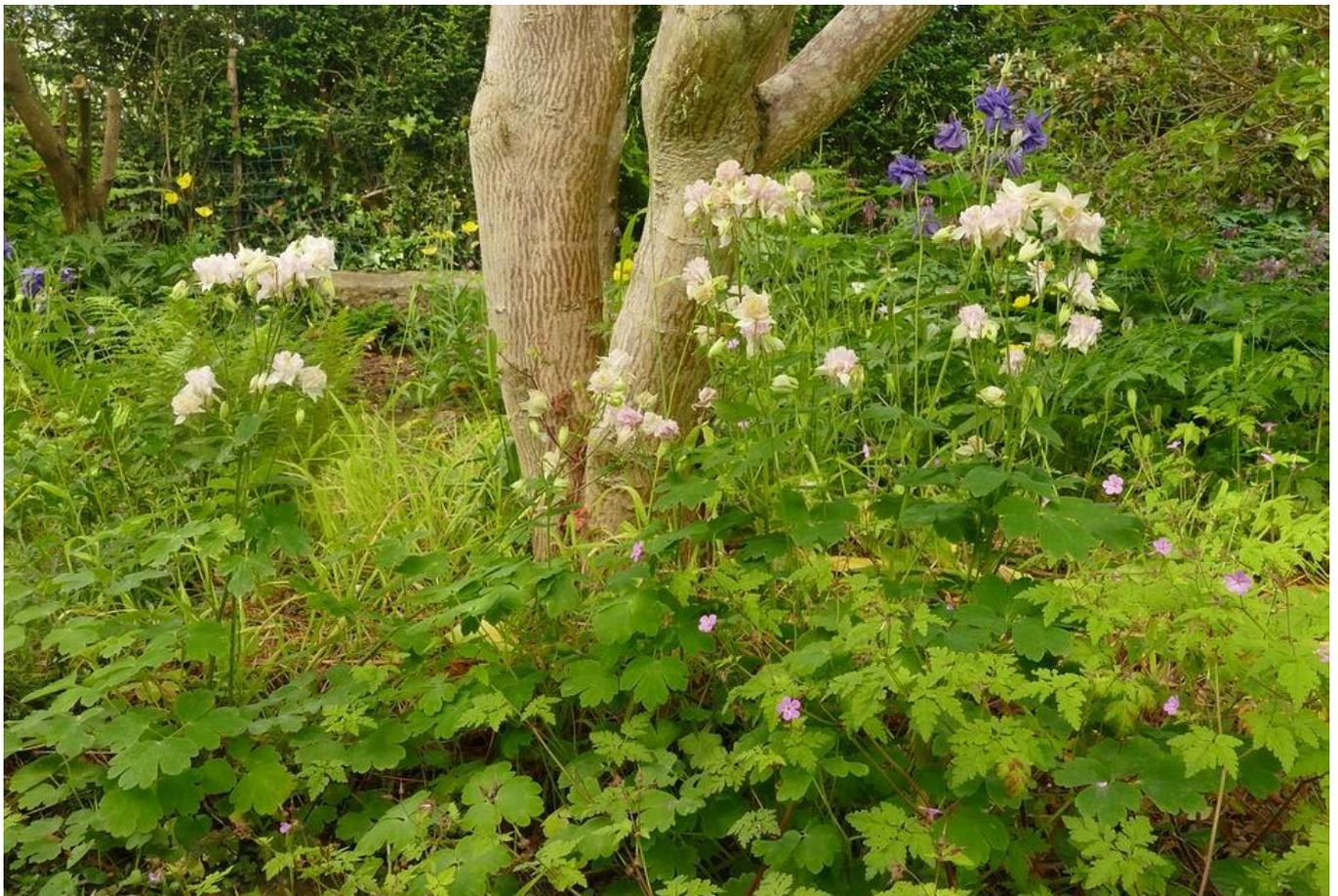
Aquilegia produce prolific amounts of seed so to prevent the garden being completely taken over we selectively cut the stems back as the flowers drop removing the seed pods which also encourages secondary flowering. The ones that we do allow to seed tend to be those with shorter stems and flower colours that stand out.



My eye jumps from the pink Aquilegia to the pink Dicentra flowers and so these links continue.



The Aquilegia, Acer, Camassia and Papaver in this picture have all seeded themselves into the gravel.



This is a nice seeded colony of Aquilegia with shorter stems and pale pink flowers.



While they all look superficially similar closer inspection shows a range of flowers from normal to semi-double.



Combinations of common plants such as the Papaver and fern, that have chosen to grow together, deserve equal attention to the rarer subjects we grow.



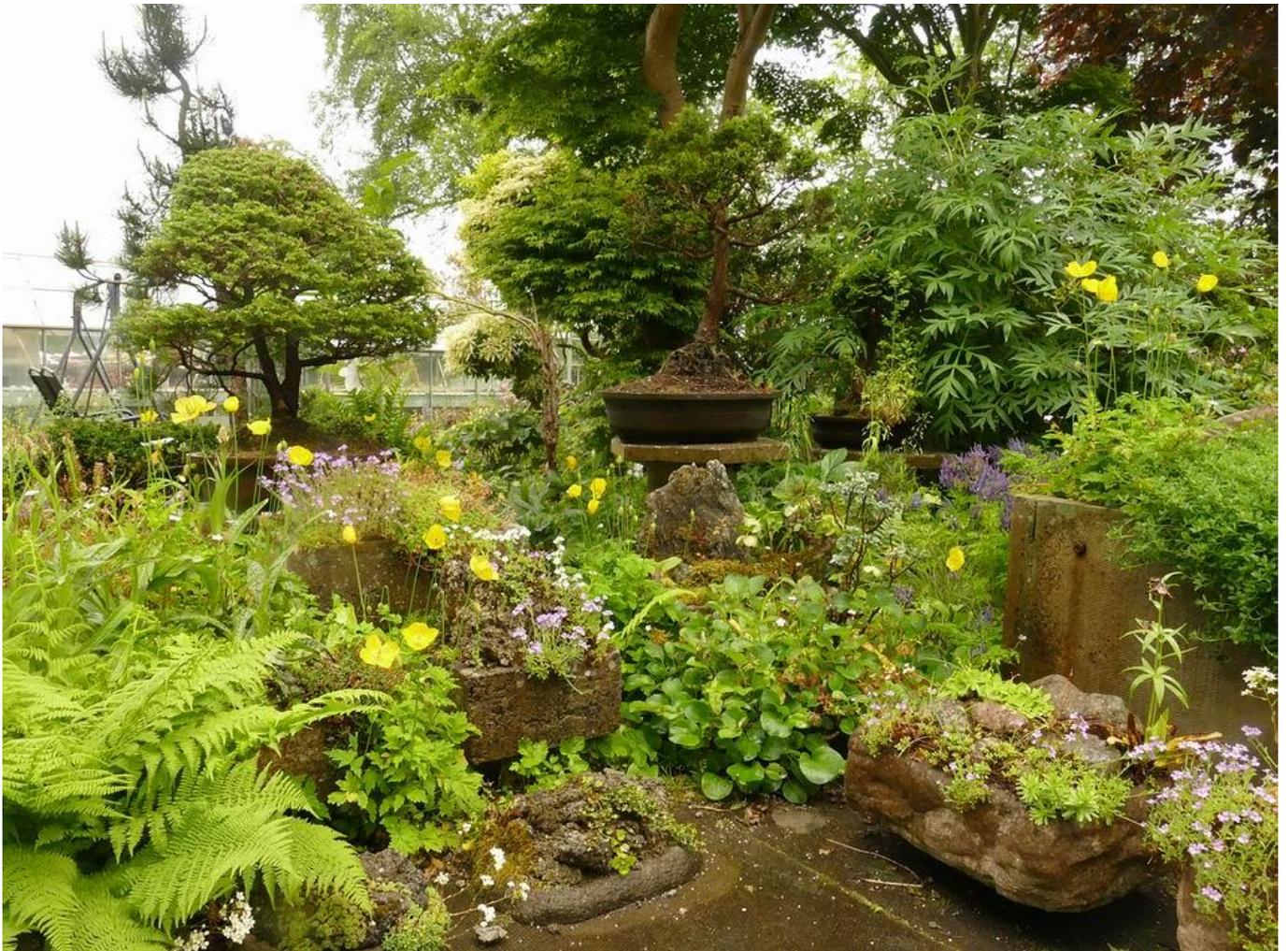
Corydalis 'Craigton Blue'



Corydalis 'Craigton Blue'



Cutting back the stems as the flowers pass over brings a degree of control over the most prolific plants while still allowing some to naturalise through the garden brings a harmony even to the alpine areas.





Some may be horrified about all the plants we let seed however few would complain about the **Meconopsis baileyi** that seeds around the rock garden and takes over the Erythronium plunge bed once they have died down.



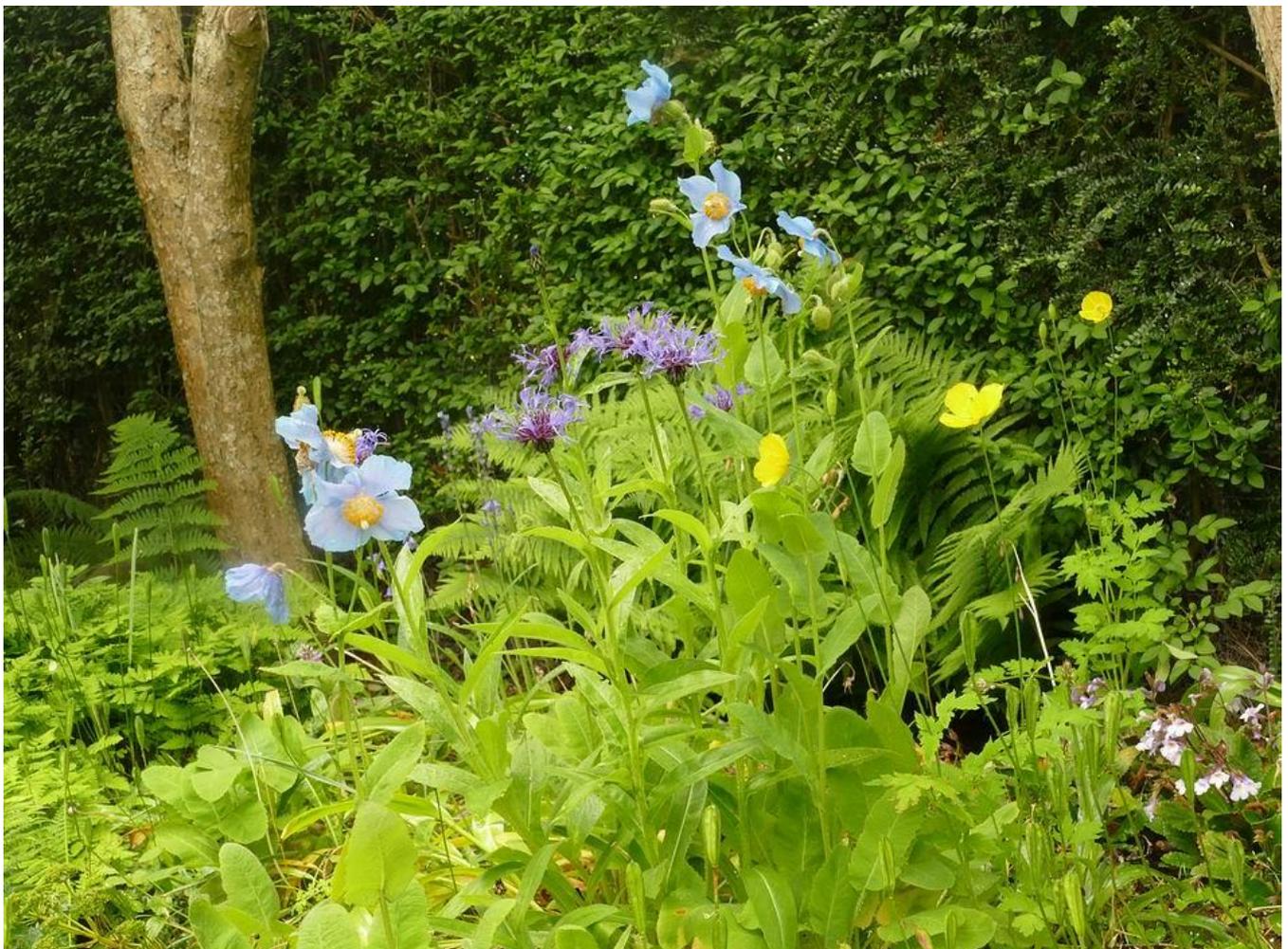


The colour of the **Meconopsis baileyi** flowers varies from year to year with temperature and moisture levels - even secondary flowers on the same stem can vary in colour depending on the weather as they come into flower. This year they are not as intensely blue. As they are all seed raised we also get some variation in the shape of the flower - most noticeably in the width of the petals.





Coming back to light: the image the camera captured on the auto white balance setting was a much colder coloured version of the scene than I was getting the impression of, but a quick adjustment of the white balance settings gave a warmer image (below) more in line with my view.





‘Looking at the whole and not the individual plants’ is what I wrote in my notes for this week and it is the plant combinations from the smallest of alpines all the way up to full grown trees that gives our garden its ambience.



Native and exotic plants of all types from the lichens, mosses and ferns through bulbs, herbaceous and upwards to shrubs and trees - all find a place in our garden.



Every day more flowers open on the **Doronicum orientale**.



Happy plant communities of **Paeonia veitchii var. woodwardii** and **Geranium robertianum** seeding together into the same ground where earlier in the year among others we enjoyed Crocus, Galanthus, Eranthis, Erythronium - and yet more bulbs will flower into the autumn after most of the current growth has died back.



It is not an individual plant that makes this scene but the combined colours of the community.





Finally I cannot ignore the blaze of colour from the Laburnum currently featuring in the ever-changing light as the sun, sometimes filtered by clouds, moves across the sky.



Anyone who has been to the theatre will know how dramatically the stage lighting can change a scene just like the ever-changing light in our gardens. Click the link to join me on the latest [Bulb Log Video Diary](#).