

# Wisley's Alpine Log

By Paul Cumbleton

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This week I'm starting the log with the intensely coloured *Androsace bulleyana*. This originates from the Yunnan province of China. I love the intense scarlet blooms held over a rosette of small, somewhat leathery leaves. It does tend to be monocarpic, dying after flowering, so I sow a little seed every year to ensure that I always have a few plants to enjoy. It does well in a pot but I have also found that it is very happy to grow out in the sand beds where, in the rather harsh conditions, it makes smaller more compact plants which nevertheless flower very well and add a splash of rich colour from May into June.

Off the coast of Italy, sitting in the Mediterranean Sea is a group of islands called the Aegadian Islands. Amongst these is the island of Marettimo. This is home to several rare plants including *Scilla hughii*. I am rather confused about both the naming and distribution of this plant. Several sources on the web – most of which simply seem to copy what others have said – maintain that this plant is unique to Marettimo. One botanical site however shows it occurring also on Sicily and on the Italian mainland. When it comes to naming, most popular writers point out that this plant is often confused with the similar *Scilla peruviana*, but that it is actually easy to tell them apart (which it is). However, looking at the Kew database, they do not accept the name of *S. hughii* and they maintain it is just a synonym of *S. peruviana* – in other words, they think that



these are the same species. Whatever the truth, it is a really striking plant. Here are a couple of photos showing it in bud and then in fuller flower:





We are getting towards the end of the spring-flowering bulb season now but there are still some late flowerers to enjoy:



Left is *Triteleia ixioides*, sometimes still seen under its former name of *Brodiaea ixioides*. This is an excellent subject for a pot creating a mass of bright yellow flowers on upright stems. Like many late-flowering bulbs it has the minor drawback of its leaves being in the process of dying back at the time of flowering, as can be seen in the photo. I am happy to live with this for the value of its flowering display. If you object to them, they can be removed at this stage with little probable effect to the bulbs, leaving a potful of naked flowers. The paler-flowered cultivar 'Starlight' is also often seen in collections:



This exquisite beauty is the South African *Ixia viridiflora* var. *minor*. It is flowering for the first time from seed sown in September 2007. The eggshell-blue colour is simply delightful and it has rocketed this plant into my top ten favourite South African bulbs. The actual colour and its depth does vary a little from seedling to seedling, but all are gorgeous!





The Alpine Display House continues to be filled with colour and interest. There are large numbers of *Lewisia*s, *Primula sieboldii* cultivars, Auriculas, *Pleione* and a wealth of other alpine subjects from all over the world.

Just one example is this *Penstemon cyananthus* var. *cyananthus*. This is a good *Penstemon* for both pots and out on the open rock garden where it gains a larger size than when constrained in a pot.



Our small collection of *Cypripedium* is also in flower. They seem to have done well this year, perhaps helped by the long cold winter and cool spring. This one is *Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *pubescens*:





The first *Dianthus* of the year is also flowering now and is one of my favourites with its wonderfully marked petals – *Dianthus callizonus*:





Inside our Landscaped House, the *Erinacea anthyllis* is flowering better than ever. This is actually three plants that have grown into each other to make a large mass:



Outside, the large *Rhododendron* 'Temple Bell' is also excelling itself:





Not far away and also flowering really well this year is x *Phylliopsis* 'Sugar Plum'



I started with the bright red *Androsace bulleyana* so to balance this week's log I want to end with scarlet too. This is *Meconopsis punicea*:

