

# The Scottish Rock Garden Club

## Dunblane Early Bulb Display

### 17th Feb 2018



#### The best laid schemes o' mice and men gang aft agley

So! Thank you, Janis Ruksans!

Like most events the planning for this year's Early Bulb Display started last summer. At the last minute Australian horticulturalist Matt Murray who was scheduled to speak on 'Growing bulbs down under' was unable to travel to Dunblane for the weekend. What to do? I phoned Ian Young to discuss various possibilities and he suggested asking Janis to give two talks instead of just one. Janis agreed and the result was a resounding success. His morning talk concentrated on the genus *Crocus*. He illustrated species from the whole distribution of the genus and explained why many accepted species need to be further separated into species of their own. He showed how populations within *Crocus* vary over their distribution. DNA work supports the new species. Why

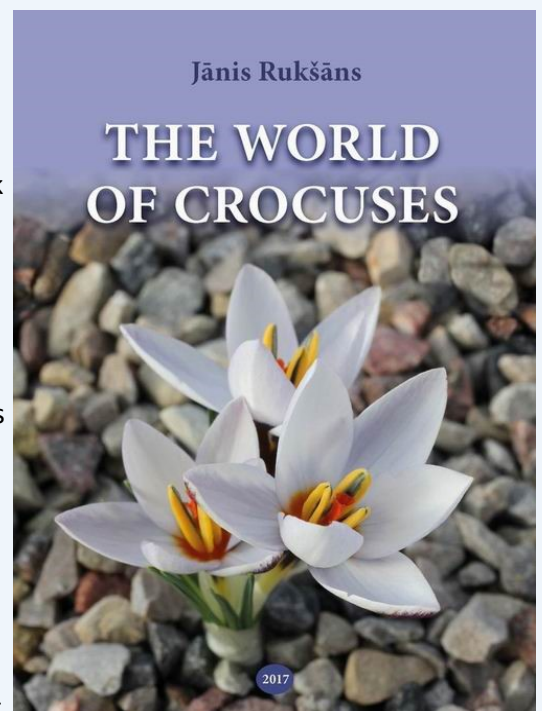
so many? As far as I can fathom, it is because many grow in mountains or islands. The Aegean Islands themselves are the tips of subsea mountains. This has resulted in populations being separated by sea, distance and altitude. Most *Crocus* seed is distributed by ants and pollinators cannot transfer pollen between plants over such wide distances. One happy result however is that in cultivation many species can be crossed to make wonderful hybrids. In nature too where hybrids are found, they can be exceptionally beautiful. Janis illustrated the differences between his species with excellent detailed drawings and pictures. His eye for details of tunic coats and leaf sections is unparalleled.

In the afternoon Janis sat by the microphone like a grandfather relating stories to his grandchildren of how over his lifetime he has developed his techniques for growing his bulbs. He included triumphs as well as tragedies. He must have a very equable temperament to have weathered the downs as well as the ups in horticulture. When his love of *Crocuses* and *Corydalis* took over, he sold his collection of thousands of daffodils to Dutch growers. When Latvia gained independence from the Soviet Empire Janis played an important part.

SRGC members enjoyed the precise and scientific detail of his *Crocus* talk and shared his love of bulbous plants and the pictures of the wild mountains and Steppes through which he has travelled to find his treasures and more recently to confirm the details of individual plants. It seems that his work will never be finished as even in the short time since his book was published, new species of *crocus* have been discovered.

The day could have been entitled, 'A Day with the Maestro'

Members should be aware that the SRGC contributed greatly to the publication costs of Janis's *The World of Crocuses*. It is available from his web site.





This time, there were fewer exhibits than in previous years but still many interesting plants. As usual there were lots of snowdrops. When shown together at bench height, the distinguishing features of each clone are easier to appreciate. Galanthophiles know what they like and they can be ecstatic when a minor difference is found. Perhaps there are too many names? Think though, how else would you differentiate plants from different places which have been introduced by many different people? I think it is fair to say that all varieties do not grow equally well in all gardens nor in all parts of the country. This being so, it has to be said that some growers can cultivate a much bigger number of species and varieties than others and grow them successfully.

Whether you like small flowers, big flowers or huge flowers, Snowdrops provide the answer. One problem about introducing plants from a number of sources and growing them together in a collection is the danger of diseases spreading to established plants from new introductions to the garden. There must be an optimum number of different snowdrops that one person can grow. If they are in pots they need regular repotting. Since they flower so early in the year snowdrops have become a source of interest to gardeners with an inquiring mind. **'Spot the Difference'** is a popular picture game in newspapers. Galanthomania is a more expensive but just as captivating a pastime. Recently, despite many almost foolishly high prices paid by some galanthomaniacs, the hobby of gathering together a number of obviously different snowdrops is both rewarding and pleasurable. As they might say in France:-

**Vive les Flocons de Neige!**

**Vive les Galanthophiles!**





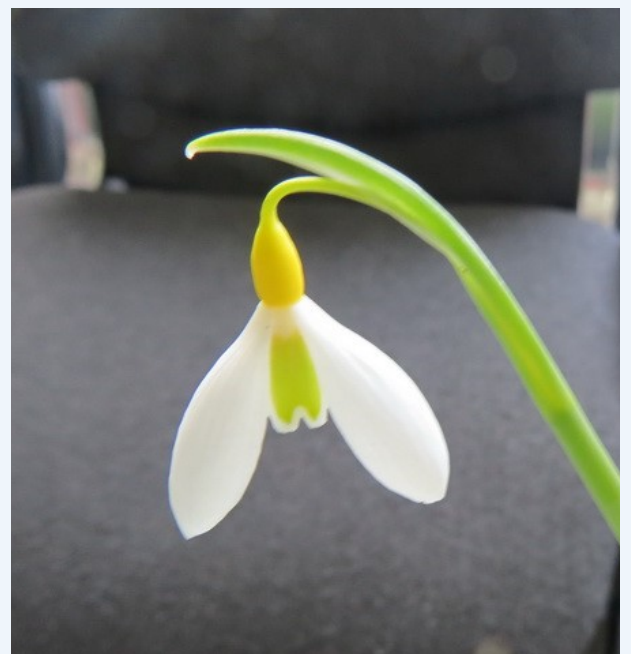
Greatorex Doubles grown by Heyrick Greatorex in Norfolk in the 1950s. They are deliberate crosses between *Galanthus nivalis flore plena* and *G. plicatus*.

*Galanthus* 'Ophelia', 'White Swan' and 'Jacquetta' are shown with *Galanthus* 'Wendy's Gold'



*Galanthus* 'Tubby Merlin'

*Galanthus* 'Wendy's Gold'





Hellebore flowers

Cyclamen coum





Crocus cvijicii



Crocus chrysanthus 'Constellation'



Scilla melaina has wonderful black stems complimenting their stunning blue flowers. Folk often complain there are not enough blue flowers but the genera Scilla and Chionodoxa provide plenty blue flowers for spring time

Narcissus Atlas Gold x albidus is a fine new white hybrid.





This year we were delighted that Sarah-Rose Carlton, Alpine and Woodland Supervisor at St Andrews Botanic garden brought a selection of bulbs and plants for the Display. I am a Friend of St Andrews Botanic garden and have been since I graduated. I remember when it was being constructed. It looked like a sand and gravel quarry! Bob Mitchell turned this 'quarry' into one of the country's most impressive and beautiful gardens. Whenever you visit a horticultural treat awaits you. Whether you like rock garden plants, Rhododendrons, trees, tropical hot house plants or cacti, there is something in St Andrews for you. Sarah Rose has inherited a treasure trove and is in the process of polishing it. Why not help to ensure the long term success of the botanic garden of our oldest university and like me become a friend. You will find a membership form on the garden's website or write to the Membership Secretary, Friends of St Andrews Botanic Garden, Canongate, St Andrews, KY16 8RT



Eranthis 'Noel Ayres'



Galanthus 'Fred's Giant'

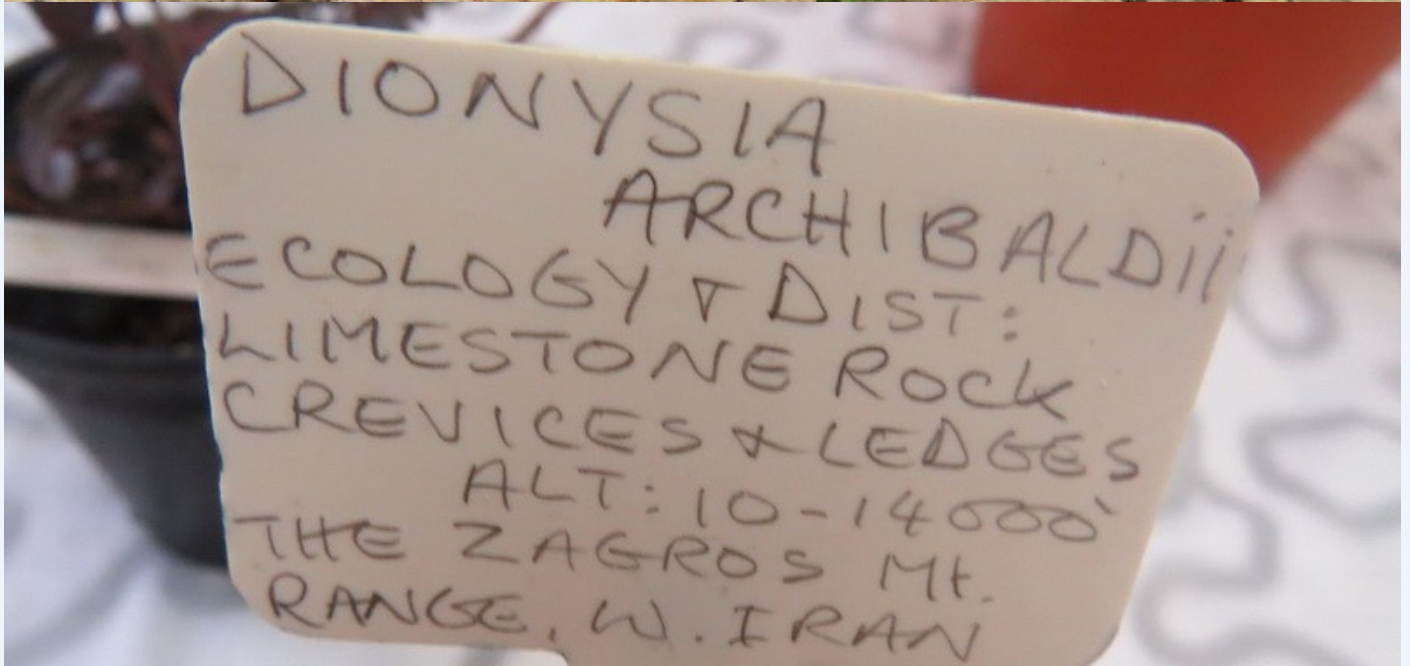


Daphne jezoensis



Primula whitei  
& below  
Primula  
{x 'Arduaine'} x aureata





Well Grown, Nick Boss!

This beautiful Dionysia is named for the great seed collector and bulb grower, Jim Archibald





The most colourful section of the show was the Iris section. Most of the plants here were raised by bulb growers, Jacques Amand. In the main they were pots of the exciting new hybrids raised by Canadian enthusiast Alan McMurtrie. John Amand has shown some of these before and they always create a lot of interest. Since many have been bred using *Iris danfordiae*, they are smaller flowers than the *reticulata* selections and hybrids which we know so well. Alan has raised countless hybrids and those on show at Dunblane were raised in the Netherlands by commercial growers. All the irises on the following pages except Pauline and George are Alan McMurtrie hybrids. Janis Ruksans told me that the secret of keeping them flowering year on year is to plant them deeply and feed them twice as much as other bulbs.

We need to thank Kit Strange for bringing the exhibit up from London and staging the plants in Dunblane.



Iris 'Eyecatcher'



Iris 'George'



Iris 'Orange Glow'



Iris 'Eyecatcher'



Iris 'On Cloud Nine'



Iris 'Splish Splash'



Iris 'Sunshine'



Iris 'Painted Lady'



Iris winogradowii



Iris 'Mars Landing'



Iris 01-1V-1



Iris 'Pauline'