

International Rock Gardener



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August 2013



This month we follow the renewal of the garden in British Columbia of our late colleague Joyce Carruthers by her daughter Amanda with the help of ZZ and friends and then travel with Trond Høy to Svalbard in the north west of Norway, a region he has visited several times, the first time as a student back in 1977. Trond lives in Rogaland and is a keen gardener as well as observer of the native flora and fauna. World of Bulbs features late summer/autumn crocus from J. Ian Young. Cover photo: *Taraxacum arcticum* by Trond Høy

SRGC Announcement: An Online subscription rate is now offered – see the last page of this IRG for details of this new way to enjoy membership of the SRGC.

Reorganisation of a lovely established Victoria garden by Amanda Carruthers

In March 2011 our old house with the big garden on Haultain Street in Victoria, British Columbia, passed to me and my family from my mum Joyce Carruthers. Joy tempered with trepidation was the feeling; joy at being able to stay in the family home with the big yard, and trepidation about the upkeep of an old house and big garden, even after some much-needed modernization was complete.

I've vivid memories of the evolution of the garden that was started in the early 1970's. I watched the potholed dirt driveway down the side of the house become a brick driveway with garden, trees and shrubs on both sides. The muddy parking circle out back was made into an urban bog and years later grassed over to make room for a big rock garden. I remember big weekend trips to collect materials, visits to houses and gardens of mum's "planty" friends, the smell of soil baking in the kitchen and pots of seeds and cuttings everywhere.



Entrance to Garden 2005 North East View



North West View mid 2000



Vegetable Garden mid 2000



North East View mid 2000

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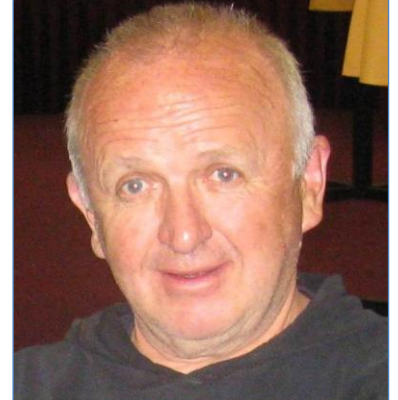
After my dad died, mum met Zdeněk Zvolánek (ZZ) and a big garden transformation began with the raising of several rock outcrops, gardens in old troughs recreated and beautiful new blooms appeared from “out of nowhere”.

One year, ZZ’s brother came to visit Canada for a holiday, the year the circular driveway went in. He was put to work helping ZZ bash an opening into the stone wall with a sledge hammer, and to take turns operating the road mulch packing machine and wheelbarrow. The rocks from the wall, the turf and soil from the new driveway were transported to the back of the yard and built into a raised vegetable bed. One day he told me with humour “I think your mum is trying to kill me”.



Joyce working on the giant [Bangsbo crevice garden](#) in Denmark.

The Brothers Zvolánek in May 2013 – Zdeněk and Luděk.



When the project was finished the three of them took off on a massive road trip to the great outdoors, toward mountain exploration, plant hunting and other adventures.



Close-up of New Rock Garden - 2005



A wider view of the new rock garden 2005



Left: Side view of the rock garden in 2005



Above: Big Granite Pot

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Left: Zdeněk's Pot Spring 2011

After spending most of 2011 weeding like mad and reminiscing about my mum saying "one year's seeds, seven year's weeds" and seeing all the bulbs and plants that needed dividing, pruning and the need for more general attention everywhere, I began to see a garden transformation was imminent when an amazing opportunity presented itself in the form of a visit from our esteemed Mr Zvolánek.

I had decided on a few features I wanted in a new garden, features that would require the moving of great volumes of material, and I discussed my ideas with ZZ who said he'd participate doing the rockwork. A financial hurdle presented itself immediately on receipt of an estimate from a company I had obtained a quote from. Fortunately and incidentally, while travelling to Qualicum Beach to hear ZZ's lectures, I received good information from Paul Spriggs who recommended I call another company to enquire about hiring a mini excavator with operator. I called Don Mann Excavating, spoke with Trevor Mann and the hurdle vanished; my new garden project had a start date.

Right: Amanda Carruthers with ZZ, Paul Spriggs and Gordon Mackay at [Eswyn's Alpine Garden](#), Nanoose Bay. Photo from Eswyn's Garden [Facebook page](#).



Modernising the garden, both to reduce summertime watering and maintenance and to accommodate more onsite parking seemed a sensible idea. The creative feature of the new garden was to be a hill with paths through a shrubby urban forest. The hill would be made using the beautiful stones we already had. The hill was built with a south east facing slope; the idea being that it would lessen the direct view of the street and provide a pleasant visual buffer between yards for neighbours on both sides of the fence.

The new hill garden and slopes have walking paths to accommodate both the garden's audience and workers. Furthermore, the project would involve use of all materials on hand so as not to be sending anything unnecessarily to the dump. This project's organiser is proud to declare that the only truckload of material that left the premises was full of soil, and it didn't go to the dump!

Work commenced with digging up as many bulbs, plants and shrubs we could find and storing them for future planting. Paul Spriggs and one of his guys came by and trenched around the big Bay tree and a few other large shrubs so the excavator could scoop and transport them to their new location in its bucket.



Left: The excavator on site

ZZ together with his helper and the equipment operator smashed the brick paths, dug and moved tonnes upon tonnes of soil from the raised bed in the backyard, dug the trench alongside the fence and built the area designated for additional onsite parking and "the southeast facing hill". The former brick path around the vegetable garden became the foundation underneath the new walking path along the fence; the rocks that supported the raised bed were stacked for later use. Truckloads of road mulch were delivered to fill in the parking area, build new paths and to mulch the entire hill and slopes against weeds.

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The most spectacular delivery was made by a “slinger truck” that was able to send a precise stream of gravel to wherever it was wanted. We stood with shovels to watch the miracle that saved hours in wheelbarrow pushing.



The mechanical “slinger” in action - with an audience

To our delight we discovered a layer of sandstone buried below the sandstone mosaic garden already dismantled. The buried sandstone was resurrected as a summit for the south east slope. One day Paul arrived with a donation of schist that became an east facing crevice slope. One day Grahame Ware from Owl and Stump Rare Plants came to visit ZZ and make a plant donation to the new garden.

Pleasant work continues in the garden even after the lion’s share of the garden is built. This spring bulbs found growing in strange places have been reunited into family clumps or better locations, and plants that aren’t happy or didn’t survive are being trimmed up and replanted or removed altogether. The box hedge segments saved from the old garden and replanted by ZZ so they could “have a chance” have been moved to a strip of soil outside the rock wall with an idea that in time they will form a small well-trimmed mini hedge adjacent to the sidewalk.



The garden April 2012

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April 2012 visit of the Alpine Gardeners of Central Vancouver Island.

The rock and alpine enthusiasts of the [Qualicum Beach Garden Club](#) were the first group of visitors to the new garden; a sunny side trip to complement their annual visit to the [VIRAGS](#) Alpine Show in April 2012. They visited again in 2013, on a [mostly rainy day](#)! The following photos are some of what has been blooming in the garden lately.



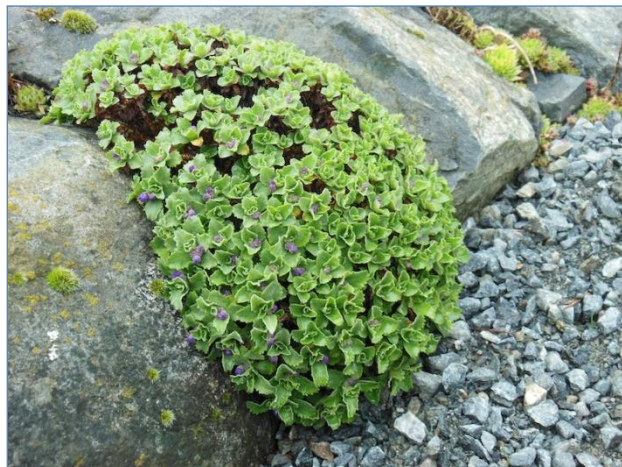
Lewisa cotyledon



Erythronium dens-canis



Left: *Primula marginata*



Far left: *Daphne mezereum*

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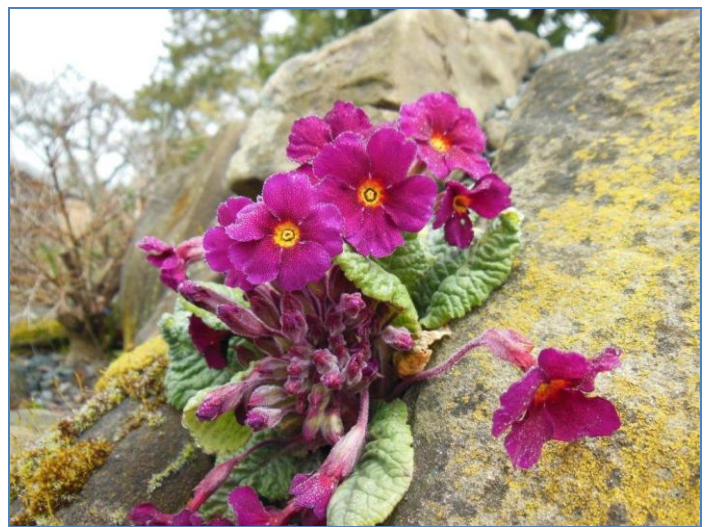
Iris reticulata 'George'



Trillium in bud



Pulmonaria sp.



Primula – polyanthus type

----In the North----

Svalbard 2013 text and photos by Trond Høy

I have been interested in plants as long as I can remember. When I was a kid we didn't have a garden at home but my grandma had and we also had a kind of garden at our summerhouse that we shared with my grandparents, uncles and aunts. I learnt growing sedums from my older cousins. We literally covered huge patches of the rocky outcroppings with stonecrops.



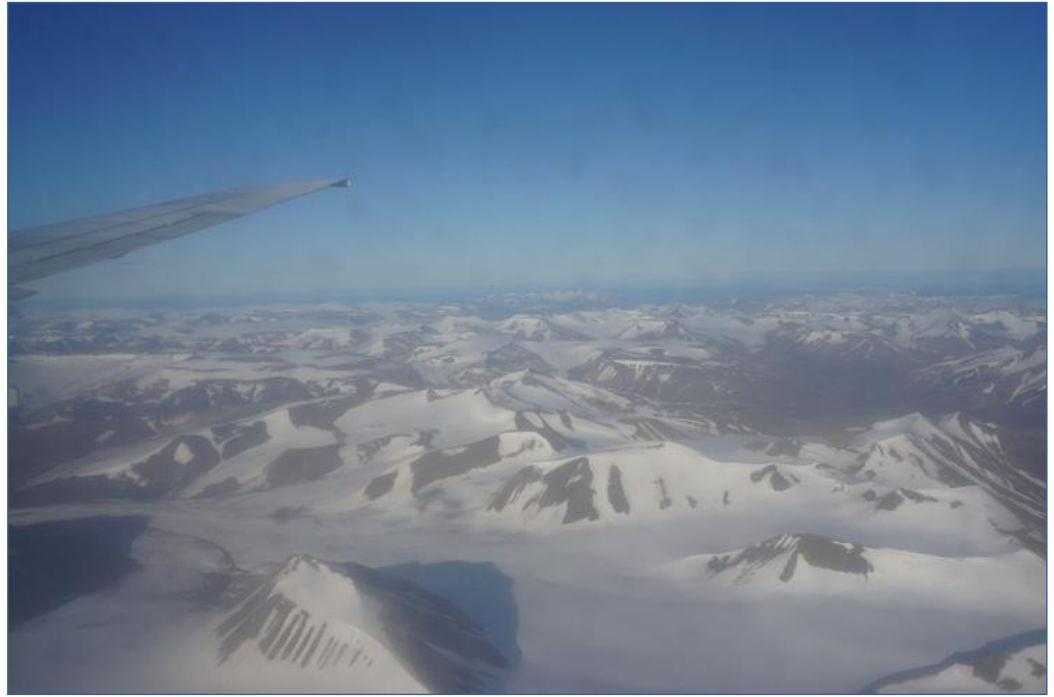
I studied biology and now I am a full-time high-school teacher. I have also always been interested in travelling but when the kids were small we didn't go abroad. The last 15 years I have made some interesting tours either with my family or with friends. When I was asked in spring 2012 whether I would join a trip to Svalbard in July 2013 I didn't hesitate. My wife also wanted to come. The trip was organized by two members of NBF (Norsk Botanisk Forening; the Norwegian Botanical Society). They invited other members of different chapters of NBF. Some also brought their spouses making the company 30 persons in all. Not all are so lucky that their better halves share their interests!

Trond Høy (left) lives in Rogaland in western Norway. He began his tales of Svalbard [in the SRGC Forum](#) and also documented the trip [in the NARGS Forum](#) – more photos can be seen in those places. Over the years he has reported on plants in his garden and from Norway and also from his travels, such as [in East Africa](#).

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Svalbard by air, July 2013

Svalbard is a rather large arctic archipelago (61,000km²) of which 60% is permanently covered by ice and snow. The main town, [Longyearbyen](#) on the island Spitsbergen, is situated at 78° N. It has the driest climate in Norway with precipitation of just 190mm a year. The climate is rather mild due to the Gulf Stream and the west coast is free of sea ice in summer. It has 4 months with midnight sun in summer and 4 months without sun in winter!



First discovered by the

Norse but never settled, it was rediscovered by [Willem Barentsz](#) in 1596 when he looked for the northern sea route to the Far East. Although the flora is sparse the fauna is rich and the archipelago soon became an important hunting ground for whale and seal.

The flora comprises less than 200 vascular plants. Due to the long distance from the mainland you don't find many plants with heavy seeds. For instance, you don't find any of the pea plants common in mountain areas in Europe or North America. Svalbard also experienced the last ice age and the flora is young. Many of the plants grow in vast numbers but differ slightly from population to population. I think a huge speciation is underway.

Taraxacum arcticum – which is also our cover plant this month.

Svalbard is easily reached by ordinary daily flights from Tromsø, Norway, or by boat. We arrived on the evening of Saturday 13 July in full sun. Luck was with us and we had 4-5 days with sun, and the rest were overcast. Two days we had some rain but only after finishing the excursions.

Sunday: we investigated the Longyearbyen area in full sun and found many plants new to all of us. Among the showiest were in my opinion *Taraxacum arcticum*, *Polemonium boreale* and *Pedicularis dasyantha*. Some of us were more interested in grasses and sedges than I am!



Pedicularis dasyantha



Ranunculus nivalis



Silene involucreta subsp. *furcata*

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The ubiquitous Svalbard poppy (*Papaver dahlianum*) grows everywhere and is Svalbard's official flower. It is very variable and can be very small or rather huge, with yellow or white and with or without contrasting green or yellow markings.



Papaver dahlianum

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Another very common plant is *Dryas octopetala*, sometimes covering acres! The genera *Saxifraga* and *Draba* are also common with a lot of rare species. The heather, *Cassiope tetragona* subsp. *tetragona* is the commonest woody plant. We found it in every place we visited.



Cassiope tetragona ssp *tetragona*

Inside the town limits we are reasonably safe but outside we had to bring two armed guards in case of polar bear attack. In summer the polar bears are usually out in the pack ice area hunting seals and those [stranded onshore](#) are hungry looking for anything to eat. At least 3 bears were only a day's march off (they can walk 80 km a day and swim for long distances).



Monday: we took a coach on the only road going more than a couple kilometres and went to Hotellneset outside Longyearbyen. We found a lot of interesting plants here too including the yellow form of *Saxifraga cespitosa*, sometimes called *S. aurea* or *S. c.* var *aurea* and *Stellaria humifusa*.

Left: *Saxifraga cespitosa*, yellow form.

We rented boats for 3 days. The sun shone from a cloudless sky for all those days. Tuesday: we left for Sassendalen, about 2 hours away with fast boats.

There are no piers and jetties so you have to get to the shore as best as you can. We usually managed without being too wet. Here we also looked at Villa Fredheim where a hunter and trapper lived for 38 years. We also found the tiny [Chrysosplenium tetrandum](#) and some other species new to us.

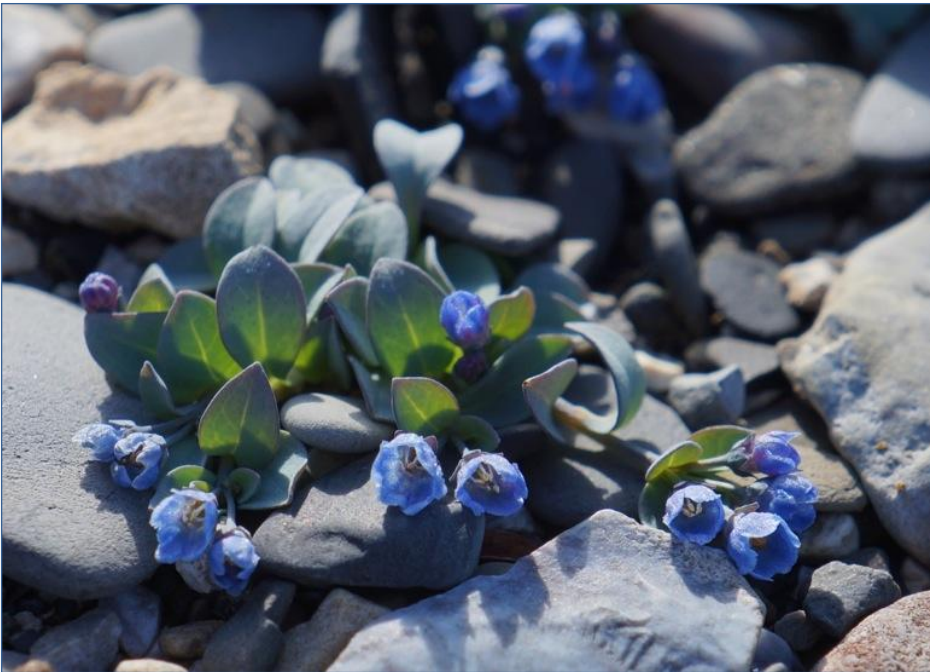
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Sassendalen



Old Villa Fredheim with new cabin in the distance



Wednesday: we went to Diabasodden where we found one specimen of *Mertensia maritima* subsp. *tenella* on the beach and *Braya glabella* subsp. *purpurascens* on the barren and windswept hilltop. The latter is regarded as the rarest species of the Norwegian mainland but is a little more frequent in Svalbard.

Left: *Mertensia maritima* subsp. *tenella*

Below: *Braya glabella* subsp. *purpurascens* from the family Brassicaceae.

Thursday: we visited Kapp Thordsen across the Isfjorden, which is very broad here. Fortunately the weather stayed calm all day. We also paid the glacier Sveabreen a visit. It calved twice while we watched.



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Silene acaulis, looking over the Isfjorden

At Kapp Thordsen *Saxifraga cespitosa* and *Mertensia* covered the beach. The bank of Saurieelva (River Saurie) was likewise covered in *Saxifraga oppositifolia*, which still was in flower. Usually it flowers just when the snow melts and here a snowdrift still lingered in the shade of the riverbank.



Above: *Saxifraga cespitosa* x2



Below: *Saxifraga oppositifolia* x2



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Friday: we had a day off and some of us went for fossil hunting. It is permitted to collect fossils found at the foot of Longyearbreen (Longyear glacier). Most of Svalbard is a protected area and the collection of plants, animals and rocks is forbidden. Also all signs and remnants of human activity from before 1946 are protected. I found some nice fossils of *Metasequoia* from the Tertiary period when Svalbard's climate was more like that of central Europe today.



Draba alpina, above left and *Draba oxycarpa* right, are two of around twelve species of *Draba* on Svalbard.

Below left: [*Coptidium lapponicum*](#)

Below right: [*Coptidium x spitsbergense*](#)



The last day we went to Adventsdalen by coach. The weather was cold with a steady wind from east. The most exciting find for me was *Erigeron humilis* (below left) and the Siberian dwarf birch *Betula nana* subsp. *tundrarum* which differ from the common one in Norway by being more prostrate and some other traits. It started raining when we went back to the hostel..... T.H.



Saxifraga hirculus : one of the showiest in the area.

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---World of Bulbs---

Late Summer Dreams text and photos J. Ian Young

If you want to have a display of bulbs in your garden next spring now is the time to visit your garden centre or quickly place your order from a bulb catalogue. We must not fixate only on the rare and difficult as there are many very beautiful bulbs available for an unbelievably low price.



Crocus corms in a garden centre



Crocus scharojanii

Having warned against bulb “snobbery” I must confess that some of the rarest species are among my favourites! The first of the summer crocus to flower with us is *Crocus scharojanii*, usually in August. We have three pots from Joseph Halda seed sown in November 1996. It was wild collected, and I got the first flower on it in 2003. I do not know if I have been growing it badly or if it is a slow to mature species, as we usually flower crocus from seed in three or four years at most.

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In 2003 I found a flower lying, severed, on the pot in the bulb frame chewed off by a slug; I had not even noticed it coming through. *Crocus scharojanii* is a rare species. I have never found *Crocus scharojanii* an easy bulb to grow and it is even more difficult to get hold of – it is seldom seen for sale though [Jānis Rukšāns](#) has listed it in the past. We see much more of *C. scharojanii flavus*, probably a hybrid with *C. vallicola*, which is much easier to grow and that is the one you occasionally see offered.

Left: *Crocus scharojanii* tepals

Below: *Crocus scharojanii* corms, July



Crocus scharojanii (like *C. vallicola*) has lovely wispy, acuminate tips to the tepals which along with the egg yolk yellow colour give it its charm. While it is in flower I often move it from the outside frame where it lives, to a glass house so I can keep it safe from slugs and hopefully (oh please!) get a seed set. This has not yet happened.

It is always wise to handle your bulbs carefully when repotting as some species will now have roots emerging even before this springs' leaves have died down. *Crocus scharojanii* is one of these plants: you can just see the new, white, roots emerging from the new corm and the shoots already extending on the two in the centre. It is also fascinating to see the stack of the previous few years' corms on these seedlings that had not been repotted for some time.



The speed at which the autumn crocus can appear and burst into flower always amazes me, one day there is barely any sign and the next a beautiful flower. It is amazing how the hoverflies are attracted to the autumn crocus flowers, as soon as the first flower opens the flies home in on it, especially when I take them into the glass house to enjoy the flowers.

Left: Hoverfly on *C. vallicola*

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Crocus vallicola and hoverflies

While they can visit the flowers many times, the flies cannot be relied upon to fertilise the flower properly by transferring sufficient pollen grains onto the sticky and receptive stigma - if you want to get seed, which you should, then you must get out your paint brush and assist nature. Who, then, does this in the wild; I hear some of you asking? No one, but our gardens are a very artificial environment and far removed from the wild habitat where plants have evolved together with specific insects for thousands of years to ensure an efficient pollination is achieved.

While the crocus are still successful in attracting our hoverflies to their open flowers, the flies in our area may differ in shape and be fewer in numbers than the primary pollinating insects of the regions of Turkey where *Crocus vallicola* is native.

Crocus vallicola, ('valley dweller') is one of my favourites - it is never likely to appear for sale by



the basketful as it likes cool moist growing conditions and dislikes drying out.

The lovely white petals terminate in a thread like wisp which often intertwine preventing the flower from expanding fully. The flower in the centre shows this as it resembles a light bulb in this entwined state; the pressure to open will cause the flower to pull apart adopting its elegant goblet shape.

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Left: *Crocus vallicola* interior

In my best forms the inside is stylishly marked with violet lines and two yellow dots at the base of each segment.

This form has yellow stamens and style but these can also be cream. I showed some of these charming variations in a [Bulb Log of 16th September 2009](#).

Crocus vallicola comes from N.E. Turkey and the Caucasus where it often grows close to the luscious yellow *C. scharojanii*. It is the other likely parent of the lovely *Crocus scharojanii flavus*.



Crocus scharojanii flavus x2 and *Crocus scharojanii*

On the far right is *Crocus scharojanii* and to the left *Crocus scharojanii flavus* which shows the acuminate tips to the segments, like *C. vallicola*, and the pale yellow colour is also a combination between that of the two parents. I find that this hybrid, *Crocus scharojanii flavus*, takes after *C. vallicola* in being easier to grow than *Crocus scharojanii* which seems more difficult to please in cultivation. *Crocus scharojanii flavus* is clearly a hybrid intermediate between these two species.

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I cannot resist more photos of *Crocus scharojanii flavus*:



Crocus scharojanii flavus is almost certainly the result of hybridisation in the wild between *Crocus scharojanii* and *C. vallicola* and as such I think it should have its own name. If it is a fertile hybrid resulting in stable populations in the wild then why is it not a species?



These beautiful Crocus remind me that the autumn crocus season is approaching and I need to get back to repotting and preparing the bulbs for [the first storm](#).....

J.I.Y.



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Fine crocus in the wild: In mid-July of 2013 **Johan Nilson of the Gothenberg Botanic Garden** saw the enchanting *Crocus scharojanii* in flower in the Kaçkar Mountains of Turkey. He has been kind enough to share with the IRG some photos of this crocus blooming on steep grassy slopes.



[Johan Nilson](#) and [Peter Korn](#), pictured working in the Explorers' Garden, Scotland, some years ago.

The plants in N.E. Turkey are said to be the subspecies *lazicus* (Brian Mathew 2002), prompting Johan to speculate that this may explain the different flowering times. Brian Mathew stated that one feature of the Turkish subspecies is the formation of stolons: Jānis Rukšāns has written that he has yet to observe this trait in cultivation.



Postage stamp from 1976 in USSR of "Saffron Sharoyan.

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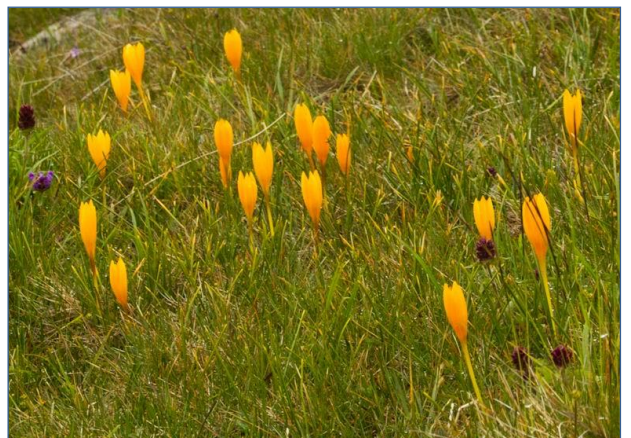


It is interesting to see the variation in the colours of the floral tubes in the bulbs shown in Johan's photographs. These vary from completely pale tubes, through some with a wash of colour to those with distinctly dark sections below the throat of the flower.

Henrik Zetterlund expressed surprise that Johan had seen these plants in bloom so early in the season. Henrik has seen it flowering in the Russian Caucasus in September. Kees Jan Van Zwiene documents a fine selection of [C. vallicola](#), [C. scharojanii lazicus](#) (with quite a variation of colour) and the probable hybrid [of the two](#) in his photo record of a trip in [September 2011](#).



Crocus scharojanii subsp. *lazicus*



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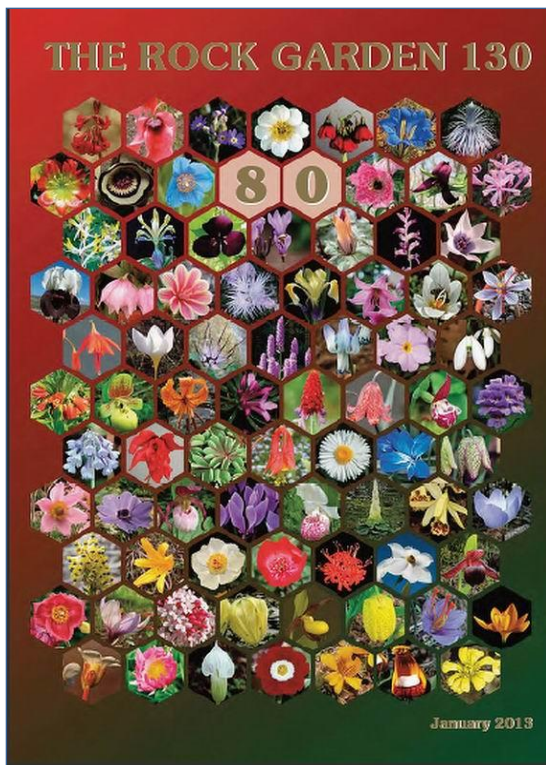
---NEWS from the SRGC---



New Online Membership option for the Scottish Rock Garden Club!

If you enjoy reading the IRG and other features of the SRGC website, including the vibrant Forum, where our international members can share the experience of the plants they grow and enjoy an online meeting place, you may have been kind enough to make a donation to the Club to support our efforts here to disseminate information and encourage interest in rock garden and alpine plants. Such donations have been and will continue to be, most welcome.

The latest innovation of the SRGC has been to include an option for membership of the Club for those who might wish to receive their twice yearly journal, "[The Rock Garden](#)" online for the convenience of having it to read on a tablet device, whenever you like and wherever you may be. It occurs to us that such a version of membership, offered at the exceptional value of £10 per year, may be of interest to many who have not considered membership of the Club where the [journal is delivered by post](#) but **who would wish to support our work and the free access to our website features and have the extra advantage of accessing our superb journal and our annual [Seed Exchange](#).**



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Cover and contents of the SRGC Journal from January 2013 to celebrate eighty years of the Club.

The Rock Garden

Our twice yearly journal is one of the world's best publications for rock gardeners. Interesting, informative and illustrated in colour, it contains articles on all aspects of rock gardening and propagation of alpine: construction of rock gardens; plant portraits; and plants in the wild. It is written for both experts and beginners and aims to mirror the wide ranges of interests and skills of our members. Issued twice per year to members, the 126 colour pages of The Rock Garden partner the online activities of the club. The journal is the usual mix of events, prizes, recollections, plant-hunting expeditions, hernia-inducing rock movements, perfect show plants, and book reviews. Its pages always aim to show the month to month activities of members and for many people these culminate in the definitive exhibits at our regular shows. Thanks to the effort of show secretaries and photographers, there are accounts of SRGC shows.

For "Online" membership (which is for those who prefer to download the Journals in electronic form) please register from the "Register" link at the top of [any main SRGC website page](#) - following that, when you next Log In on the main page you will be taken to a special page to pay for e-subscription, at the rate of just £10 per 12 months, thereafter when you are logged in you will have access to the latest Journals.

Online subscription allows access to the Journals and the Seed Exchange!!! Why not join now?

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