

## Arun West U3A visit to Highdown Gardens on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2019

Report by Anne Evans and Gwyneth Booker with thanks to Liesma Mezuiz, our "plant advisor".

For our first garden visit this year we went to Highdown Gardens, just north of Goring by Sea, run by Worthing Borough Council. It was a cold and a bit of wind was blowing, but a dry and sunny day with a definite feeling of spring in the air!

Highdown Gardens created by Sir Frederick Stearn is situated on a down land countryside in a chalk pit, featuring a wide collection of plants, many raised from seeds bought from China by many of the great collectors of their time.

We left the car park and entered the garden where we were struck by the scent of flowering box, *Sarcococca confusa*. We walked past the greenhouses and our first sighting of crocuses, and then turned right into the Old Orchard. Little was out in flower, however, there were plenty of daffodils showing a promise of colour to come.

We carried on into the Millennium Garden; this was full of scented plants such as lavender, curry plant, a beautiful *Daphne*, scented geraniums and miniature *Iris reticulata*. We also saw our first hellebores in shades of purple, pink and white. Out of the Millennium Garden and following the footpath we passed many daffodils ready to bloom.



Next was the first quarry, and we passed a bed of snowdrops with at least four different varieties, and



honesty seed heads. There was a pond by an old lime kiln with huge carp swimming around the plants. In the larger quarry, its back wall was a rockery with snowdrops, cyclamen and crocus. Hart's tongue ferns also clung to the chalk face. The gardeners gladly allowed Pip to move their wheelbarrow so photographs could be taken of the rockery. Next to this was another pond full of bamboos.

The path took us past a newly planted bed of hellebores which will look fabulous next year. There were swathes of purple crocus, *Crocus tommasinianus*, mixed with aconites and



snowdrops under the trees. We noticed a fallen tree next to one that was fenced off; this was a Judas tree - a rare tree that will have bright pinkly red flowers later on. We walked round the rest of the garden where many plants were beginning to grow; the ground was slightly muddy but ok to walk on. The sun came out and this encouraged people to use the benches to stop and have

a chat. On leaving the main garden we noticed a tassel shrub, *Garrya elliptica* next to a very thorny plant. Finally, hidden away were three camellias out in flower, a red one with a yellow centre, a double pink and a white one. Gorgeous!

The garden was interesting and had lots of early spring colour, but there were lots of signs of how colourful the garden will be over the next few months.

Unfortunately, we were unable to join the group who had gone to Haskins for coffee and we hope they had nice cake! (We did!)

Thanks to Masha for organising this trip. It's well worth a return visit in different seasons, and certainly it felt like Spring is just around the corner!