



Spotlight on...



## English Bluebell

### *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*

#### Introduction

We are fortunate in The Chilterns that the native English bluebell is a common sight in our woodlands in late spring, carpeting the ground in a mass of intense blue / indigo flowers. It is a perennial plant, invisible for much of the year as it hides away as a bulb underground. Grass-like leaves emerge from February onwards, and flowers can start to appear from the end of March.

#### Habitat

Bluebells are woodland plants, particularly associated with ancient woodland. They are native to western Europe, with the UK being a species stronghold.



#### More information, and what to look out for

This much-loved native flower is under threat from the Spanish bluebell (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*), introduced to Britain in the late 1600s as an ornamental garden plant. This non-native species was first recorded in the wild in 1963, and spreads when garden waste is fly tipped in the countryside.



English bluebell

Unfortunately, it freely interbreeds with native bluebells, producing hybrid offspring and changing future populations forever. Many bluebells in our local woods are good examples of British native bluebells, but how can you tell our native bluebell from the Spanish species?



Spanish bluebell

Native Bluebell	Spanish Bluebell
Deep indigo-blue, also pink and rarely white flowers	Pale to mid-blue, often also white or pink flowers
Cream-white pollen / anthers Flower stems droop or nod clearly to one side Almost all flowers hang down to one side of the stem	Green or blue pollen / anthers Stiff and upright flower stem Flowers usually arranged all the way round the stem, with the flowers sticking outwards
Narrow, straight-sided bell flowers with parallel sides	Wide open flowers, almost con shaped bell
Reflexed (curled back) petal tips	Petal tips flare slightly outwards
Strong, sweet scent to flowers	Little or no scent at all to flowers