

Look out for the first bluebells

April 4 2011



Bluebell-like plant called grape-hyacinth, *Muscari armeniacum*

Have you seen any bluebells yet? If you have, help scientists at the Natural History Museum and record your sighting in the bluebell survey.

This year, the annual survey is focusing on the timings when bluebell flowers first appear, which will help scientists discover if flowering seasons are changing as a result of climate change.

Bluebell-like plants

Anyone can take part. The Museum's bluebell experts have provided useful tips and guides to help you check that what you've seen is a bluebell and not one of the many bluebell-like plants.

For example hyacinths, *Hyacinthus orientalis*, are a common look-alike although they flower earlier than most bluebells.

Species of grape-hyacinth are also often confused with bluebells. But they have distinctive flowers and their petals are fused almost to the tips.

Bluebells are easily separated from the look-alikes by having two bracts (a leaf-like or scale-like part) at the base of each flower.

Bluebell species

The bluebell survey has identification guides to help you correctly identify bluebells.

In the UK, there are 3 types of bluebell found, the native (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*), the Spanish (*H. hispanica*) shown on the right, and the hybrid (*H. x massartiana*).



Spanish bluebell with its blue pollen and open bell-shaped flower. The native UK species has distinctive cream pollen and a narrow darker more closed tubular flower.

It is easier to identify bluebell species in their early stages when the flowers first appear. They still have their pollen, which is only creamy-white in the native species. The natives also have a strong sweet smell and the flower spike nods at the tip.

The first bluebells

'Usually the heat of our big cities means that urban gardens are among the first to enjoy bluebells, but we've no records yet,' says Museum plant expert (botanist) Dr Fred Rumsey.

'It would seem that the hard winter has had an effect on bluebell flowering. I've still even to see any buds in my travels but flowering native and non-native [plants](#) have now been recorded on the south coast and in the south-west.'

So, keep your eyes open, record your sightings in the online map, and help with scientific research in the bluebell survey. And remember, you are not allowed to collect native bluebells in the wild as they are protected by law.

Provided by American Museum of Natural History

Citation: Look out for the first bluebells (2011, April 4) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-04-bluebells.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.