

## Country Notes for May 2015

One of the great joys of early May is walking through a wood amidst a carpet of blue - the blue of bluebells. In some years these beautiful flowers are in their full regalia in the latter part of April. In other years they save themselves for the first part of May. I suspect that this may be one of those years.

A flower of woodland, they are often seen at their best where the trees have been coppiced, allowing them to be seen in the open. However, to walk along a woodland path and breath in their scent whilst enjoying the spectacle of their colour is one of the privileges of living in England. In fact in Scotland the bluebell is another plant altogether and what is called a bluebell in England is referred to there as the wild hyacinth. The bluebell in Scotland is what in England is called a harebell. Somewhat confusing! There is no doubt however that they bear a striking similarity to the hyacinths we enjoy in our homes in winter, in whose family they are to be found.

The English bluebell is *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* and it can be distinguished from the Spanish bluebell, *Hyacinthoides hispanica*, by the fact that the flowers of the native bluebell curve slightly downward at the top. The Spanish bluebell, on the other hand, points straight up. The Spanish bluebell is also somewhat paler in colour than the English bluebell. The Spanish bluebell is often found in gardens and there is no doubt that there has been some hybridisation between the two. The ones on my garden - and I have quite a lot - seem to be a mixture of the two. Let's hope that the bluebells in our woods continue to retain the pure character of the pure bred English bluebell.

For many people this is their favourite plant of all - or so some surveys say. It would certainly be high on my list. So now is the time to take a walk along our many woodland paths and enjoy what must be considered the plant of the moment.

Andrew Snowdon