

THE HUNDRED PARISHES SOCIETY

www.hundredparishes.org.uk

One of the delights of a woodland walk on a sunny April day is the sweet scent wafting from the massed flowers of the English bluebell. One of our best-loved wildflowers, with half of the world's population found in the UK, it is typically associated with ancient woodlands but can also occur at the base of long-established hedgerows.

The narrow glossy leaves and flower spikes are produced from deeply rooted bulbs supported by specialised symbiotic fungi. The flowers are a deep violet-blue, but sometimes white or pink spikes occur. The flowers are narrow, tubular-bell shaped, with tips that curl backwards, and the pollen is cream-coloured. They are arranged on one side of a drooping stem. After pollination by honeybees and other insects many green capsules form which will hold large numbers of ripe black seeds. The seeds are shaken from the capsules by breezes or by animals running through the woods.

The introduced and invasive Spanish bluebell has broader leaves. Its pale blue, unscented flowers are arranged all around the upright stem and are more open revealing blue pollen. Encouragingly, recent research has found that the native species has a genetic advantage due to the sheer weight of numbers and greater fertility and so should continue to thrive.

Locations where it is possible to see carpets of bluebells include the Hertfordshire Way as it passes through Sidehill Wood and Mill Wood in Much Hadham and Howe Wood in Littlebury beside Strethall Road as it crosses over the M11 motorway.

Several walks described on our website pass through woodlands. Walk number 4 goes through a fine bluebell wood at Rickling whilst the longer walk 20 visits Mill Wood. Details of woods or nature reserves to visit can be found on these websites: www.Uttlesford-Wildlife.org.uk and www.hertswildlifetrust.org.uk.

Tricia Moxey, Trustee.

Photos

Bluebells

Littlebury

Much Hadham

Rickling