



PLANTLIFE

POSITION STATEMENT ON SALE OF BLUEBELLS IN THE UK

Remit: UK

Last updated/adopted: October 2003

1. Introduction

1.1 Native bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* is widely distributed and common throughout the United Kingdom. It is of international importance as 25-49% of the world population is found in the UK. The new Atlas¹ suggests that the distribution of native bluebell is stable and it remains abundant throughout its range although the fertile hybrid of native bluebell and Spanish bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispanica* is increasing its range and frequency. The Atlas states that "the fertile hybrid is perhaps the commonest cultivated bluebell in gardens. Discarded bulbs readily become naturalised, and introgression with *H. non-scripta* occurs."

1.2 The major threats to the native bluebell are:

- Habitat loss as a result of conversion of woodlands to agriculture or conifer plantations
- Possible competition and hybridisation with the fertile hybrid *Hyacinthoides hispanica x non-scripta* and Spanish bluebell *H. hispanica*
- Climate change resulting in changes in composition of our woodland flora
- Unsustainable commercial collection of bluebells from the wild

1.3 Plantlife's survey of bluebells in 2003 will provide a clearer picture of the distribution and ecology of the species and give an indication of the co-occurrence of the hybrid and its parent species. Further research will be needed to determine the extent of the problem posed by hybridisation.

1.4 Given the public interest in this issue, Plantlife needs to have a clear position statement about trade in bluebells. This position statement is supported by Plantlife's policy on non-native species.

2. Statement

2.1 There are concerns that all supplies of wild native bluebell are:

- either misleading as non-native species (Spanish bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispanica* or the hybrid *H. hispanica x non-scripta*) are being sold under the guise of native; or
- illegal as to date only one licence has been issued by Defra allowing the sale of wild bluebell seeds². (It is worth stating, however that it is legal to sell native

¹ Preston, C.D., Pearman, D.A. and Dines, T.D. (2002) *New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora*. Oxford University Press for DEFRA and BSBI.

² Native bluebell was listed on Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act in 1998. Since then it has been illegal in Britain under Section 13 of the Act to take native bluebells (bulb or seed) from the wild for commercial purposes.

bluebells from a cultivated stock, provided the source bluebells were collected under license or prior to 1998.)

- 2.2 Plantlife believes that there should be a legal supply of native bluebell for gardeners and for habitat restoration.
- 2.3 Plantlife believes that it should remain illegal to take bluebell bulbs from the wild for commercial purposes and no bulb collected from the wild should enter the trade.
- 2.4 Plantlife encourages licenses being granted for sustainable harvesting of wild bluebell seed for either direct sale to the market or for bulking up for subsequent sale of bulbs.
- 2.5 Plantlife urges the horticulture industry to end the misleading sale of the Spanish bluebell or the hybrid under the guise of native bluebell.
- 2.6 Plantlife will urge gardeners to:
 - Double check that supplies of native bluebell are genuine and are not sourced illegally from the wild - if in doubt, they should not buy them
 - Never plant Spanish/hybrid bluebells in the countryside
 - Always compost excess garden material carefully
 - Only plant Spanish bluebells or the hybrid in gardens which are far away from native bluebell populations
- 2.7 Plantlife will encourage garden retailers to sign up to the joint Flora Locale/Plantlife code of practice for collectors, growers and suppliers of wild flora (www.naturebureau.co.uk/pages/floraloc/).

3. Status

- 3.1 Adopted by the Board in October 2003.