

# **Bluebells are blooming early this year**

**Scotland's top bluebell woods are peaking up to a fortnight earlier than usual this year thanks to the sunny weather.**

Spectacular carpets of the violet-blue flowers – dubbed “nature’s fireworks” – are already appearing across the central belt.

Experts expect sites further north to peak early in the coming days rather than mid May onwards, if the trend continues.

Conservation charity Woodland Trust Scotland said prolonged sun may have triggered “peak bluebell” between a week and two weeks earlier than usual in some places.

Trust spokesman George Anderson said: “Scotland’s bluebells usually peak around the middle of May, with southern sites a little earlier and northern ones a wee bit later. But this year we are seeing the flowers romp ahead of their usual timetable.

“Prolonged spells of sunny weather may have been the trigger but we don’t know for sure. It looks like things are running at least a week earlier than usual and perhaps even a fortnight in some places.”

Scotland’s bluebells provide one of nature’s most spectacular events, with their appearance across the country credited with giving people a mental health boost.

Woodland Trust Scotland, which cares for over 8000 hectares of land in Scotland, said bluebell woods were “there to be enjoyed by all”.

But they urged people to look after displays and not trample on the sensitive plants in search of selfies and picture perfect picnic spots.

The charity warned that going off paths to pose for photos among the delicate flowers could cause entire colonies to die out and threaten displays for future years. It can take up to seven years for a trampled area to recover.

Mr Anderson added: “The sights, sounds and smells of a bluebell wood never fail to lift the spirits. We urge everyone to enjoy them without threatening their future, and that means staying on paths to avoid trampling them.

“The plants must pack a lot of work into a very short few weeks and it can be catastrophic for them to be crushed or trampled now. So, we ask everyone enjoying bluebells to keep to existing paths and leave them to do their glorious thing undisturbed.

“Don’t wade into the blossoms to take a photo and don’t stand among the plants to have your photo taken. Keep dogs on paths too and let them run around somewhere else while the bluebells are out.”

Bluebells – also known as wild hyacinths – thrive in old broad-leaved woodlands where trees are far enough apart to allow light to reach the ground.

The iconic blue-purple flowers traditionally begin blooming in the warmer south and spread north as the season progresses.

Around half of all bluebells in the world are found in the UK and Scotland’s native species (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) is protected.

Because they are strongly associated with ancient woodland, carpets of bluebells in a wood are likely to signify the wood is also ancient.

Spanish bluebells also flower at this time of year but are simple to differentiate from native species. The Spanish bluebell is more upright with flowers on both sides of the stem, while the British bluebell leans over, weighed down by its flowers all on one side.

In Scotland, the harebell (*Campanula rotundifolia*) is also referred to by many people as the “Scottish bluebell”.



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