



# South Wirral Watch

## April 2010



Letting you know what to look out for this month at Dibbinsdale LNR and Eastham Country Park

Welcome to April's edition of South Wirral Watch. This is compiled by the combined forces of The Friends of Dibbinsdale and Eastham Country Park, in conjunction with the Rangers service at both sites. If you see, hear or photograph anything in either of the parks this month that may be of interest to other readers then just email Peter or Alan at [petermiller@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:petermiller@wirral.gov.uk) or [alansmail@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:alansmail@wirral.gov.uk)



## Bluebells

Voted Britain's favourite flower, the bluebell captures the very spirit of springtime with its intensely coloured carpets appearing in many woodlands this time of year. As with most things in nature, this picture is not as simple as it first appears. Three different types of bluebell occur in the British Isles – native, Spanish and a hybrid. Scientists and conservationists want to learn more about the distribution, characteristics and interactions of these closely related plants, how they change over time and whether the native bluebell is under threat.

The bluebells that can be seen in Eastham Country Park and Dibbinsdale LNR between April and June each year are mostly native bluebells. These can be seen at their best in the long plantation and oak woods at the north end of Eastham Country Park and at the Dibbinsdale Road end of Dibbinsdale LNR.

## Identifying bluebells

The following questions will help to identify which bluebells you are observing.

### Question One

1. Leaves narrow, usually less than 15mm broad. Flowers normally narrow, straight-sided bells and strongly scented in warm weather. Petals strongly rolled back. Anthers creamy-white = **Bluebell** (*H. non-scripta*).

Or

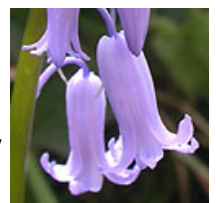
1a. Leaves usually wide, often greater than 15mm broad. Flowers broader flaring bells and not scented in warm weather. Petals not rolled back or slightly rolled back. Anthers pale to dark blue. **Go to question two.**

### Question Two

2. Flower spike often droops slightly to one side. Flowers spreading, 10-20mm diameter. Petals rolled back slightly. Anthers pale creamy-blue (occasionally creamy-white) = **Hybrid Bluebell** (*H. x massartiana*).

Or

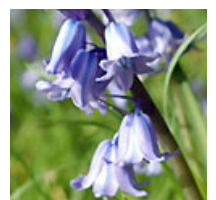
2a. Flower spike usually stiff and upright. Flowers broadly spreading, 15-25mm diameter. Petals usually not rolled back. Anthers clear mid-blue = **Spanish Bluebell** (*H. hispanica*).



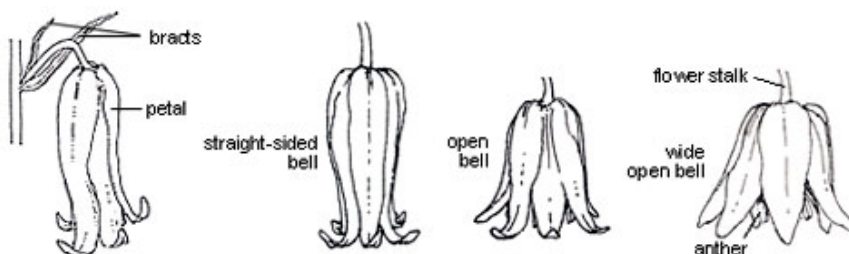
**Bluebell**  
(*H. non-scripta*).



**Hybrid Bluebell**  
(*H. x massartiana*).



**Spanish Bluebell**  
(*H. hispanica*).  
*cripta*



## Butterflies

**Peacock, orange tip and speckled wood** butterflies appear in April. The orange tip butterfly (*Anthocharis cardamines*), named because the males have bright orange tips to their forewings, are a common site along the path through the reed beds at Dibbinsdale LNR.



The males can be seen as they fly along in search of the more reclusive female which lacks the orange and is often mistaken for one of the other 'White' butterflies. The undersides are mottled green and white and create a superb camouflage when settled on flower heads such as Cow Parsley and Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). The female Orange Tip Butterfly lays eggs singly on the flower heads of Cuckooflower (*Cardimine pratensis*) and Garlic Mustard and many other species of wild Vegetable.

**Gorse** is in full yellow bloom during April and provides a very important food source for insects. Gorse has a distinct coconut smell and can be seen in ECP around the view point mound at the north end of the cycle path.



## Trees

Ash trees come into flower in April, but its leaves are one of the last to emerge (May). The male parts consist of a bundle of purple pollen filled clusters and the females parts dangle in the air to pick up wind borne pollen.



Ash buds bursting



Ash Fruit known as keys

## Birds

The dawn chorus is in full swing but it will be May before all the singing bird species arrive.

**Frog's** spawn has become tadpoles by April. The adults now leave the ponds to live on land until Autumn. They feed on slugs, snails and insects and therefore should be valued by gardeners



**Bats** are beginning to emerge from hibernation and can be seen feeding as the weather gets warmer. In bad weather, they may become torpid (cool and inactive) to save energy. Bats can be seen at Dibbinsdale and Eastham.

## Don't forget this months events.

### [The Easter Bunny Rides Again](#)

Fri 2<sup>nd</sup> & Mon 5<sup>th</sup> April 12noon- 4pm

Easter fun at Eastham Country Park with the ponies and their friends from Parkgate Pony Sanctuary. Come and meet our very special Easter Bunny and have your photo taken with him, follow the Bunny trail through the woods, pony rides, stalls and lots of fun.

### [Walled Garden Open Days](#)

Sun 11<sup>th</sup> & Mon 12<sup>th</sup> April 11am – 3pm

Visit the Eco-garden project at Dibbinsdale Nature Reserve, run by and for people with learning disabilities. Wildflowers, trees, insect garden, veg, fruit and composting demonstration area. Plants and refreshments will be on sale on behalf of the project.

### [Wildflowers of the Spring Woodland](#)

Sun 25<sup>th</sup> April 10.30am – 12.30pm

A guided walk through Dibbinsdale Nature Reserve looking at the amazing tapestry of wildflowers and the sea of Bluebells amongst the ancient woodland. Booking essential. Contact Tel: 0151 327 1007 or email [easthamrangers@wirral.gov.uk](mailto:easthamrangers@wirral.gov.uk)

## UK Seasonal Produce

Seasons for British crops have changed in recent years according to the climate. Many crops that once had a single or short growing season may be available for longer than the traditional season or even twice in a year.

April sees the start of the UK asparagus, beetroot and lettuce seasons.

Please feel free to forward this letter to your friends.

A .pdf of this document and others related to the sites are available from [www.dibbinsdale.co.uk](http://www.dibbinsdale.co.uk)

This document was produced by the friends of Dibbinsdale LNR and Eastham Country Park and the Rangers of South Wirral.

