Friends of Spencer Park and Recreation Ground

**Spanish Bluebells**

You may have heard that we have been clearing Spanish bluebells from Spencer Park. Why are we doing this? After all, Spanish bluebells have pretty, mid-blue flowers. They can be seen in numerous front gardens in Spencer Avenue, Spencer Road, Belvedere Road, Broadway, Berkeley Road North, and Mayfield Road – to name only those roads closest to the park. They can also be seen in local pavements.

English bluebells (as we call them) are native to the Atlantic coast of Europe but are most common in the British Isles and Ireland. They have thin leaves; the flowers are dark blue, on one side of a curved stem, and give off a wonderful scent. Spanish bluebells are an imported but established species with much wider leaves and mid-blue flowers, which surround an erect stem; they have almost no scent.

In the last two years, as part of our plan to improve Spencer Park, we have planted over 500 English bluebells in the shaded west border before we realised the extent of the threat from Spanish bluebells and hybrids, which had already spread across the park. What is this threat?

1. Spanish bluebells interbreed with English bluebells, through cross-pollination. But the hybrids are dominated by their Spanish parentage. The flowers are pretty (sometimes white or pink) but there is little scent. Over time, as a species, English bluebells are ‘submerged’. This is recognised as a danger by the Royal Horticultural Society.
2. Spanish bluebells are invasive, spreading within a garden, and from garden to garden. Once established, they will smother other plants.

If Spanish and hybrid bluebells are not removed from the park and from gardens for some good distance around it (bees travel far!) then our plan for a beautiful scented glade of English bluebells in May will fail.

So far we have removed about 80% of the Spanish bluebells from the park and prevented the remainder from flowering. Each year this figure will increase. But we need your help to remove Spanish bluebells from local gardens and paths. Some residents have already done this.

The best way is dig deep under each clump (or occasional single plant), extract the bulbs and put them in the green waste bin (not the brown bin for garden waste, as the bulbs may infect any compost). You will need to do this for a few years as some always ‘escape’. If you cannot dig up Spanish bluebells because they are in a path or rockery, or under a hedge, or because you are too busy, then cut them to the ground with garden shears on a regular basis. Over time they will die as having no leaves robs the bulbs of nutrients. And without flowers, there will be no cross-pollination with English bluebells.

So will you please help us in this project to create a beautiful, scented glade of English bluebells in Spencer Park by removing any Spanish bluebells from your garden as soon as possible. For advice, contact friendsofspencerpark@gmail.com (website: friendsofspencerpark.org/) or leave a message on 07581286563.

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