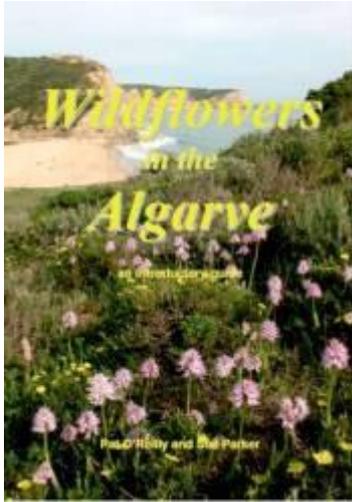


# Wildflowers in the Algarve

*an introductory guide*

by Pat O'Reilly and Sue Parker



**ISBN:** 0-9549554-9-8

A beautifully illustrated souvenir guide to wildflowers in the Algarve, with clear information on where, when and how to find many of the botanical gems for which southern Portugal is so renowned.

More than 100 large colour photographs, with descriptions of the Algarve's varied wildflower habitats

'Where and when to look' advice plus details of the Algarve's nature reserves and natural parks

## Reviews

*What a delight it is to come across a book that provides such helpful advice and beautiful pictures to help visitors to this wildflower wonderland. I particularly value having a map as well as location information for the dozens of wildflowers that grown in southern Portugal in springtime (December to May being the key months). The scientific names are included for those who prefer to work that way. A pocket guide that is excellent value for money and beautifully produced. Ten out of ten!*

(Review on Amazon)

*This user-friendly information source will delight newcomers to the Algarve as well as residents who want to discover more of the hidden botanical gems of the region. Well-known authors and naturalists Pat O'Reilly and Sue Parker have produced a beautifully illustrated introductory guide to the wildflower delights of the Algarve. With chapters on the major habitat types - coastal cliffs and coves, agricultural land, river valleys and estuaries, and mountains and forests - the authors guide visitors to the best wildflower locations, describing and illustrating more than 100 of the most beautiful wildflower species to be found throughout the year.*

(NHBS Environment Bookstore)

## Contents

- What Makes the Algarve so Special
- Algarve Wildflower Habitats
- Wildflower Hotspots
- How to Use This Book
- By the Way
- Coastal Cliffs and Coves
- Agricultural Land
- River Valleys, Estuaries and Marshland
- Mountains and Forests
- Invaders and Wanderers
- Nature Parks and Reserves in the Algarve
- Who Cares for the Algarve Environment?
- Index

# About the authors

Writer and broadcaster Pat O'Reilly has wandered the countryside throughout Europe in search of wildflowers for more than 50 years; he has written more than 20 books on wildlife and countryside topics.

Sue Parker is a frequent contributor to countryside magazines, radio and TV programmes and has been studying and photographing wild orchids for more than 30 years; this is Sue's ninth book.

This book uses the commonly accepted term wildflowers, rather than wild flowers. Whatever your preference the flowers illustrated and described in this guide book are some of the most beautiful to be found in the Algarve, southern Portugal.

## Sample pages

### What Makes the Algarve so Special?



The common poppy (*Papaver rhoas*) blooms in March and April in the Algarve. Visit southern Portugal in the early part of the year and you see wildflowers everywhere. From January through to May there is hardly a piece of ground, no matter how small, that does not have its own colourful display. Later, when the temperature soars, it is hard to believe that such a fabulous riot of colour preceded the brown, dried-up vegetation that dominates the summer landscape.



4

For those of us old enough to have known the countryside of Britain and northern Europe half a century ago, scenes such as the one on the cover of this book replay experiences from our childhood: cornfields flushed with poppies and cornflowers; butterfly meadows peppered with wild orchids; and waysides where wildflowers smother banks, hedges and ditches. In the Algarve of today, farming still relies much more on sunshine than on the herbicides, insecticides and artificial fertilisers that have stolen so much of our own countryside colour. Organic rather than intensive farming is practised across much of the Mediterranean region. As a result the region is home to more than 10,000 species of flowering plants - mostly native ones, but with a fair number of introduced plants thriving alongside them.

That's not to say time has stood still in Portugal, but many of the land-use changes here have been good for the native plants. Even the cutting of roadside verges to reduce fire risk in summer favours some of the less robust wildflowers - wild orchids in particular. Of course, farming inevitably causes some plants to become marginalised, restricted to places that people and farm animals find inaccessible, but it also creates new habitats in which other wildflowers flourish where they might not otherwise have done. Welcome back, therefore, to the wildflower-rich lands of the Algarve!



Large Blue Alkanet (*Anchusa azurea*) is a common wayside plant in the Algarve. Tourists flock to the Algarve for its wonderful weather and natural environment. Ironically, development to meet the growing demand for villas, hotels and golf courses consumes the precious land and water resources that are the Algarve's source of wealth. (Many Portuguese rivers now dry up completely in summer.) Recognising the need to balance development with the preservation of the natural landscape, the Portuguese authorities have designated some of the most beautiful wild places as National Parks. (See pages 63 - 65).

5

## Algarve Wildflower Habitats

Although its coast faces the Atlantic Ocean, the Algarve shares the wet, mild winters and hot dry summers - sometimes up to five months without rain - that characterise Mediterranean-climate regions in other parts of the world. Perhaps surprisingly, this climate is not restricted to those countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea: in North and South America, the Cape area of South Africa and in southern Australia there are Mediterranean-climate regions sharing this unique weather pattern and with distinctive plant communities adapted to the climatic conditions. The collective size of these regions, at a mere two percent of our planet's land surface, is no measure of its importance in terms of flora and fauna. This small area contains some 20 percent of the plant species known to Mankind.

Bush and forest fires are an all-too-frequent feature of Algarve summers, and indeed fire has had a major influence on wildflower evolution here. Species with the ability to regenerate from root systems or from bulbs protected below ground from the ravages of the summer blazes do well. In fact some of the plants actually depend on fire to penetrate their specially toughened seed cases, releasing the seeds and stimulating them to grow and flower.

While the Algarve and other Mediterranean regions provide ideal conditions for plants, they are also places where people like to live. Over thousands of years Man has cleared most of the accessible land of its original tree cover to create open areas either for grazing animals or for growing arable crops, grapes, oranges, almonds, olives, figs and so on. The land-use regime has, in turn, determined which wildflowers now grow in abundance here.



Thyme Broomrape (*Orobanche alba*), a parasite on thyme plants and related species, is a very common sight on fallowed agricultural land throughout the Algarve.

6

## Wildflower Hotspots

You can find Algarve wildflowers in the littoral zone (the coastal cliffs and coves); in forested mountainous regions (known as the 'serra'), along river valleys; and in the maquis (areas with moderate rainfall that support shrubs up to about five metres tall) and the garigue (drier habitats up to about 50 metres above sea level comprising compact cushions of plants and shrubs with bare stony areas in between that make the going fairly easy underfoot). From December through to June these are all places where plenty of wildflowers bloom.



A tangle of wildflowers on the cliffs near Carvoeiro

But if you have only a limited amount of time available and want to see lots of wildflowers, concentrate on the garigue, the zone that lies between the coastal strip and the wooded hills further inland. This narrow strip of land is home to a vast array of plants - indeed, many of the wild orchids for which the Algarve is renowned can be found there.

Barbary nut (*Gynandris sisyrinchium*), an iris-like wildflower, blooms on the Algarve from late January onwards. The short-lived flowers open in mid afternoon and close again as dusk descends.



7



Spanish iris (*Iris xiphium*) has colonised this area of cleared woodland on a hilltop near Bordiera. With bright orange patches on its azure-blue flowers, Spanish iris is usually at its best between late March and mid May.

54



One of the many wild orchids of the Algarve, the broad-leaved helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) is a common sight in wooded areas, where it can often be found bathed in dappled sunlight beside forest footpaths. This elegant plant was photographed in mixed woodland between Monchique and Alferce in late April.

55