

Bee Orchids and their relatives

The genus *Ophrys*, the Bee Orchids and their relatives, is Mediterranean in distribution and only four species are found as far north as the UK. They are amongst our most striking plants, the curious flowers mimicking insects through shape, colour, texture and smell to bring about pollination. The commonest British species, the Bee Orchid, routinely self-pollinates as visiting insects are scarcer in colder, wetter climates. As a consequence, floral mutations that arise are spread, and are usually regarded as varieties (they have 'var' in their names below).

With their minute (thus highly mobile) seeds, orchids may be among the first species to respond to climate change. We know that the northern limit of the Bee Orchid has shifted over 50 km north in the last 40 years, now reaching Scotland. We need help plotting its continuing advance. Send records of any *Ophrys* species (number, where and when), ideally with a photo, to f.rumsey@nhm.ac.uk.



Spider-orchids are protected from collection and damage under Schedule 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Bee Orchid *Ophrys apifera*

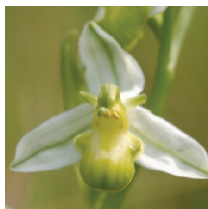


Found in a range of open sunny habitats, even in urban areas. Flowering from late May onwards.



Ophrys apifera var. *belgarum*

This is distinguished by the lack of pointed hairy shoulders to the lip and the colour and shape of the markings on the lip. It was first described from near Winchester in 1998 but has since been found elsewhere in Southern England.



Ophrys apifera var. *chlorantha*

In this variety, all of the reddish-purple pigments are missing giving a greenish lip with white sepals. It is scattered throughout the species range but is always rare.

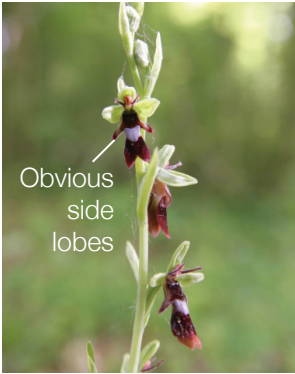


Wasp Orchid

Ophrys apifera var. *trollii*

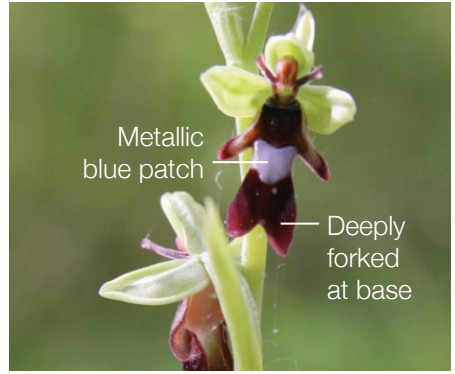
The most distinctive variety. The narrower, paler, blotched lip is pointed – the 'sting' at its tip not neatly tucked under as it is in the other varieties. Restricted to south-west England.

Fly Orchid *Ophrys insectifera*



This has smaller, narrower flowers than the other *Ophrys*.

It is more a plant of shadier areas, such as woodlands, than the other species. Usually flowering from mid-May onwards.



Early Spider-orchid *Ophrys sphegodes*



Now largely restricted to calcareous grasslands close to the south coast, from Dorset to Kent. Shorter than the Bee Orchid and with a more rounded lip and greenish sepals, this rare plant flowers up to a month earlier, from late April onwards. The lip markings are very variable.

Late Spider-orchid *Ophrys fuciflora*



Our rarest *Ophrys* species, known from a handful of sites on downland in East Kent, from Folkestone north to Wye. The flowers are similar in colour to the Bee Orchid but are larger, squarer in shape, the yellow terminal appendage to the lip is visible, not tucked away behind as in the Bee Orchid, and is lobed. The lip markings are very variable. Flowering is from early June onwards.



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