

REPORTS

Bulb-digging in the Park National des Cévennes

J. FELTWELL

Marlham, Henley's Down, Battle, TN33 9BN,
UK

This photograph shows the result of systematic removal of bulbs from the summit of a small hill immediately to the north of Col du Lac at Sumene, Gard (30) in southern France.

The steep hill is at about 900 m altitude on limestone and is within the périphérique of the Parc National des Cévennes, France.

I witnessed the removal of the bulbs on 20th April, 1992 from the other side of the valley, whilst I was making my ascent, but was unable to apprehend the culprit. He had a knapsack on his back and carried a long wooden box, both of which he filled with bulbs for the descent.

On my arrival at the summit an hour later it was pock-marked with small excavation holes, reminiscent of those made by badgers or squirrels. I imagine that a trowel had been used to remove the bulbs. No other person was on the mountain.

The species collected was thought to have been principally early-flowering squills, *Scilla* ssp. Remnants of the leaves on the surface of the soil indicated presumably where digging would be successful. It

was not known whether the man was collecting the bulbs for himself or to sell commercially.

Mountaintops are particularly rich sites for plants and animals and should be given special protection. Even some protection and recognition would be useful, if only on paper as a first stage. This particular hill was also being used by butterflies from the valley below for "hill-topping" a characteristic of some butterflies, in this case swallowtails and various whites which were cavorting around the summit. The presence of nectar-sources on the summit is always useful to these butterflies, which will usually have the tendency to be wafted to these summits on warm days.

The Parc National des Cévennes was set up in 1970 to protect the flora and fauna and biotops, but these are not always primary considerations. On entering the centre of the National Park one is informed by a roadside notice that it is a protected area, but no such notices exist around the vast périphérique. There is also no effectual policing in the wilder parts of the park.

Received 7 January 1993, accepted 10 January 1993

