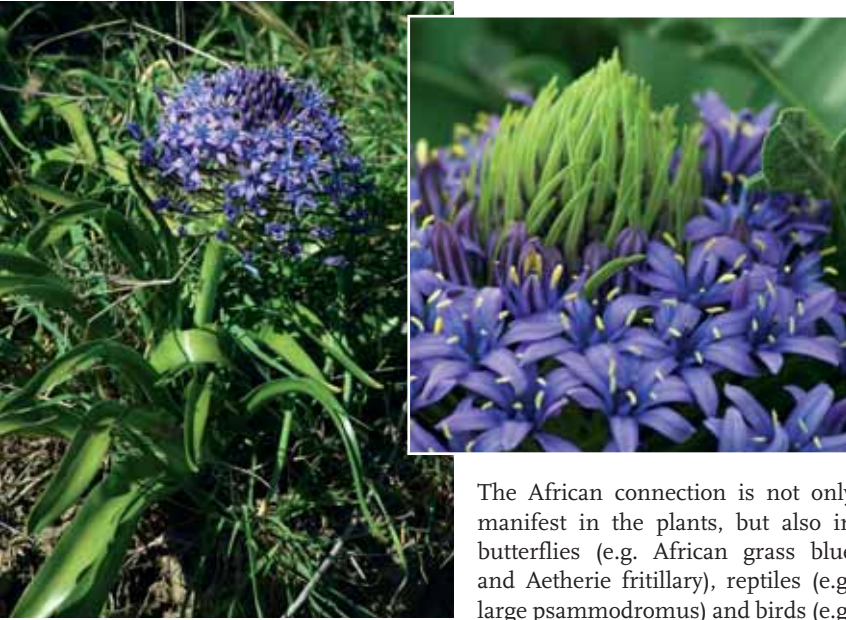


The flora of the Andalusian Sierras, in particular, is simply dazzling, encompassing as it does an impressive variety of species. The mountains are also rich in mammals, butterflies, birds, reptiles and amphibians. One of the reasons behind this diverse ecology is that it is a meeting point of species from very different habitats, varying from the humid subtropics to the dry and cold conditions of the Mediterranean high mountains.

Apart from the restricted endemics -those species that occur only on a few mountain tops- the Andalusian Sierras harbour quite a large numbers of plants and animals that are at home only in the south of Spain and the mountains of North Africa. Since North-Africa and southern Andalusia once formed one mountain range, it is hardly surprising that these areas still have many species in common. The most striking example, and the one plant that cannot fail to come to your attention, because it is so celebrated, is the Spanish fir (see text box on page 24). This large tree only occurs on isolated, humid north slopes of the western Andalusian mountains (Sierra de Grazalema, Sierra de Bermeja and Sierra de las Nieves) and in a similarly small area in the Moroccan Rif mountains (although the latest trend is to consider these two populations as separate species).



The Portuguese sundew is a strange member of the sundew family which grows in dry open scrub on acidic soil. Sticky glands on its grass-shaped leaves catch insects, just like other sundews.



The African connection is not only manifest in the plants, but also in butterflies (e.g. African grass blue and Aetherie fritillary), reptiles (e.g. large psammodromus) and birds (e.g. black wheatear).

Most of the other plants and animals of the Andalusian Sierras occur throughout the Mediterranean basin. However there are a few very interesting species that originate from the Tertiary era, when the climate was subtropical. Today, they are more typical of the Macronesian region: the Atlantic islands of the Canaries, Madeira, the Azores and the Cape Verdes. Some of them also linger on in the damp, forested valleys of the Alcornocales. Several ferns occur here in the river valleys, which otherwise only grow in the humid cloud forests of the Canary Islands. Others, such as the alder, are normally only found in the temperate regions of Europe. Finally, the lowlands of Portugal and south-western Spain boast a mixture of plants and animals that benefit both from the warm Mediterranean climate and the moist Atlantic winds. Three of the most appealing plants of the region belong to this group: the massive Portuguese squill, the winding Andalusian birthwort* (p. 169) and the insect-eating Portuguese sundew. The combination of all these plants and animals originating from different areas creates a confusingly diverse hodgepodge of species that is at least as attractive as the scenery, the culture and the pleasant climate of the Andalusian Sierras.

As an endemic species of southwestern Iberia and the lowlands of Morocco the scientific name of the Portuguese squill, *Scilla peruviana* (or 'squill from Peru'), is most inappropriate. Apparently this misnomer, by Linnaeus, arose as he thought his specimen came from Peru. In reality 'Peru' was merely the name of the boat it was shipped with from Spain.