



Trumpet gentian

Gentiana acaulis

The best known of 17 Alpine gentians, the trumpet gentian is less rare, less menaced, and easier to distinguish than the others. Nonetheless, this popular symbol of the Alps is equally at the mercy of human encroachment into its habitat.

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Where to look: This gentian occurs throughout the Alps from the Pyrenees to the Carpathians, at altitudes between 800 and 2800m. It can be found from May until August in stony turf and alongside bogs and swamps. It thrives in poor, acidic soils with a high clay content.

What to look for: The plant consists of a thick, short stump with several shoots, each of which terminates in a rosette of greyish-green elliptical or lance-shaped leaves. The flowers are carried singly on leafy stalks which emerge from the rosettes. They consist of five spreading, pointed lobes forming trumpets of deep-blue, tinged with purple or violet. Each lobe carries a patch of green spots inside its neck. Flower size varies from 1 to 7 cm, and the stems can reach 15 cm.

The trumpet gentian is fertilized primarily by bumblebees of the genus *Bombus* and sometimes by butterflies.

Threats: Although still more abundant than other gentians, the trumpet gentian has come under the direct, destructive influence of human activities. These include:

- fertilization of grasslands, which enriches the nutrient-poor soils on which gentians depend;
- drainage and reclamation of alpine wetlands, which prevents formation of the acidic conditions required by the plants; and
- expansion of winter tourism, which ruins huge areas of the plant's habitat.

What we can do:

1. **Stop picking the flowers.** We should remind ourselves and our friends to let all the Alpine flowers live, so that everyone can look forward to seeing even more of them next year.
2. **Enforce protective measures.** The trumpet gentian enjoys partial protection in some parts of its range, which is aimed at preventing damage to the flowers' roots or its collection for commercial purposes. It is often confused with neighbouring species which enjoy total protection.
3. **Protect the gentian's habitat.** We should campaign to restrict the drainage and transformation of alpine wetlands and control encroachment by ski resorts.

Based on material provided by Dr G. Müller, Director of the Cantonal Museum and Botanical Gardens, Lausanne, Switzerland.