

## Daffodils in Spain Revisited

June, 2000

I had the opportunity to spend a week in Spain again this year with several daffodil-loving friends to see daffodils growing in their native habitat. It's always amazing to me to see where daffodils grow naturally. Many are definitely plants of the mountains. And many are also always found growing among rocks. We are always so careful to get rid of the rocks in our gardens to give our plants the best growing conditions we possibly can, yet in nature, the daffodils grow with abandon among rocks. Obviously, drainage is of paramount importance. Some species grow and bloom at the edge of the mountain snowmelt. Even bulbocodium species, which are sometimes thought of as not being hardy, grow at higher elevations. So, I think it is the fact they tend to put up foliage in the fall in my climate (USDA Zone 5-6) before winter arrives that leads to failure. I saw bulbocodium species growing at the edge of the snowmelt, often in running water. And obviously they get a good summer baking. So, it seems to me that the bulbocodium like water in early spring, and then want to be almost completely dry in summer.

The first two days of our trip, I thought these notes might be titled "Daffodils in the Mist," as we had rain much of the time. But after a few days, the sun came out along with the daffodils.

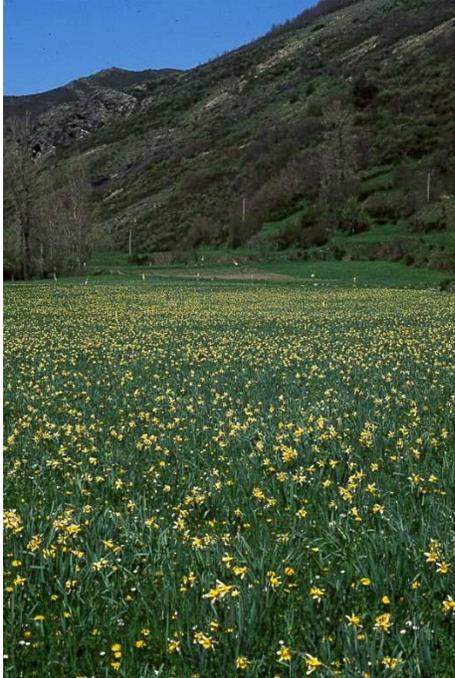
On arrival in Spain, we motored north of Madrid and the first daffodils we saw in the Sierra de Guadarrama were *N. triandrus pallidulus* and *N. rupicola*. These grow in the same general conditions, acid soil and granite rocks, and are often found growing together. Sometimes hybrids between the two occur.



At the Puerto San Isidro, at an altitude of 1520 meters, we found *N. asturiensis* growing. There was still lots of snow on the mountains. *N. asturiensis* (pictured) is one of the smallest trumpet daffodils, and as cute as can be. These had particularly good form, with no hooding of the perianth, and stems strong enough to hold the blooms erect. We traveled a bit further to the Puerto de San Glorio where the elevation was 1620 meters, and here the *N. asturiensis* was all in seed. But never mind, the mountains were glorious! We also found a few *N. bulbocodiums*.

We next headed for Covadonga and the Lago de la Ercina where it is reputed that *N. bulbocodium citrinus* grows. This is the lemon-colored bulbocodium. Again, these were mostly over, but we saw a few, along with some gentians and other wild flowers. And the scenery was spectacular!





We were looking for the fields of *N. nobilis* (pictured) which are said to be in this area, and we were not disappointed. The individual flowers are not what we would look for today in modern hybrids, but when you see a field of thousands in bloom, the effect is wonderful. *N. nobilis* is a trumpet daffodil with a yellow cup and a perianth that is mostly white, with varying amounts of yellow at the base. The shape of the trumpet varies from slender to fat, some had a roll at the brim of the trumpet and some did not. Most perianths were slender, though a few were a bit broader.

The week was coming to an end as we arrived at the Puerto de Tarna, where we found *N. asturiensis*, *N. bulbocodium*, and gentians growing happily together. Nearby, at the Puerto de las Senales, we found what one expert has named *N. tarnensis* growing with *Erythronium*. To me, they looked like smaller versions

of *N. nobilis*.

One thing came through loud and clear in all these species populations, and that is the great variability within each species. In the bulbocodium species, some flowers may be very small, while others may be quite large. In *N. nobilis*, the shape can vary as well, with some having fat trumpets with a roll at the end, while others have long slender trumpets. And the perianths can be narrow or broad, some waving like propeller blades, while others were nearer to being flat.

On our last day, as we approached Madrid, we again found *N. rupicola* growing happily among the rocks. Always the rocks.



Driving to the airport at Madrid, there were lots of the bright red Flanders poppies. Thus our week ended, with my friends and I parting at the airport. But the memories of the sights we saw, and our impromptu lunches of bread, Brie, and olives, and an occasional bottle of wine will remain