

Silene flos-cuculi

[Synonyms : *Coccyganthe flos-cuculi*, *Coronaria flos-cuculi*, *Lychnis flos-cuculi*]

RAGGED-ROBIN is an invasive perennial. Native to Europe (including Britain) it has small stringy-petalled, pink (occasionally purplish blue or white) flowers.

It is also known as Bachelor's buttons, Billy buttons, *Carpiog y Gors* (Welsh), Cock robin, Cock's caim, *Coucou d'pré* (Channel Islander-Jersey Norman-French), Crowflower, Cuckoo, Cuckoo flower, Cuckoo gillyflower, Cuckoo hood, Drunkards, *Fior del cucolo* (Italian), *Fleur-de-coucou* (French), *Flor-de-cuco* (Portuguese), *Flor del cuclillo* (Spanish), Gipsy flower, *Gökblomster* (Swedish), Indian pink, Indy, *Käenkukka* (Finnish), *Koekoeksbloem* (Dutch), *Kohoutek luční* (Czech), *Kuckucks-Lichtnelke* (German), *Kuckucksnelke* (German), *Lichtnelke* (German), *Lychnis fleur de coucou* (French), Marsh gillyflower, Meadow pink, Meadow spink, Polly baker, Rag-a-tag, Ragged jack, Ragged willie, Red robin, Robin hood, Rough robin, Shaggy Jacks, Thunder flower, *Trævlekrone* (Danish), *Violette au vaër* (Channel Islander-Guernsey), and Wild Williams; and in flower language it is said to be a symbol of ardour, aversion, and wit.

It is attractive to butterflies, flies and long-tongued bees.

Flos-cuculi is made up of Latin *flos* (flower, blossom) and *cuculus* (cuckoo) components meaning 'cuckoo flower' with reference to the plant blooming when the cuckoo is in full voice.

As on the stems of lady's smock (*Cardamine pratensis*) ragged-robin stems can also bear balls of froth commonly called 'cuckoo's spit' or 'devil's saliva'. These are made by the larvae of the meadow frog hopper from the surplus juice he has sucked from the stem.

Ragged-robin is dedicated to St. Barnabas, the 1st Century apostle, whose Feast Day is the 11th June when traditionally hay-making is in full swing and when in past centuries the bright pink flowers of ragged-robin could be found among the hay.

Authorities believe that the English playwright, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) and his audiences knew ragged-robin as Crow-flowers that are mentioned by the Queen as she describes how the drowned Ophelia drifted in the water in *Hamlet*.

There with fantastic garlands did she come,
Of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,