

Bealeswood Common Wildlife

Bealeswood Wildlife Recording Group (BWRG), November 2024

See also at www.dockenfieldpc.org.uk/wildlife

Nature's Seasons 2025 Calendars:



Once again Dockenfield's nature photographers Alex Potts and Alan Cox have produced a calendar highlighting the diverse nature to be found in the Surrey-Hampshire borders. Copies can be purchased (£9 each) at the Frensham Village Shop or delivery within Dockenfield and nearby by contacting Alan Cox (alanfjcox@gmail.com). All money raised will go to the Frensham Churches Charity

Fungi (Amanda Adolph)

What an amazing couple of months it has been on the Common for Fungi. With 43 of our regular species popping up over September, October and November and then an additional 53 species that are new this year. (They have certainly been there all the time but it's my first time of recording them).

Despite the badly timed meadow cut we had 5 species of waxcaps (Genus *Hygrocybe*). Early in October prior to the grass cut we had Blackening (*H. conica*), Parrot (*H. psittacine*), and Snowy (*H. virginea*) waxcaps, then later we saw more Blackening, Golden (*H. chlorophane*) and Heath (*H. laetus*) waxcaps popping up in some unusual, sheltered and uncut spots on the Common. Waxcaps are an important indicator of unimproved, ancient meadow grassland. A rare and disappearing habitat across Britain and Europe. They are one of the species that show just how special and important Bealeswood Common is and why it's so important that we protect it. Old maps of the village show the Common to have been grassland and woodland to be common land right back to the early 18th century.

I was privileged to be able to lead out two fungi walks this season. The first, a wonderfully enthusiastic group of local people whose interest in the world of fungi was a delight. We were able to see 28 species in 1.5 hours with my personal favourite being the Elfin Saddle (*Helvella lacunose*), which appeared the day before our walk and held on into mid-November before disappearing back into the earth.



Left: Elfin Saddle (*Helvella lacunose*)
Right: Golden Waxcap (*Hygrocybe chlorophane*)

The second walk took place on 3rd November with members of the West Weald Fungal Society for a highly productive 2-hour walk, during which their sharp and experienced eyes yielded an impressive 47 species. Including the aptly named Hare's Ear (*Otidea onotica*) the beautiful Rosy Bonnet (*Mycena rosea*) and the striking, Yellow Fieldcap *Bolbitius titubans*, which has been prolific this year.



Hare's Ear (*Otidea onotica*)



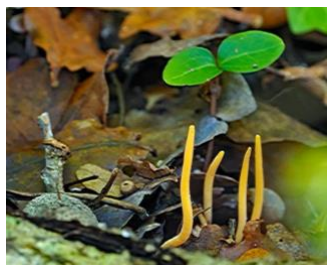
Rosy Bonnet (*Mycena rosea*)



Yellow Fieldcap
(*Bolbitius titubans*)

It has been an interesting and exciting fungi season which has been brought to a rapid end by the frosts at the end of this month but leaves me waiting with bated breath for next year.

In addition to Amanda's success the sharp eyes, and keenly focussed lenses of Alan Cox has captured these small, but striking, coral fungi on the Common:



Left: Golden Spindles
(*Clavulinopsis fusiformis*)
Centre: Apricot Club
(*Clavulinopsis luteoalba*)
Right: Yellow Club
(*Clavulinopsis helvola*)

Bealeswood Common- Habitat Management

(Dan Bosence- with help from Colin Hall and Alison Bosence)

Many might assume that if you want wildlife to flourish all you need to do is let an area go wild. This is a common misconception of what is meant by "rewilding". However, to maintain certain habitats like grassland and ponds for both biodiversity and recreation a certain amount of management is needed otherwise grassland will, in a few years become overgrown by scrub and woodland, and a pond will naturally silt up from its inflow. In addition, and as is the case with Bealeswood Common which is surrounded by houses and gardens, non-native plants can invade and out-compete our native flora. The best example we have of this on Bealeswood are variously coloured Spanish Bluebells that now occur as a fringe around the Common.

Each year the Parish Council arranges a walk around the Common with our Waverley Borough Council (WBC) Ranger, Vicky Keller, to discuss what management is needed to both encourage wildlife and to make it accessible to visitors. Sometimes this is carried out by WBC, such as felling dangerous trees/branches or pond dredging but at other times manual jobs are carried out by working parties. One such party has just been held on a bright Sunday morning late in November. 15 suitably attired villagers and some visitors (and one cat) assembled at the lower end of the Common (between Bealeswood and Garden Cottages) to cut back a fallen willow tree, oak saplings, brambles, wild roses and a non-native Portugese Laurel tree. This plant community (referred to as “scrub”) had encroached many meters over the grassland which is where our important wildflowers, grassland fungi grow and grassland insects live. Although the scrub is valuable for wildlife in its own right, if it is not cut back, then in a few years the common would be overrun by this ever-encroaching plant community and the diversity of wildlife would be reduced. Currently about one-third of the Common is grassland and two-thirds scrub and woodland.

This balance is kept in check with our annual, autumn grass-cut of the Common. This year, this cut was delayed by the very wet September and the heavy cutting machine traversing our soft clay scraped off some of the grassy sward and made deep ruts. Whilst some disturbance can enhance the diversity of natural habitats it is expected that these areas will take some time to recover. Their recovery, or otherwise, will be monitored along with the normal weekly surveying of the plants in the Common so it's a question of watch this space, or, visit the Common to see what happens.



Left- scouring and ruts from grass-cutting lorry. Some of the ruts have been infilled (thanks Vicky!) and grass is already beginning to grow back in the scoured areas. Right- Working party removing brambles, wild roses, sapling oaks and fallen willow on lower part of Main Common.

BWRG: *Amanda Adolph , Dan & Alison Bosence, Alan & Pauline Cox, Philippa & Colin Hall, Alex Potts, Roger & Jill Trout and Anne Tutt.* 26th November 2024