

MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

18 January 2012

I wouldn't normally send out a newsletter this early in the year, but the weather has been so unusual that several readers have written in over the past couple of weeks with reports of unexpected finds. But let us start with the prosaic discoveries . . .



Wood- and field blewits are still out in force as is the under-rated Jew's ear

On New Year's day I found reasonable numbers of wood blewits in my favourite patch (which, by the way, is 300 metres from the nearest tree) and the recent rain prompted a flush of Jew's ear. I haven't been to check my best oyster mushroom patch, but I expect it is cropping heavily. Meanwhile regular newsletter readers, Andrew Wright and Michael Rowell were picking field blewits in Gloucestershire and Newport Pagnell last month.

Rather more unexpected was the news from Pip Mackellar that she was picking porcini on the Kent/Sussex border in early December, while along the coast Andrew Murdock was doing the same in Hampshire on the 9th. In similar vein, at the same time that he was picking blewits, Andrew Wright was finding field mushrooms.



December porcini and field mushrooms are unusual, but not unheard of . . .

There are also some strange mushrooms around. Michael Webber found some strange white birds nest fungi (*Crucibulum crucibuliforme*) near his Essex home, first in November, but they were still there earlier this month. I am quite jealous – I've never found this strange, but inedible species.



These November birds egg mushrooms were still recognisable in late December (pictures by Michael Webber)

Another particularly unseasonal mushroom was Garry and Sally Ash's discovery of hen of the woods (Grifola frondosa) on Christmas Day in the Towy Valley near Llandeilo.

After identification, harvested and ate it - very good. Measured approx 10 inches across and weighed in at 800g . . . just to let you know that we paid attention on our fungal foray with you in October!

This is interesting because, although the books describe it as 'rare' and 'autumnal', in my experience it is relatively common on Welsh oaks, but is definitely a fungus I associate with September rather than mid-winter.



In my opinion hen of the woods is just as good as the better-known 'chicken' (photos Gary and Sally Ash)

Most bizarre of all, I think, was Andrew Murdock's e-mail on 6 January which states he had 'just picked a very early handful of St George's which were quite well developed' (he is based in Southampton).



St George's mushrooms are named after the Saint's Day (23 April), so Andrew's find is four months early!

Finally, thanks to all those who have booked an autumn foray as a present for a loved one. Although it is obviously far too early to predict what we will find in nine months' time, it looks set to be another fascinating year!

Happy foraging and keep those reports coming in!

Daniel Butler

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P.S. As always, let me know if you want to be removed from the list and I will do it forthwith.