

# MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

**September 3 2009**

Well it's not been much of a summer has it? Despite predictions of a record-breaking heat wave last spring, the reality has been very different: 30% more rain than the summer average; the wettest July on record for the UK; the wettest August ever in Dumfries and Galloway . . . Is there no silver lining?



*Hardly seasonal weather for the August Bank Holiday (taken 8.30 am 28/08/09)*

Well actually yes . . . yes, I am going to be really positive about the current situation. While it may have been wet, the summer was actually significantly warmer than 2007 and 2008, with temperatures only just below the seasonal average.

So why is this important? Well, the last good mushroom year was 2006. This was followed by two bad years, with last year's season being particularly disappointing. Naturally we fungiphiles are wondering whether the coming season is going to be another dud or whether we are in for a bumper year.



*One can but dream . . .*

Now one knows exactly what makes for a good mushroom season, but everyone is agreed it has to be down to a combination of temperature and rainfall. Last year I expounded on two plausible theories:

*I suspect many mushrooms need a significant temperature variant to trigger activity, so (for example) porcini mycelia thrust up mushrooms when the soil temperature drops reasonably quickly from maybe 20C to around 10C.*

*A mycological friend, Ray Woods, who has more mushroom know-how in his little finger than I will ever master, disagrees. His money is on a hot summer being necessary for the mycelia to build up the necessary nutrients for a fruiting body. As evidence he cites 1976 as an example of a very hot year producing record-breaking quantities.*

The reason I bring this up is that this autumn could be very interesting. We've had a damper summer than the last two years and it's also been warmer. On top of this, I still quite like the 'pruning' notion – that plants and fungi are desperate to reproduce and shocks, such as a bad year, lead them to coil up like a spring, ready to burst into action with renewed vigour as soon as they've got the chance. Now I will admit this theory failed spectacularly last year, but I am not yet prepared to discount it entirely.



*Hen of the woods is an under-rated 'meaty' autumn mushroom which is starting to come out in numbers*  
 And the good news is that things are stirring amidst the leaf mould. Last week I spotted some bumper outcrops of hen of the woods in a local lane. This is a badly under-rated mushroom, usually dismissed as being inferior to its better known relative, chicken of the woods. Actually in a taste test on one of my forays two years ago it came out near the top and it is certainly worth experimenting with, not least because it has the same wonderfully meaty texture of its relative. This makes it perfect for casseroles, risottos and even kebabs.



*Sulphur tufts are poisonous, but are a good indicator species for edibles such as ceps (26/08/09)*

The first sulphur tufts are emerging too. These are seriously poisonous, but there is little serious risk of mistaking them for an edible variety. Instead they are a cause for celebration because they are a good 'indicator species, growing in the same habitats are delicious mushrooms like porcini, bay boletes, yellow swamp russulas and cauliflower fungus.

Out in the fields the first waxcaps of the year are beginning to appear, while I've also heard of parasols being harvested (sadly I've yet to find any of these myself).



*Waxcaps and shaggy parasols are starting to emerge, prompted by the unusually early autumn weather*

Finally, if anyone wants to plan a last-minute break, I still have a few places free this October. As always, the broad details are available on the website, but I'm always happy to have a quick chat if you need to know any more.

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P.S. I loathe junk e-mails and would be horrified to think I might be clogging up your systems unnecessarily, so if at any time you want your name taken off, just let me know with a brief - preferably polite - indication that you want to be removed.