

MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

12 May 2012

PURE JEALOUSY

It's well into May and I've still yet to find any St George's (although that said, I haven't looked very hard owing to the recent horrible bout of wet and cold weather). The same cannot be said for others, however, and owing to my invitation for contributions to this newsletter, I've been inundated with reports of surprising and mouth-watering finds elsewhere. I shall try to pass on the news and mention all those kind enough to let me know what's going on, but if I leave anyone out, please bear with me (although do let me know and I will rectify any omissions later on). I will start with the most exciting new discovery – Guy Bowden's chicken-of-the-woods find near Caerphilly.



Guy Bowden's chicken of the woods was very low and early, my second picture (taken last June) is more typical

Guy's discovery was about a month earlier than I would normally expect and it's also interesting that it seems to be growing very low down. This occurs relatively frequently, but sod's law dictates that it is more often found growing tantalizingly out of reach. This is perhaps best illustrated with the second picture taken last June in the Elan Valley (it was just beyond my outstretched arm and went unharvested).



Michael's false morel and St George's are seasonal, but this is wood blewit and Andrew's shaggy ink caps are not

Keen mushroomer Michael Webber has been making more Essex finds since the last newsletter. The potentially deadly-poisonous false morel, Jew's ear and St George's are to be expected, but his wood blewit is not. That said it echoes Dawn Charman's surprise discovery of their very closely-related (and equally normally post-frost autumnal) relative, the wood blewit.



Heather, Karen and Ric are finding St George's: note the gill structure and the circular growth

And there are plenty of other readers around the county making good St George's finds. Heather Fletcher made her first St George discovery ever in a hedgerow near her National Trust cottage on the Isle of Wight, while Karen Pobjee has been similarly rewarded near Stratford-on-Avon. Most exciting for me, however, was yesterday's call from Ric Johnson - an Elan Valley friend and mushroom novice, who has also discovered his first St George's. He phoned to ask me to confirm his self-identified finds. I pointed out mildly that this was difficult without at least a photo, but that any all-white, reasonably large, 'mushroom-shaped' fungus growing in pasture in Spring is almost certainly a St George's. He duly obliged with a digital image and a plea that I agree he could eat them for lunch. I confirmed the identification and gave him my normal advice that when you first eat a mushroom, you should always cook two or three slivers to decide whether they agree with you and probably more of a risk, whether or not you like them: if all goes well then pig out a day or so later. He ignored this sage advice and an hour later wrote back:

Well I was a bit impatient and had a load on toast and they were delicious and I'm absolutely fi....



Fly agaric is yet to emerge, but . . .

Now clearly Ric was joking (at least I think he was – I haven't phoned to check), but another reader was not when he sent me the following note.

[Daniel](#), I started to cook up *Amanita muscaria*. First you need to slice them and parboil for 10 min to destroy the ibotenic acid, throw out the water and then you can fry them. People used to eat them. A Dutch friend told me how her granny used to add them to her fried mixed mushroom dish even without parboiling, just thorough cooking. Also in North-Germany there is a tradition of transforming these beauties into food. The taste is fine and the consistence after parboiling is also great, they are not getting mushy as I was afraid. And they are totally easy to identify, but yes it is more troublesome than frying a king bolete or a chanty.

Oh, and before anyone screams with alarm, Daniel Winkler is a far better mycologist than I and one of the world's leading experts on that half-fungus, half-insect, Cordyceps. He knows what he is doing, but read [this](#) 't try this at home . . .

Once again, thanks for all your contributions. Please keep them 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.