

MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

1 January 2016

WHAT IS THIS AND CAN I EAT IT?

Happy New Year to all my readers! Let's hope 2016 will bring bumper crops of delicious mushrooms and that we get the decent weather that we've been denied for the last two or three years. Meanwhile it's the depths of winter and there should be almost nothing out there, but it's still so mild and damp that people are making amazing finds. Two days ago, for example, readers Paul and Angela found parasols on the Gower Peninsula near Swansea. Now these wonderfully edible mushrooms normally peak in August/September, so that's about four months out of kilter. For the record I reckon no mushroom is better when simply fried in butter and served on toast with a little black pepper and possibly a small squeeze of lemon.



Angela picking a prime parasol on 29 December

On a different note my pal, Bill O'Dea (www.mushroomstuff.com), who runs foraging courses in Ireland came up with a wonderful snippet of information. We both get sent loads of pictures sent in by former clients asking for an ID. Now neither of us minds making a tentative identification based on a picture, but it can be a bit hit and miss (ideally one needs to examine the fungus from all angles and smell can also be

important). Just for fun Bill did a bit of sniffing around on the web and discovered that a few years back there was a mushroom conference in California. Hundreds of mycologists, including some of the real 'greats', descended on a town and spent three days searching for and identifying local fungi. The finds were spread out across several tables and the great and the good of the mycological world were invited to name them. Now a lot of fungi are difficult to identify with total certainty, so the specimens were sent for DNA analysis to be absolutely sure and the results were checked against the participants' paperwork. Apparently the 'hit rate' among even this expert audience was only 51%.



Can I eat this?

On a totally different note, yesterday our lovely postman, Neil, turned up in the yard at the normal time: "I don't have any mail for you," he said. "But I thought you might know what to do with this." He reached into his sack and pulled out an immature kestrel which he'd found in the lane. She doesn't appear to have any injuries, but her tail is fairly battered and this must be a serious handicap for a bit which hovers. Incredibly she was happily feeding on the fist within five minutes of emerging from the post bag. I do love kestrels – it was discovering one of these in 1974 which sparked off my passion for

birds of prey and falconry. She's currently dozing on a perch above my computer with a nice big crop of stewing steak.



The new arrival and a shot of a 10 year-old Daniel taken in July 1974

And on a parallel note, I've started to reclaim (retrain) our two harris hawks who've spent the last three years trying – and failing – to breed. Not surprisingly, their beaks were very overgrown, so I've coped them both. In the process realized that most people won't know this falconry process is the origin of the word 'to cope' which comes from the French 'couper' – to cut. I apologise for the poor quality of the pictures, but they were taken in bad light in the kitchen and Monty, the male, had just footed me in both hands. There was blood everywhere and I am now on antibiotics.



Monty before and after coping

Otherwise, if anyone wants a luxurious seaside holiday, my Pembrokeshire project has finally come to fruition. The website is still under construction, but you can see a fair amount at www.glebeholidays.co.uk and there's also a facebook page - 'Glebe House, Talbenny' with lots of photos. Discounts are available for newsletter readers - and the Skomer puffins are great from May - July.



Glebe House - sleeps up to 10 and only a mile from the beach and 200 yards from the Coastal Path

Happy foraging!

Daniel Butler

www.fungiforays.co.uk

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