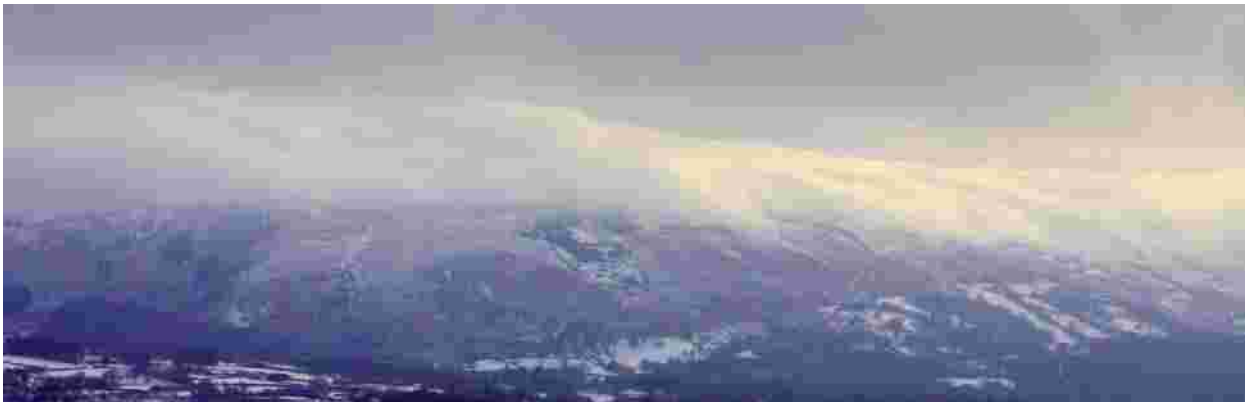


MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

6 November 2012

2012 – SEASONAL OVERVIEW



We have had the first sharp frosts and even a little snow – a bleak few months await for mushroom hunters

Normally I expect to compile my seasonal review in early December, but readers have responded with such speed and enthusiasm to my appeal for information in yesterday's newsletter that I felt obliged to rush this one out immediately to mark my gratitude.

I don't want to rub it in, but my season wasn't too bad with my foray of 30 September probably representing the peak of the season. I know you've already seen this picture, but it really says it all:



Late September/early October is usually the height of the Welsh season and this year did not disappoint . . .

Similarly Chris has been having a fantastic autumn on the East Coast:

Our woodland walks in Lincolnshire and Norfolk have resulted in very interesting finds. We always seem to ve a full basket resulting in lots of jars of dried mushrooms of deceivers, amethyst deceivers, ceps, brown birch boletes, saffron milk caps, Tricholoma portentosums, jew's ears yellow russulas, fairy ring champignons. Also eaten beefsteak, hen-of-the-woods, dryad's saddle, giant polypore, shaggy inkcaps, shaggy parasol, blushing wood mushroom, field mushrooms, larch boletes. Now hoping to find wood blewits and tawny funnel caps.

On the subject of too many mushroom pickers in the woods, we have never encountered another picker anywhere.

Chris, Lincolnshire



Chris Thornley is finding hen of the woods, beefsteak, ceps (although I am not entirely certain of the fourth picture)

And now the rather more typical news: I had a very disappointing spring with almost no St George's and most people have found very little this autumn. My friend and fellow mushroom guide, Bill O'Dea (see www.mushroomstuff.com) reports the worst year he can remember. Guy in West Kent says he has had almost nothing when 'last year we needed wheelbarrows'. Unlike me, Michael in Newport Pagnell reports a good year for St George's, but little of note since then.

These quotes from other readers are typical of the general picture:

I spend a lot of time walking in the countryside around Barnet, Enfield, and Hertfordshire. This autumn, I noticed a scarcity of mushrooms compared with most years, and they are often soggy and rotten from all the rain.

Patsy, North London

Overall it's been a bad mushroom season. Our normal area in the north-west peak district yielded no chanterelles, no boletus, slightly more hedgehogs than usual and only one day of amethyst deceivers in one patch, when we expect lots everywhere . . . most disappointingly, our site in the North Lakes, where we usually gather huge quantities of chanterelles, yielded just a quarter of a basket.

Rick, Peak District

I look for fungi each year locally choosing to pick and eat mainly ceps and field mushrooms. Last year there were loads of field mushrooms in the pastures. This year I have not been able to find a single one. I managed to bring home one cep from the common where I can usually find a good crop. This fits in with the overall situation here of very few damsons, elderberries, apples, blackberries, hazelnuts and chestnuts.

Sue, Worcestershire



It has been a terrible year for all manner of hedgerow fruit and nuts . . .

We'd agree with your indifferent summary. A local friend found a couple of kilos of cepes last week, but we've only really had a few hedgehogs and wood blewits. And the only fly agarics we've seen have been in the garden!

Kate, Hampshire

Our season has been pretty miserable. Three out of four of our (usually) reliable chanterelle patches produced close to nothing. A favourite porcini location had a brief early flush (rain and slugs got most) and another sparse burst about two weeks ago. Between us, we walk regularly in woodland all around the area and the Wye Valley. The story has been the same on pretty much every trip. But I did get to eat some cauliflower fungus for the first time (found at Westonbirt!) and this week a few decent oyster mushrooms went into a sauce.

Mel, Cardiff



Chanterelles have generally been in short supply . . .

I was chatting to some delightful Italian restaurant owners last week. Their three recent trips into the New Forest on their Mondays off had produced "niente porcini" - not one. They blame the season not competition. Unfortunately I missed my usual trip to Scotland in September but found plenty of chanterelles in August.

David, Oxfordshire

We are reluctant to sample the 'odd' looking mushrooms, so restrict our intake to the 'pinkies'. Last year we were gathering large numbers of all sizes from button to palm sized. This year we have been collecting mushrooms the size of a frying pan - nothing smaller - every couple of days. Last year there were many puff balls but none this year. It seems the weather is responsible for the different species and quantities pushing through the grass.

Rosemary, Haute Vienne, France

I have only actively taken an interest in mushrooms for the last three years, but I have never seen so many parasols. I have been out every morning for 10 days and haven't once failed to return with a decent haul. On the other hand, the shaggy ink-caps and the field mushrooms have been very elusive. We have seen a large number of fly agaric in the local woods, but still haven't had any luck finding the one we're really looking for - the penny bun.

Jeff, East Sussex



Honey fungus and wood blewits are around now (pics by Richard Webber, Terry Boyle and Jeff Tawney)

After my rant about the lack of science behind the claims professional pickers are devastating fungi, in the spirit of balance it is only fair to include Wendy's thoughts on commercial foraging:

It is somewhat frustrating for us New Forest foragers who enjoy spotting a variety of fungi and picking some for the pot to see large groups of people carrying cool bags decimating areas. It is obvious many are picking commercially and some pick all the fungi regardless of whether they are edible. These are then sorted by more knowledgeable people leaving piles of discarded specimens. So while industrial picking might not have an impact fungal reproduction, it can and does impair the enjoyment for others.

This seems eminently fair and I am sure that were I to live in an area where there was serious competition for the available fungi I would share her frustrations. She makes one other observation which is worthy of comment:

You are allowed to pick 1.5Kg of fungi for yourself (i one session, so quite a lot over the season if you keep to this!).

This guideline was introduced about 20 years ago by the Forestry Commission to target professional collectors. Brigitte Tee-Hillman (quoted in The Telegraph article), has been openly picking and selling wild mushrooms since the 1970s. In 1998 she was told to stop and, after repeated brushes with the Forest wardens, in November 2002 she was arrested with several kilos of trumpet chanterelles. She was convicted under the Theft Act, but appealed. Thirty two court hearings followed, but in 2006 the case was eventually thrown out by a judge who complained he was here to try rape cases, not persecute elderly mushroom pickers. Costs were awarded to Tee-Hillman and the Forestry Commission presented with a bill of almost £1 million. With considerable ill-grace the Commission issued her with a unique licence, but it still sticks sulkily to its position that commercial picking is

forbidden and collecting is limited to 1.5kg per person per visit. This may be its public stance, but it is effectively unenforceable and the Commission, its wardens and, critically, the commercial pickers all know this.

All the best!

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.