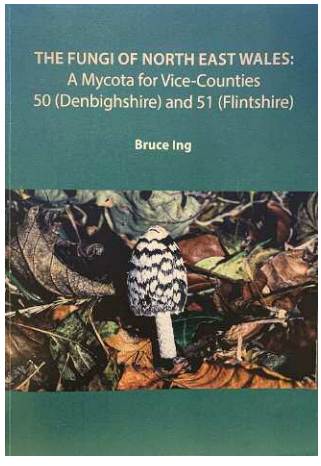
Book reviews

The Fungi of North East Wales

Bruce Ing
302 pp. A4, paperback.
University of Chester Press, 2020
ISBN 978-1-910481-12-7. Price £19.19

Whether described as a fungus flora or a mycota or a funga (a term recently advocated) this is a rare beast. Following the meticulous Fungus Flora of Warwickshire edited by Malcolm Clark (1980) many such have been contemplated but few have reached book form, none indeed with so much detail per species. The main British ones, in date order, have been: Bramley 1985 for Yorkshire, Dennis 1986 for the Hebrides, Dennis 1995 for South East England, Dickson & Leonard 1996 for the New Forest and Aron 2005 for North West Wales. Species totals, when cited at all, were around 2500 for Warwicks, 3000 for the Hebrides and 4000 for the South East. There has also been Ellis & Ellis 1988, a mere pamphlet, but concisely listing 3762 species from Suffolk, the high total benefiting from the authors' unrivalled knowledge of microfungi.

Reasons for the lack of such books are not hard to find. The task is manifestly impossible. Not even Dr Dennis knew enough to cope with such an undertaking unaided. In all cases the preface acknowledges assistance from 30 or more colleagues. It needs an author with exceptional tenacity to see the whole thing through to a conclusion, knowing all along that the finished product will be only a first stab at the actual diversity waiting to be uncovered.



This book covers the two vice-counties of Denbigh (VC50) and Flint (VC51), listing around 2000 species from each, 2500 in all. The area complements Aron's coverage of VCs 48, 49 and 52. Preliminary matter gives a background to the physical environment, summary descriptions of 24 important sites, notes on previous recording and an impressive bibliography. Each species gets at least the following details: current name and author citation, English name; habitat/distribution in NE Wales; frequency in Britain as a whole (on a five point scale); presence by 10 km squares and in which of the 24 notable sites; total recorded sites in the area; year of first record; presence in which of Aron's three VCs. Thus all in all a good impression of how well it is known in the region.

Recent phylogenetic concepts are followed, resulting for instance in hyphos and coelos all listed under their known or suspected teleomorph genera. Species are listed alphabetically within their genus as expected, but also genera alphabetically within their family, families within suborder etc.. This is all very logical, but has its drawbacks. Species can be hard to locate: apparently absent taxa may in fact be listed under recent nomenclatural changes. Thanks, it would seem, to some impatience from the publishers, there is no index. By the time you read this, I am assured that an index to species (including widely used synonyms) will be available on request from the author. His address is: Tigh na Faoileige, 1 Rhue, Ullapool, IV26 2TJ.

Alick Henrici

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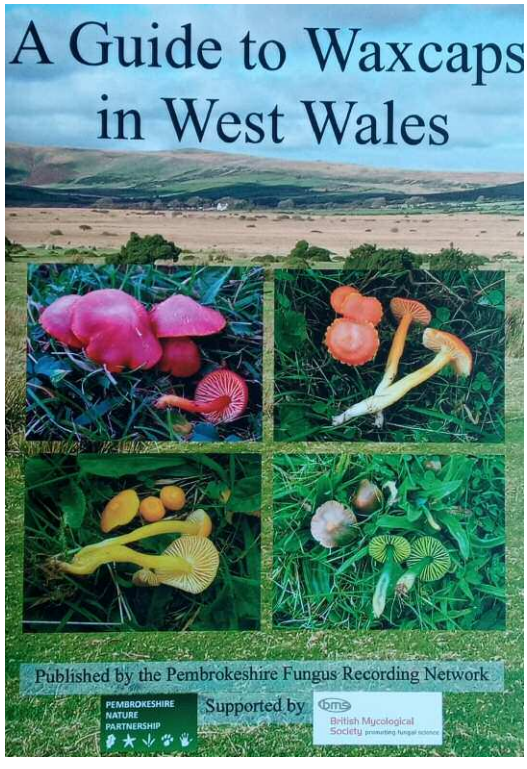
A Guide to Waxcaps in West Wales

David Harries
Pembrokeshire Fungus Recording Network, 2022
Half A4 size, 40 full colour pages
£30 for 20 copies, from djh.somerton@gmail.com

The motives behind this admirable booklet are set out in two sentences in its introduction: "Published to encourage people to identify and report waxcap finds and to help raise awareness of the conservation needs of waxcap-grassland fungi. Although waxcaps receive good coverage in several popular field guides, it is intended that this booklet should be light and compact enough to take into the field, and sufficiently inexpensive that it can easily be replaced if lost or damaged". It especially targets novice mycologists who have become waxcap enthusiasts. The ultra-low price (bulk orders only!) is thanks to financial support from the Pembrokeshire Nature Partnership, the British Mycological Society and, I suspect, from the author himself.

The 49 species covered include almost all those known in Britain (the rest mainly confined to Scotland), keyed informally on colour and texture. The last four pages add a brief overview of the other main fungal groups found alongside waxcaps. Each species gets excellent photos,



Gliophorus laetus (Hygrocybe laeta) **Heath waxcap**

Cap small to medium, flattened-convex, greenish-orange, slimy. Gills greyish-white with a **translucent margin** (best seen using a hand lens). Stem greenish-yellow, slimy. Specimens are unusually firm when crushed and have a **characteristic smell said to resemble burnt rubber**. Occasional in heaths and amongst moss in wet areas on acid soil.

Gliophorus psittacinus (Hygrocybe psittacina) **Parrot waxcap**

Cap small to medium, hemispherical sometimes umbonate, very slimy. Colour variable, usually green, yellow-green, yellow or purplish-pink. Gills rather broad but narrowly attached to the stem, sometimes with a tooth. **Stem shades of yellow or green but always with a trace of green near the top**, slimy. Widely recorded in unfertilised grassland.

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short notes on field characteristics and a frequency indicator. My only quibble is that some species with very few confirmed British records are considered 'infrequent'. This is certainly preferable to 'rare', unjustifiable in the current state of knowledge. But 'rarely recorded' would be nearer the mark and might help to ward off over-optimistic identifications.

Ongoing DNA studies have revolutionised waxcap taxonomy. They were all in *Hygrocybe* in the 2005 checklist. Names here are spread over six genera in accordance with modern orthodoxy. The downside of DNA is that several species have been shown to encompass complexes of virtually indistinguishable 'microspecies' scarcely differing except in their DNA. The further field work this booklet aims to promote isn't going to remove this inconvenient truth. But if it achieves the distribution it deserves, it will surely boost our understanding of British waxcaps, a group possibly as well represented in Britain as anywhere in Europe.

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