

Nature Diary 3

Now is the season 'of mists and mellow fruitfulness' and FUNGI ! Some of you have already spotted some for me to identify. I use a book describing 1500 British species but the total is more than 15000. I have a family member, born in 1825, called Mordecai Cubitt Cooke who was a world famous mycologist. He wrote 36 books, in one alone he describes 2810 species. (It's in my genes!)

In order to identify specimens you need to observe :-

- the cap, on top and underneath
- does it have gills pores or teeth?
- has the stalk got a frill?
- does it rapidly change colour when broken?
- does it smell?
- where was it growing, what tree was it under or on?



Chicken of the Woods

The fungus you see is only the fruiting body most of it lies below the surface as a network of cotton wool-like threads called hyphae. They are a vital part of any ecosystem. These threads grow in association with plant roots. They not only supply the plant with nutrients but act as a communication network, sometimes called the 'wood wide web'. A tree can 'tell' other trees if it is being attacked by a pest and even what pest it is so others can produce chemicals to deter a similar attack. It can supply an ailing tree with extra nutrients to aid its recovery. It can 'feed' its own saplings whilst they are trying to grow in the gloom of the forest.

I particularly like the descriptive names of fungi. Here are some I have found locally.



Can you match the pictures to these names? Witches butter, dead Moll's fingers, Earth star, scarlet elf cap, jelly ear, cramp balls.

Some fungi are poisonous or at least unpalatable. The best place to forage is Sainsburys.

Squirrel news

We have a mad or at least intellectually-challenged squirrel, appropriately called Donald, who only collects small brown oval pebbles from our gravel bed which has dozens of different shapes sizes and colours of stones. He buries them in the lawn ready for winter. He's going to need a good dentist. I have to find them before I cut the grass. Is he playing a game?

Tim W.16/9/20