

Fungi to be with

Contributed by Andy Overall

The 'Fungi to be with' mushroom club was formed in the autumn of 1996 to facilitate a growing interest in edible wild mushrooms among the general public. This interest was mainly due to various TV programmes on mushrooms and the explosion of Mediterranean food among London's restaurants. At the time, other fungus groups did exist and still do but they were and are all rather dry in their application of the subject, hence our name 'fungi to be with'; we wanted to make the subject of fungi more approachable and fun for people.

And so the club was born and has achieved what it had set out to do by bringing the subject of fungi to the public, in a fun, safe and responsible manner and in doing so promoting the subject of mycology (study of fungi).

{kl_thumbimage img="morel.jpg" alt="Morel, found in a garden, and its cross-section"}

Most people that join the walks are solely interested in identifying edible fungi but there are a few people on each walk that are interested in not only the edible fungi but also the inedible fungi that we encounter during the walks.

This leads me on to another role that we play, that of the 'London Fungus Group'. During each foray all of the fungi we find are either noted if they are well known or collected if not and a species list is produced for that particular foray. Some of the fungi will be dried and deposited at the herbarium held at Kew Gardens along with accompanying notes and details. I am actually doing this practically all year round and it is helping with local biodiversity action plans and building a picture of the fungi that come and go from a particular site like Hampstead Heath for example.

So as a result of people booking onto a foray, not only are they collecting a few edible wild mushrooms for themselves but they are also helping to survey a particular site at a given time. I find this to be a most amenable relationship between 'fungi to be with' and the public.

I have discovered over the years of leading the forays that these events amount to far more than just looking for edible and non-edible fungi. The walks also act as an opportunity for like minded people to meet up, walk and chat. For many individuals they are a medium in which to de-stress and in the bargain take home a few edible wild mushrooms as a result. Foraging for wild mushrooms can be a very relaxing, safe and leisurely pursuit, one in which families and people of all ages can take part and frequently do on my forays. Yet it has to be stressed that it is not wise to collect any wild mushrooms that are destined for the pot, without any prior knowledge of what you are collecting. Some fungi are lethally poisonous and some will make you very ill so it is always advisable to join a group or a club like FTBW to get grounding in what is safe and what is not.

The old adage goes 'There are plenty of bold mushroom hunters but not too many old, bold mushroom

hunters’.

And the FTBW motto is, ‘if in doubt leave it out’.

Each

year we have also been running a very popular fungi workshop for beginners on Hampstead Heath; this gives people the opportunity to get to know fungi a little better by combining ID exercises, lecturing and a 2 hour foray. For 2005 we have added more of these workshops to coincide with the forays planned.

‘Fungi to be with’ are now organizing Wild Herb and Wild Art workshops to which we hope to add more subjects in the near future. A list of our activities for 2005 is listed below, for more information about the workshops and the club go to www.fungitobewith.org.

Walks and workshops for 2005 (TBC) are as follows:

Spring

Saturday 7th May – Hampstead Heath
 Sunday 15th May – Wimbledon Common
 Saturday 21st May – Epping Forest
 Saturday 28th May –Fungi Workshop – Hampstead Heath

Summer Forays, Wild Herb and Wild Art Workshops

Saturday 18th June - Wild Herb Workshop - Hampstead Heath
 Saturday July 16th - Wild Herb Workshop - Hampstead Heath,
 Saturday 13th August Wild Art Workshop - Hampstead Heath

fungi forays

Saturday August 13th – Hampstead Heath
 Sunday August 21st – Epping Forest
 Sunday August 28th – Puttenham Common
 Sunday September 4th – Wimbledon Common
 Saturday September 10th - Fungi or Lichen Workshop - Hampstead Heath (TBC) Autumn Forays and workshops 2005
 Saturday 24th Sept-Hampstead Heath, London
 Sunday 25th Sept-Puttenham Common, Surrey
 Saturday 1st Oct-Epping Forest, London/Essex
 Sunday 2nd Oct-New Forest, Hampshire
 Saturday 8th Oct - Fungi Workshop - Hampstead Heath, London
 Sunday 9th Oct-Wimbledon Common, London
 Saturday 15th Oct-New Forest, Hampshire.
 Sunday 16th October-Epping Forest-London - /Essex
 Saturday 22nd October-Wimbledon Common, London
 Sunday 23rd October-New Forest, Hampshire
 Thurs 27th - Monday 31st October, Spain Foray
 Saturday 5th Nov-Hampstead Heath, London
 Sunday 6th Nov-Epping Forest, London
 Saturday 19th Nov - Fungi Workshop - Hampstead Heath
 Saturday 10th December - Wild Art Workshop - Hampstead Heath

All the walks start at 10am

Contact me now for a booking form, via the site ([Click here to PM asoverall on the Forum section](#)) or call me on 0208 458 0652 or 07958 786 374 for details. If

you are on the mailing list you will receive a booking form in April for the spring/summer activities and in August for autumn. Visit Fungi to be with's website Ask questions or comment on this in the Forums