

Autumn Grassland Jewels

Waxcaps are some of the most distinctive and visible of all the grassland fungi and have been described as the orchids of the fungi world. They are gloriously brightly coloured and occur in many startling shades from reds, oranges and yellows to whites, pinks and browns. They add some much appreciated colour to grassland in autumn and bizarrely often appear to have a 'shiny' appearance by the presence of a glutinous surface layer.

There are 60 species of Waxcap (genus *Hygrocybe*) in Europe, most of which occur in the British Isles. They fruit in the autumn from August to November favouring the warmer, wetter days to emerge. Fruiting, though, does not necessarily occur every year.

Management of grassland for Waxcap Fungus

Waxcaps are generally found in unimproved pasture, old lawns and grassy churchyards. A common feature to all sites with diverse waxcap populations is that they are grazed or mown regularly and no fertilizers are applied. In the absence of mowing or grazing, grassland communities change and the competition within the sward will swamp the fruiting part of the waxcap fungus.

Ploughing or improving fields with fertilizers is also detrimental to the below ground part of the fungus called mycelium. The mycelium forms the body of the fungus where nutrients are absorbed from the environment. Mycelium is vital in terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems for its role in the decomposition of plant material but also forms an important food source for many soil invertebrates. Interestingly the mycelium of mycorrhizal fungi (those that have a relationship with the roots – rhizomes - of plants) perform a very useful ecosystem function by increasing the efficiency of water and nutrient absorption of most plants. They also confer resistance to some plant pathogens.



Pink meadowcap

To conserve Lawn, Churchyard or other Grassland Fungi:

- Keep well grazed or mown
- Remove grass clippings if cutting
- Use no fertilisers, lawn feeds or moss killers etc.
- Do not reseed
- Keep well-drained
- Avoid deep shade
- In churchyards reduce mowing to favour flowers only in areas which are less important for fungi

If you are keen to see waxcaps and all sorts of other fungi you can't go far wrong with a visit to Kingcombe Meadows Nature Reserve in autumn, when there are a number of guided walks looking at fungi of grasslands and woodlands. For more information on guided walks around Kingcombe Meadows phone 01300 320684

More information on waxcaps can be found at:

www.aber.ac.uk/waxcap



Blackening waxcap

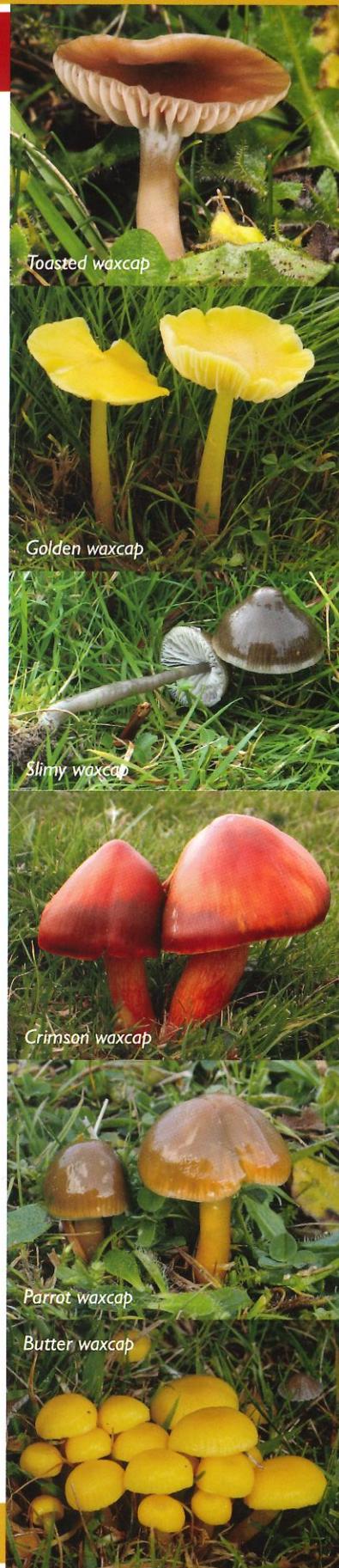
Splendid waxcap

Snowy waxcap

Scarlet waxcap

Honey waxcap

Fibrous waxcap



Toasted waxcap

Golden waxcap

Slimy waxcap

Crimson waxcap

Parrot waxcap

Butter waxcap

Re-creating wildflower meadows using green hay - a case study



Harvesting the green hay using a specially designed Ryetec Cut-and-Collect machine



Spreading the green hay by hand



The finished field after even spreading of the green hay

A new wildflower meadow in Broadwindsor

The beauty of the 'green hay' technique is that it can be adapted to the available machinery, or lack of! August 2011 saw the Pastures New team and one of our stalwart volunteers, Kim Newton, join two landowners, family and friends in Broadwindsor to re-introduce wild flowers onto a field that had not received fertiliser for many years, but where the species-list was still very short. The 'donor' site for this project was actually the nextdoor field that had itself been floristically enhanced using green hay from DWT's own Kingcombe Meadows nature reserve a few years ago.

We used the Pastures New Ryetec Cut-and-Collect machine to harvest the species-rich green hay for the Broadwindsor project. This much admired piece of machinery was purchased specifically to enable management of small sites and is expertly operated by local contractor Brian Ewins. It was the perfect piece of kit to cut the donor site and tip the green hay into waiting trailers. Towing tractors and landrovers then sped the very short distance between the donor and 'receptor' site and the crop was forked out of the trailers by hand. Large, rear-discharge muck spreaders are more commonly used for this job but spreading the green hay by hand was a marvellously low-tech, and low-cost option, (financially, if not energetically for the assembled pitch forks!) With much hard work on everyone's part, we achieved an even spread of the donor crop all over the receptor site, as you can see from the 'after' picture. Sheep were then brought in to nibble off the excess material and tread in the fallen seed; they then moved on to tidy up the donor site with a good aftermath graze.

At the end of a long day we were left with blistered hands but high hopes for the Broadwindsor site, especially if the much talked-about cold weather should descend this winter bringing good conditions for wild flower seed vernalisation. While creating wild flower meadows is a long term endeavour, the uniqueness of every individual project makes the beginnings of each sward enhancement journey very exciting.

Nick Gray

With our Pastures New project over the last four years, Dorset Wildlife Trust has worked with farmers on private land to create approx 70ha of wildflower-rich grasslands in West Dorset. Landowners have been very pleased with the results and our annual surveys record great success in restoring species-rich indicators like ox-eye daisy and common knapweed to these crucially important patches of habitat.

Perhaps the simplest way of restoring or re-creating species-rich grassland is by using 'green hay', so-called because it is taken relatively early to ensure plenty of wild flower seeds in the 'crop'. Green hay is, by necessity, local and therefore holds genetic integrity. Additionally the seeds are adapted to local conditions and therefore stand a better chance of germination. And restoration using green hay is a straightforward concept: cut the species-rich green hay, transport it to a 'receptor' site and strew it around - what could be simpler? Well, quite a lot of things as it turns out, but not many of them are as rewarding as wild flower meadow creation!

Pastures New Volunteers

The Pastures New volunteer group meet once a fortnight throughout the year to carry out practical tasks that benefit wildlife in West Dorset. We work with local landowners in areas that would otherwise be difficult to manage for wildlife, such as boggy ground or steep slopes, including on SNCl. As it is difficult to use large machinery in such areas the volunteer group carries out these conservation tasks using hand tools and a good dose of brute strength!

Winter tasks include clearing invasive scrub from species-rich grasslands, clearing fence lines to enable grazing, and laying hedges. In the summer months we could be surveying for plants and insects, removing alien plants such as Himalayan balsam or sowing seeds or green hay to help with wildflower meadow restoration.

At Muston Farm, a chalk downland SNCl site in Piddlehinton, the volunteer group spent a day pulling up ragwort followed by an invertebrate survey of the fields, hedges and farmyard. Poisonous ragwort must be controlled in order to ensure the safety of livestock, one of the most important management tools in grassland conservation. The survey results were sent to the Natural History Museum as part of their investigation into how the built environment affects invertebrates.

On the River Hooke at Kingcombe we have spent two days this summer following up on work started in previous years to clear Himalayan balsam. This invasive plant is not native and rapidly colonises riverside areas, preventing our native species from flourishing, but the group has now made a significant impact in this area.

At Ferndown Farm near Wynford Eagle the group have been clearing invasive scrub from a steep bank to allow the species-rich grassland to return. Gorse and blackthorn were shading out the grasses and herbs but now that they have been cleared back the grassland habitat can be restored. The area will now be grazed to maintain the sward.

These are some examples of tasks the volunteers can get involved in. If you would like more information please contact Catherine Mason cmason@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk



Large pile of Himalayan balsam removed at Crabbs Hill



Invasive scrub removed on a bank at Ferndown Farm, Wynford Eagle



Volunteers clearing scrub on a brick kiln in west Dorset



Hedgelaying by volunteers at Pitt Farm, Whitchurch Canonicorum



DORSET WILDLIFE TRUST

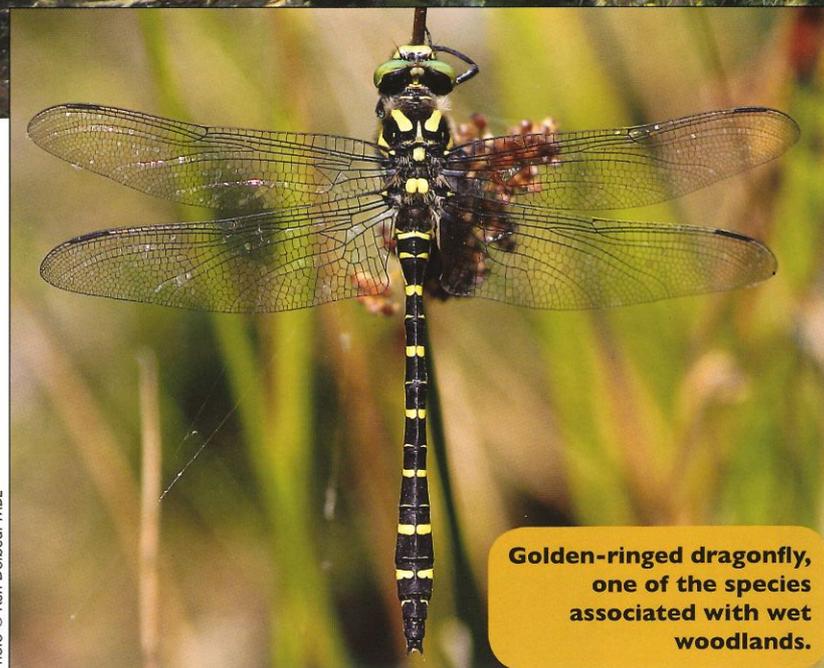
Rytec Cut & Collect Flailmower **FOR HIRE**

- Scrub maintenance
- Clearance of neglected sites
- Weed control

Do you live in West Dorset? You may be eligible for free use of this machine.

Contact Dorset Wildlife Trust, Pastures New Team: 01300 321329

Wet Woodlink 2011



Golden-ringed dragonfly, one of the species associated with wet woodlands.

Photo © Ken Dolbear, MBE

Photo © Sharron Abbott

As mentioned in our last issue of the Green Linnet, 'Wet Woodlink' was initiated in June 2010 to locate areas of wet woodlands in Dorset, to identify the management requirements which will help to retain their wildlife interest and to encourage adoption of best practice management.

The first year of the project involved collating information from landowners and rural advisors about the distribution of non designated (not SSSI or SNCI) wet woodlands in Dorset. This ground work led to DWT's Tree and Woodland Officer undertaking site visits to confirm the presence and condition of wet woodlands whilst offering advice and encouraging landowners/managers to adopt best practice management.

Throughout spring 2011 DWT SNCI Surveyors undertook ground flora surveys and site condition assessments for a number of SNCI sites. This also involved identifying potential areas for restoration, linking and buffering wet woodlands.

Summer 2011 saw Dorset Dragonfly Group and Dorset Bat Group carrying out specialist species surveys for wet woodlands, which provided valuable species information for Dorset.

In 2012 Dorset Wildlife Trust will be undertaking invertebrate surveys, ground flora surveys and are offering free advisory visits for wet woodland owners including some of our SNCI owners. If you are interested in having such a visit please contact Emma Tomlin on 01305 264620 or etomlin@dorsetwildlifetrust.org.uk

CONTACTS

For further information on SNCI's:
Sharron Abbott 01305 264620

Dorset Wildlife Trust West Dorset Team Office:
Pastures New Team 01300 321329

For advice on Environmental Stewardship:

We suggest you initially contact our West Dorset Team on 01300 321329. They should be able to advise you as to the best course of action or person to contact within the re-structured Natural England team for further help.

Woodlink c/o Dorset AONB:
01305 228239

Forestry Authority:
Dick Preston 01626 892853

SNCI Project
supported by

