

PRESS RELEASE

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Dr Aileen Baird and Dr Rachel Warmington available for comment

Join the waxcap hunt: charity calls on public to report sightings of rare colourful fungi

- People are being asked to spot waxcaps to help experts protect rare fungi and grasslands
- Over 400 important fungal sites located, including homes of rare and threatened species
- Download the app and record what fungi you find in grasslands, parks and cemeteries

Conservation charity Plantlife is today calling on people across England, Wales and Scotland to take part in this year's Waxcap Watch (2 September – 31 December 2024) to help conservationists both protect rare grassland fungi and find fragments of surviving ancient meadows.

Waxcap Watch is Plantlife's annual survey, held every autumn, aimed at identifying new sites where waxcaps and other grassland fungi can be found, simply by recording the fungi you discover in different locations up and down the country.

After analysing four years of data, researchers have identified 400 sites in England, Scotland and Wales as having high diversity indicators for grassland fungi. This can be indicative of ancient grasslands that have not been recently disturbed or artificially fertilised through intensive agriculture.

Staggeringly, the majority of our meadows have been eradicated since the 1930s - in an area one-and-a-half times the size of Wales. Nature-rich grasslands cover less than 1% of the UK. The recent State of Nature report revealed that over a quarter (28%) of fungi and lichens are now at risk of extinction.

The survey has landmarked 262 sites that play home to the rare and declining Ballerina Waxcap *Porpolomopsis calytriformis*, given the name because of the way its pink cap flares out and splits like a tutu, and 17 sites with Violet Coral *Clavaria zollingeri*, another fabulous fungus which has a distinct violet-purple colour.

Dr Aileen Baird, Senior Conservation Officer, Fungi, Plantlife, said:

"There are an estimated 2.5million species of fungi globally but more than 90% of these species are unknown to science. That's why citizen science is so crucial to the future of these species – it will help us identify which species are most at risk and require urgent conservation action.

“We’re counting on the public to get out for Waxcap Watch, with Britain home to some of the most important grasslands for fungi in the world. You will be gathering essential data we need, as well as enjoying time outdoors, connecting with nature and having fun.”

Dr Rachel Warmington, Head of Science at Plantlife, said:

“Fungi are a crucial partner to nearly all life on Earth. But devastatingly we’re potentially losing them faster than we’re discovering them due to habitat loss, climate change, and the lack of mycologists to collect data on these fascinating species.

“Grasslands can be a haven for important fungi, so knowing where waxcaps and other grassland fungi are thriving can help us better protect them for the future.”

Whether done with friends and family, or on your own, Waxcap Watch is free, fun and takes as little as five minutes. A walk in grasslands, parks and cemeteries can be one of the best ways of experiencing autumn, as well as discovering habitats for fungi. Living in a town or city doesn’t mean you can’t take part – fungi are everywhere, in local parks and even road verges.

This year’s Waxcap Watch runs from Monday 2 September to 31 December 2024. For more information and to take part simply visit plantlife.org.uk/waxcapwatch

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About Plantlife:

Plantlife is the global charity working to enhance, protect, restore and celebrate the wild plants and fungi that are essential to all life on earth. With two in five plant species at risk of extinction, biodiversity loss is now the fastest it’s ever been and Plantlife’s work has never been more vital. Plantlife champions and accelerates conservation action, working at the heart of a global network of individuals and organisations, to influence and inspire landowners and land managers, public and private bodies, governments and local communities. As time begins to run out, Plantlife’s position as the global voice for wild plants and fungi will help to bring lasting and positive change to our natural world – for everyone’s sake

Notes to editors:

Images available for use with credit:

<https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fo/hwl708cpaywg1042c96ct/AGg6igRQtVntHVDSmTwXTPo?rlkey=85suywy0ruqumeuf25vcaygc4&st=nhsi18eb&dl=0>

Waxcaps definition = Waxcaps are a group of grassland fungi. They have brightly coloured fruit bodies, with a waxy texture and widely spaced gills.

Fungi definition = Fungi are a kingdom of life which includes mushrooms, moulds, and yeasts. Although closely related, fungi are neither plants or animals.

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