



Waxcap Watch

Activity Pack for Group Leaders

Introduction

Britain is home to some of the most important waxcap grasslands in the world. However, many species are becoming rare and declining. Waxcap Watch is a citizen science activity that helps conservation organisations to find not just rare species, but the habitats they might be found growing in.

This year we want more people than ever to take part, and as a group leader, you can help. Whether you're leading community groups, volunteer teams, or educational sessions, this pack provides guidance, activities and resources to help you support others to take part.

In this pack you will find:

1. An example session plan that you can adapt for your group
2. Health and safety guidance
3. Frequently asked questions...and their answers
4. Resources that you can print and share, that will support your session.

Session Plan

You know your group best so use this session plan as a starting point and adapt it to meet the needs of your group. The session is designed to be delivered outdoors, but elements could be delivered indoors.

Aim

The aim of this session is to inspire and enthuse your group and give them the confidence to take part in the 2026 Waxcap Watch survey.

By the end of the session participants will:

- Understand the purpose of Waxcap Watch and how to take part in the survey
- Know the kinds of places where they might find grassland fungi
- Be able to recognise some of the growth forms of grassland fungi and their identifying features

Session Outline

Topic	Activity
Participant arrival.	Gather people away from areas with traffic, welcome and introductions.
Share session aims and structure.	Explain types of activities that will happen e.g. hands on, practicing skills, individual and small group work. Share practical info such as finish and break times.
Health and safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Highlight known site hazards e.g. steep or slippery ground, streams, cattle, electric fences, potholes etc. - Identify first aiders and location of first aid kit. - Check participants are prepared e.g. appropriate clothing and footwear, carrying food, drink and any medication needed. - Make participants aware of facilities (or lack of them) for toilets and handwashing. - Risk of ticks, tucking trousers into socks, long sleeves and tick check at home. Notify GP if you feel unwell after a bite. - Let group leader know if you need to leave early for any reason.
Preparation for site visit	Check participants have the Waxcap Watch app on their phones (if not, pair up people so they have sight of the app) Distribute resources e.g. recording sheets (in this pack)

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Introduction to the site	If you can, provide an overview of the site, its features and management. It's not essential but it can help volunteers to think of more survey sites if they understand the features of a grassland that's good for waxcaps. The site manager or owner may be able to help with this.								
What makes grasslands good for fungi (this site and other sites volunteers might want to survey)	<p>Explain features of grasslands in general, and this site, that make it good for grassland fungi i.e. short mossy grass that has been grassy for many years.</p> <p>Mention other places that are good for grassland fungi e.g. gardens, playing fields, churchyards, road verges, fields grazed by sheep.</p> <p>Try and use examples that participants can see in the site to explain e.g. grazing animals, local landscape features</p> <p>Ask if participants can think of other places they might go and look for waxcaps?</p>								
Spotting fungi	<p>Dedicate a small area of the site for participants to walk around where everyone can see each other.</p> <p>Give participants flags or other markers, ask them to spread out as a group and place flags wherever they spot fungi.</p> <p>Resources – flags or other markers visible from a distance</p>								
Fungi features	<p>Have a look at the fungi that people have found and choose one or two examples of fruiting bodies ('mushrooms') and use these to show the key features of gilled fungi e.g. gills, gill spacing, gill attachment, cap colour, cap texture, stipe etc.</p> <p>Encourage people to refer to the illustrations on the recording sheet.</p> <p>Resources – (optional) recording sheets which have illustrations of the features on the back.</p>								
Waxcap and non-waxcap features	<p>Choose a waxcap species and at least one other non-waxcap species to compare it with.</p> <p>Highlight the features of the waxcap that makes it distinctive e.g.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Waxcap</th> <th>Non-waxcap</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Widely spaced gills</td> <td>May have no gills or more narrowly spaced gills</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Chunky stipe (stem)</td> <td>May have a more slender stipe</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bright colour (although some are white, black or brown)</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Waxcap	Non-waxcap	Widely spaced gills	May have no gills or more narrowly spaced gills	Chunky stipe (stem)	May have a more slender stipe	Bright colour (although some are white, black or brown)	
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The Waxcap Watch survey

Choose an area of the site where participants can practice their own Waxcap Watch survey.
Demonstrate to the group how to carry out the survey, talking through the different questions and how to fill them in. Ask people to follow you on the app if they can.
Ask pairs or small groups to fill in the survey for the area.
Check in with people to see how they are getting along.

Survey debrief

Check in with participants to see how they found the survey and identify any areas of difficulty. Use knowledge in the group to answer questions and problem solve.

Next steps

Discuss next steps with the group. Are participants identifying places to survey or do you have sites in mind? Do people need any additional support?
Signpost people to the Waxcap Watch web page which has lots of resources on it including the Waxcap Watch e-learning course.

Health and Safety

Risk Assessment

When leading any group, you should assess the potential hazards and the risks involved. You should take steps to reduce the likelihood of an incident happening, or the severity of it if it does.

In addition to the expected hazards when working with groups or being outdoors, like weather, walking on uneven ground, or illness, here are some that you should particularly consider when you are leading this session:

Hazard	Risk	Control measures
Livestock	Trampling, fear	Only survey in public areas or have landowner permission. Check the area in advance to see if livestock are present. Have a Plan B in mind if livestock are unexpectedly in the survey area.
Tick bites	Tick related disease i.e. Lyme disease, Tick-borne encephalitis	Ticks thrive in grassy places. Require people to cover their limbs with long sleeves and trousers which should be tucked into socks. Encourage tick checks after the session and share NHS advice on management of tick bites and symptoms of related illnesses.
Flags or other markers	Injuries to eye, face or other body part.	Warn participants to be mindful when looking at the ground around a flag or marker so that they don't poke themselves in the eye or face. Encourage careful movement around the site so that they don't trip onto a flag.
Traffic	Serious injury from being hit by a car.	Don't carry out surveys in high-risk areas e.g. road verges. Ensure there is space/a barrier between people and traffic. Carry out the initial group briefing away from a parking area.
Handling and eating fungi	Poisoning	Advise participants not to eat any fungi that they find. Encourage hand washing before eating as a matter of good hygiene, although unless fungi has been eaten, there is no risk of poisoning from just touching fungi.

Frequently Asked Questions

Resources

The following pages are a two-sided resource for recording and describing grassland fungi. It comes in both English and Welsh language.

Plantlife

Brewery House
36 Milford Street
Salisbury
SP1 2AP