

THE LEASOWES SSSI

A guide to the waxcap grasslands



THE LEASOWES IS HOME TO ONE OF THE RICHEST WAXCAP GRASSLANDS IN ENGLAND AND CONTAINS SEVERAL INTERNATIONALLY RARE SPECIES.

THIS GUIDE WILL AID YOU IN FINDING AND IDENTIFYING SOME OF THESE OVERLOOKED COLOURFUL SPECIES.

WHAT IS A WAXCAP?

Waxcaps belong to the fungi kingdom, separate from plants, animals and bacteria. They live below ground as an intricate network of fine microscopic threads called mycelia. Some species of waxcap have been found to form a close bond with the roots of living plants, however the exact nature of this relationship remains a mystery.

If conditions are right, a spore producing 'fruit-body' or mushroom is formed above ground, however, some species do not produce mushrooms each year making them difficult to find. When present, many species of waxcap are unmistakable due to the attractive bright colours, waxy or slippery cap and thick, coloured gills.

WHAT IS A WAXCAP GRASSLAND?

Waxcap grasslands are meadows, pastures or lawns which are diverse in waxcaps as well as other fungi such as clubs, corals, pink gills, earthtongues and crazed caps. These grasslands are typically poor in nutrients, having escaped 'agricultural improvements' in the form of fertilisers, pesticides and ploughing, making them perfect for wildflowers too.

Unfortunately, an estimated 97% of these grasslands have been lost in the UK since 1940 which means many associated species are rare and declining. Despite this loss, waxcap grasslands within the UK remain amongst the richest and most important in the world.



OLIVE EARTHTONGUE; A priority species in England (NERC Act 2006)

WHITE SPINDLES



LILAC PINKGILL



A CRAZED CAP



MEADOW CORAL



WHY IS THE LEASOWES SSSI IMPORTANT?

The fields at the Leasowes can be dated back to the 18th century when they formed part of William Shenstone's 'ornamented farm' landscape and neighbouring Webb's Green Farm. Consequently, these grasslands have a long history of consistent management through grazing and hay cutting without any 'agricultural improvement'. These traditional practices reduce nutrients and control coarse grasses and scrub, providing the opportunity for a large assemblage of grassland plants and fungi to develop and thrive. It is a combination of the age of these fields and continuation of traditional management which underlies their biological importance today.

In total, 29 species of waxcap have been recorded within these fields (a grassland with 19 species is considered nationally important).

Five of these species; ballerina, citrine, crimson, date and *Gloioxanthomyces vitellinus* (a yolk coloured waxcap) are very rare and considered conservation priorities as is another grassland specialist, olive earthongue. Consequently, The Leasowes was designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its community of grassland plants and fungi in 2019. At the time The Leasowes was the joint 6th richest waxcap grassland in England and of international significance. SSSI's are a legal designation which recognises the best sites for wildlife protecting these habitats and rare species for future generations to enjoy.



BUTTER/GLUTINOUS WAXCAP

Hygrocybe ceracea/glutinipes

Cap: yellow to orange yellow, greasy to slimy, 5-30mm
Stem: yellow to orange, dry, silky, or distinctly slimy, 15-50mm tall, 1.5-3mm wide
Gills: broadly attached to decurrent, pale yellow
Notes: Glutinous waxcap is covered in thick slime which often forms lumps on the stem

GOLDEN WAXCAP

Hygrocybe chlorophana

Cap: golden yellow, greasy, 20-70mm
Stem: golden yellow, dry, smooth, 20-80mm tall, 4-13mm wide
Gills: pale yellow, adnexed
Notes: Golden waxcap differs from Butter by the wider stem and adnexed gills and from Oily by the lack of scent and gills paler than cap

OILY WAXCAP

Hygrocybe quieta

Cap: lemon-chrome to dirty yellow, becoming grey-white, dry or slightly greasy, 10-80mm
Stem: yellow, dry, silky, irregularly compressed, 30-90mm tall, 2-8mm wide
Gills: orange or yellow flushed with salmon pink, darker than cap, broadly attached
Notes: smells of engine oil, fruits late September to late November

HONEY WAXCAP

Hygrocybe reidii

Cap: dull orange with yellowish margin, dry, smooth, 10-50mm
Stem: dry, smooth, orange-yellow, 20-50mm
Gills: broadly attached to decurrent, yellow to orange (paler than cap)
Notes: smells sweetly of honey, restricted to only a few banks, fruits from mid August to November

SCARLET WAXCAP

Hygrocybe coccinea

Cap: bright red with a narrow yellow margin, greasy, 10-60mm
Stem: red to yellow, dry, silky, 20-70mm tall, 3-6mm wide
Gills: red with a yellow edge, broadly attached
Notes: an abundant species generally appearing in groups, fruits mid-September to mid-December

FIBROUS WAXCAP

Hygrocybe intermedia

Cap: red becoming orange-yellow, dry, covered in fine scales, 25-110mm
Stem: red to orange-yellow, dry, fibrous, 20-150mm
Gills: pale yellow, free or adnexed
Notes: few locations on site, fruits late August to late September



MEADOW WAXCAP

Cuphophyllus pratensis

Cap: orange buff, dry, 30-120mm
Stem: cream, dry, 30-150mm
Gills: cream, deeply decurrent
Notes: A very robust species, abundant across the entire site, appears singly or in small groups, early September to early December. The 'deceiver', an unrelated species, is similar but has flesh coloured gills

CEDARWOOD/SNOWY WAXCAP

C. russocoriaceus/virgineus

Cap: ivory white, dry to greasy, 5-30mm or 10-70mm
Stem: ivory white, dry, smooth, 12-40mm tall, 1.5-40mm wide or 20-60mm tall, 2-10mm wide
Gills: white, decurrent
Notes: Cedar is the smaller of the two species and should smell of pencil shavings, however our specimens lack a strong smell

EARTHY WAXCAP

Cuphophyllus fornicatus

Cap: whitish grey, dry, smooth, 20-80mm
Stem: white, dry, fibrous, 20-70mm tall, 3-20mm wide
Gills: white, adnexed
Notes: A rarer and more robust species than cedar or snowy, our specimens are much paler than the norm but easily separated by the adnexed gills, fruits early October to late November

PARROT WAXCAP

Gliophorus psittacinus

Cap: jade green (rarely purple) becoming yellow and finally ochre-orange, slimy, 5-35mm
Stem: green or yellow with green apex, slimy, 20-60mm
Gills: green with pale yellow edge, broadly attached
Notes: a variable species in large numbers across the site. Green at the top of the stem or on the gills is diagnostic

SLIMY WAXCAP

Gliophorus irrigatus

Cap: grey-brown, slimy, 10-50mm
Stem: grey, slimy, 20-50mm
Gills: whitish, broadly attached
Notes: appears infrequently across the entire site, thought to be a good habitat indicator, can appear in August but peaks in mid-October

BLACKENING WAXCAP

Hygrocybe conica

Cap: red, orange or yellow quickly turning black, greasy or dry and fibrous, conical, 15-100mm
Stem: yellow turning black, greasy to dry, 15-100mm
Gills: whitish turning black, adnexed
Notes: all parts of this waxcap turn black with age, resembling a lump of coal



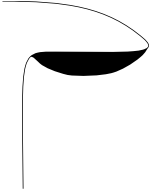
WAXCAP SPECIES AND KEY

- Ballerina waxcap
- Blackening waxcap
- Butter/Glutinous waxcap
- Cedarwood/Snowy waxcap
- Citrine waxcap
- Crimson waxcap
- Date waxcap
- Earthy waxcap
- Fibrous waxcap
- Golden waxcap
- Honey waxcap
- Meadow waxcap
- Oily waxcap
- Parrot waxcap
- Scarlet waxcap
- Slimy waxcap
- Blue waymarked trail - 2.5km
- Spur path
- Fencelines
- Water body
- Golf course
- Car park

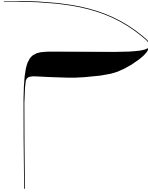
IDENTIFYING WAXCAPS

Key features to look for:

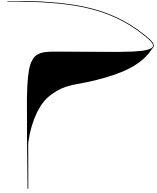
- The colour of the cap, stem and gills.
- The texture of the cap and stem. Are they: dry, fibrous, scaly, greasy or slimy?
- The gill attachment to the stem. Are they:



barely attached
(free or adnexed)



broadly attached
(adnate)



or decurrent

- The smell can sometimes be distinctive for some species, like honey, oil or cedar.

Photographs of the cap, gills and stem can be sufficient to identify most waxcaps and with a little experience these species can be identified easily in the field. A small mirror can be very useful for viewing the gill attachment without damaging the mushroom. Though they are not known to be poisonous the slimy waxy texture would make them unpleasant to eat.

Please do not pick the mushrooms.

The Leasowes is a SSSI and therefore the site, and species within, are legally protected. We hope you appreciate the special fungi and grassland habitat but please leave them for others to enjoy.

YOU CAN HELP

Your records can help us to learn more about these special fungi and assist in maintaining their unique and rare habitat. Take a photo of any waxcaps you find and we'll try to identify them for you.

Email: leasowes.country@dudley.gov.uk

Alternatively, detach this form and return it to:

The Wardens Office, 3 Leasowes Lane, Halesowen B62 8DH

Species (or brief description)

.....

Date Location.

(Several free smartphone apps are available providing accurate ordnance survey grid references)



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CITRINE WAXCAP

Hygrocybe citrinovirens

Cap: lemon yellow, greenish hue, dry radial fibres, 25-90mm

Stem: yellowish-white sometimes flushed orange, dry, silky or fibrous, 50-130mm

Gills: yellowish white with a greenish hue, free or adnexed

Notes: Fruits late September

IUCN red listed species

DATE WAXCAP

Hygrocybe spadicea

Cap: date coloured, brown radial fibres over yellow flesh greasy but soon dry, 25-80mm

Stem: yellow, dry, fibrous, 35-90mm tall

Gills: yellow, free or adnexed

Notes: rarely recorded, fruits infrequently

IUCN red listed species



BALLERINA WAXCAP

Porpolomopsis calyptriformis

Cap: pink, dry, conical, becoming split, 25-100mm

Stem: white, dry, smooth, 40-120mm

Gills: pink, free to adnexed

Notes: UK supports 80% global population, fruits late September to early November, over 40 fruit-bodies were seen in 2015

IUCN red listed species

CRIMSON WAXCAP

Hygrocybe punicea

Cap: blood red with brownish hue, becoming pale buff with age, greasy, 30-150mm

Stem: yellow-orange, dry, fibrous, 30-150mm tall, 5-13mm wide

Gills: broadly attached

Notes: More robust than Scarlet, only occurs on one bank, late October to early November

IUCN red listed species

LOCATION

THE LEASOWES
LEASOWES LANE
OFF MUCKLOW HILL
HALESOWEN
WEST MIDLANDS
B62 8DH

THE LEASOWES LIES EAST OF HALESOWEN CLOSE TO
JUNCTION 3 OF THE M5 MOTORWAY.

CONTACT US

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For more information and to view other
special Black Country geosites, visit:

<https://blackcountrygeopark.dudley.gov.uk/bcg/>



Cover image: Fibrous waxcap

'*Hygrocybe spadicea*' by Malcom Storey

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