



Penallta Yafflings

Volume 4

November 2019

A seasonal newsletter about the wildlife at Parc Penallta

With the recent wet weather and forecasters predicting snow by the end of November, you could be mistaken for thinking that summer had skipped straight into winter but, take the time to look and you will see autumn is in full swing.

Penallta's woodlands are preparing for the changing seasons. Shorter days and falling temperatures trigger deciduous trees to reabsorb nutrients from their leaves. This causes a change in the chemical composition of the leaf as food producing chlorophyll, which gives it its green colouration, begins to break down. Other pigments which were masked during the summer now begin to show through, turning the canopy to a patchwork of red, yellow and brown.



Oak leaves and acorn cap

It is not just leaves falling to the ground though. 2019 is a mast year when trees synchronise their seed production producing bumper crops. Like many other trees, oaks will produce different amounts of seed from year to year. Heavy crops usually occur every 2 – 5 years with few or even no acorns produced in between. How the trees synchronise their seed production is not known but it is thought that the right combination of temperature and rainfall in spring may trigger this response. Why trees do this is easier to fathom. Seed production takes a lot of energy and this can limit growth during mast years. Acorns are also

a valuable autumn and winter food source for many animals such as deer and wild boar and holding back production for a few years helps to keep these predator populations low. During a mast year, more acorns are produced than these animals can possibly eat, ensuring that some seeds survive to grow into the next generation of oak trees.

Autumn is also mushroom season and many species of fungi can be found sprouting from the woods, hedges and fields across the park. People are often fearful of fungi thinking them poisonous or fearing that they are detrimental to other plants and animals, but as well as recycling nutrients and breaking down

dead material, many species form symbiotic relationships with plants. The fungi colonize the root system of a host plant, helping them absorb water and nutrients. In return the host plant provides the fungus with carbohydrates generated during photosynthesis.

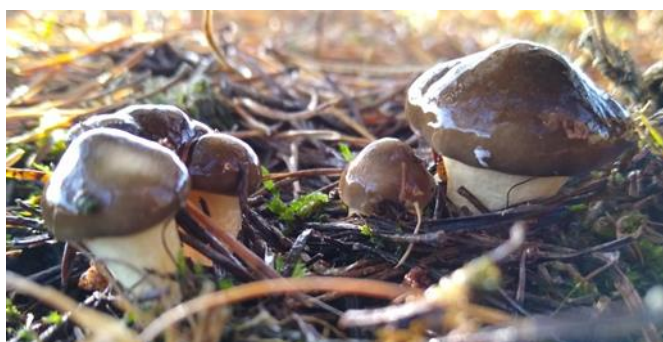
One group of mushrooms that are particularly attractive are the waxcaps and at least 9 species can be found growing in the meadows and grassy hill sides around



Waxcaps from Parc Penallta

the observatory. Coming in lots of different colours waxcaps are indicators of unimproved grassland and are only found in places that have not been fertilized or treated with chemicals for many years. You can help us to protect these fascinating fungi by ensuring that you clean up after your dog, as dog faeces and urine can lead to a build-up of nutrients in the soil which are detrimental to the fungi.

The names of fungi are often descriptive and can help in identifying them. One such species is the Herald of Winter. This species is always associated with pine trees and has only been recorded at 13 other sites in Wales making its recent discovery at Penallta quite exciting. Although not the most colourful of species its arrival in late autumn when many other species are disappearing is a good clue to its identity.



Herod of the Winter (Hygrophorus hypothejus)

As the fungi fade, we welcome two wonderful winter visitors, the fieldfares and redwings. Members of the thrush family, these two birds come to the UK to feed and can often be seen in flocks eating hawthorn and rowan berries. On clear nights listen out for the thin 'seeeeip' like calls of the redwing as they fly overhead through the darkness – a clear sign of the season, because as the fungi have foretold Winter is coming!