

The fungus kingdom: an introduction to mycology-(Peter Walker).

Thursday 16th October 2014.

A fascinating talk about these diverse organisms that often only appear transiently for just a few days or weeks before disappearing again to spend most of their life hidden away. With over 12000 in Britain, 3000 of which are macro, there is plenty of scope to learn. Using Peter's guide & looking out specific characteristics we could all make a start on the identification of the more common ones. Habitat & local conditions are all guides to identification but variations or changes as fruiting bodies age mean identification is by no means straight forward. Indeed some highly toxic ones can be mistaken for safe ones & Peter cited examples of death of even knowledgeable collectors eating the wrong ones! (I for one will enjoy the challenge of identification but will stick to relying on the supermarkets for my edible fungi). When trying to identify fungi, apart from the fruiting body characteristics including the base of the stem, notes should be taken if they are on or in association with particular trees as well as other habitat information.

The talk also covered other aspects of the positive importance of fungi, in for example bread, cheese & beer production, also in medicine & their huge role in recycling nutrients in the soil for use by plants. However, they also have a negative effect when spoiling growing food crops or with goods in store.

Other interesting points he raised were the longevity of honey fungus (1500 years) & the mass of it when spread over large areas can run to 100 tons (research in USA) ; he also pointed out that some orchids live in association with fungi throughout their lives eg bird's nest orchid. Also, even fungi can get parasitic fungi on them !....

..and so with this inspiring talk behind me I have yet another amazing aspect of wildlife to look for on any walk I venture on in the future.