

St Matthew's Churchyard Lightcliffe

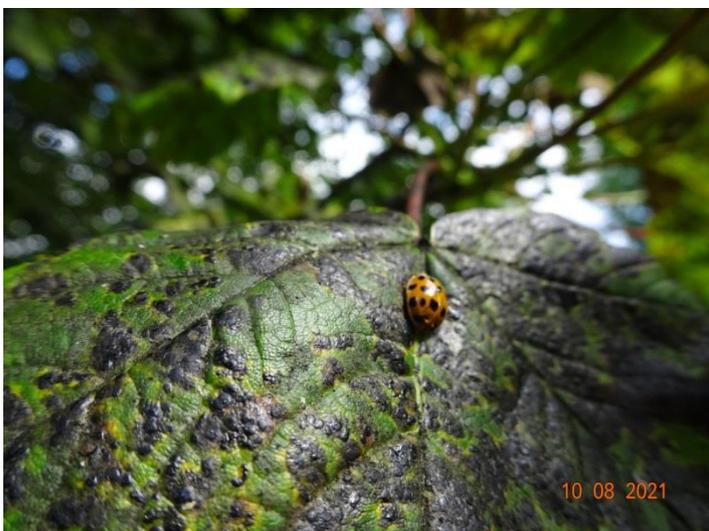
Late summer and early autumn wildlife snapshot 2021

Some warm weather in August attracted a feline visitor seen basking in the sunshine! There were also plenty of speckled wood butterflies flying in both August and September plus the occasional red admiral.



Speckled wood adults are on the wing between March and October and can overwinter as a pupa or a caterpillar, sheltering at the base of one of their food plants – grasses like Yorkshire Fog and Cocksfoot. Both pupae and caterpillars are green so they hard to spot amongst the grasses!

The bramble flowers were plentiful in August, attracting white-tailed bumble bees and common carder bees as well as Syrphus species of hoverfly. The hoverflies were a joy to observe one afternoon with the sun glinting through their transparent wings.



This ladybird seemed to be enjoying the warmth of the sun for a few moments on a sycamore leaf. The black marks on sycamore leaves are a common sight from mid-summer onwards. They are caused by a fungus called **Sycamore Tarspot**. The air in Lightcliffe must be relatively clean as this fungus won't grow in areas with high levels of sulphur dioxide. Tarspot doesn't seem to affect the health of the tree or cause difficulties with photosynthesis.

Fungi season



After a heavy rain shower in August, I spotted these fungi in the churchyard – new ones for our list I think. The white pointy ones on the left are probably **Milky Cone Cap** mushrooms. Although they are common, it's a case of “now you see them, now you don't” as they appear after a heavy burst of summer rain but only last for 24 hours! The ones on the right could be **Wrinkled Field Cap** (*Agrocybe rivulosa*) which grow profusely on woodchip piles.

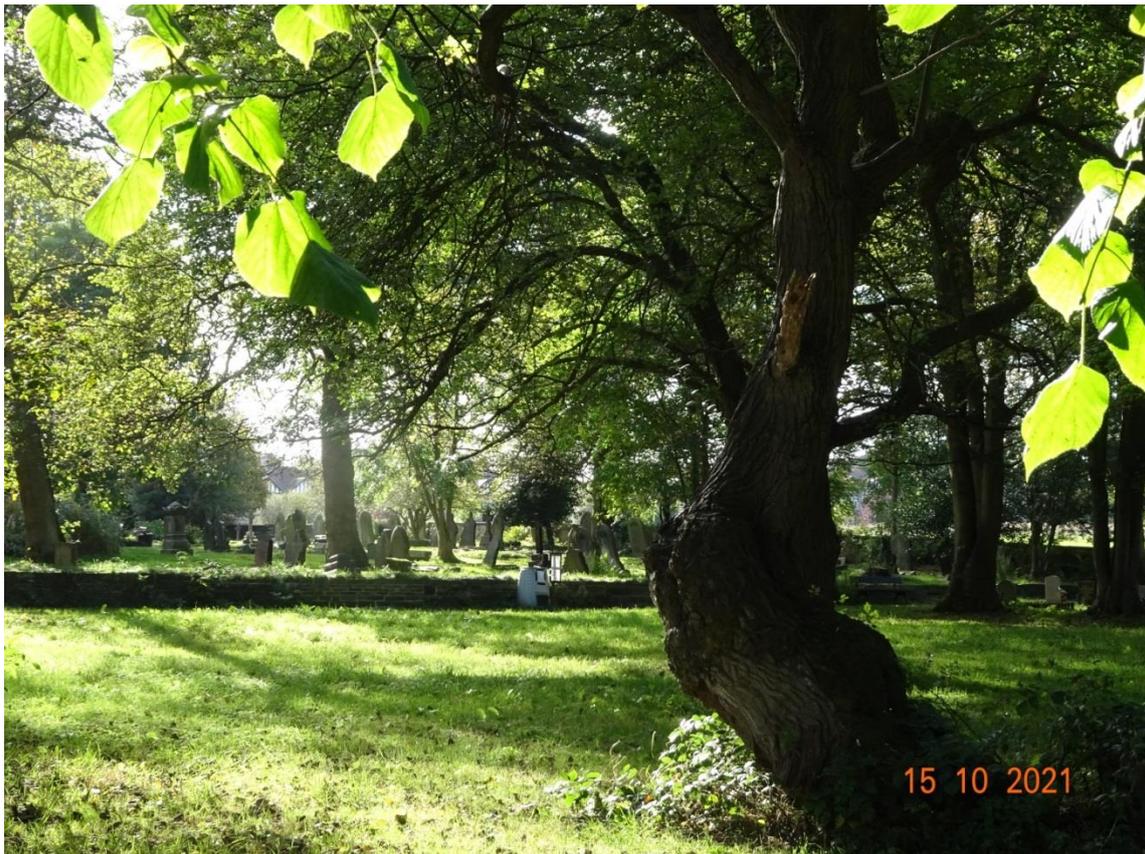


I found this specimen in October and again, I think it's a new record for us : a **Shaggy Ink Cap**, sometimes known as a “Lawyer's wig”! It starts off as a tall egg shape and then will open out into a bell.



Sometimes you have to look in shady places to find beauty! On a cloudy August day, I spotted the delicate leaves of a **Maiden Hair Spleenwort** fern growing out of the east wall (above left). These dainty ferns grow in the crevices of shady walls, enjoying the lime provided by the mortar. Then I turned over the leaf of a common fern (above right) to find this intricate pattern of spores.

Effects of climate change in the churchyard



By mid-October, the trees in the churchyard were beginning to show some autumn colour although this seems to be happening later than usual this year, probably due to climate change. Summer temperatures are lasting longer into autumn, delaying the onset of rich leaf colour. The lime (above), oak and beech were the first to turn:



Our squirrels and jays will have a lean time of it this winter as the beech and oak trees have produced next to no mast. According to the Woodland Trust, this is due to the wet spring weather earlier this year. Oak and beech flowers are wind pollinated and need warm, dry conditions for the pollen to travel successfully through the air. Only pollinated flowers turn into fruits, of course, so the weather in spring determines how much food is available in autumn for our wildlife. Hawthorn flowers are insect pollinated but there are

fewer insects flying during rainy weather so although our churchyard hawthorns have a reasonable crop, the berries are not as plentiful as last year.



Hawthorn and Rowan berries will provide food for birds such as redwings, song and mistle thrushes and blackbirds, as well as small mammals, over the next couple of months.

Nuthatch news:

In October, I saw a nuthatch foraging very high up in the canopy of an old willow tree in the lower half of the churchyard. It was too far away to capture a photo but the sun was lighting up its orange and slate blue plumage beautifully. It's good to know they are still around!



Marjorie Middleton

October 2021