

October wildlife snapshot

St Matthew's churchyard, Lightcliffe

Beech trees

Autumn has arrived in the churchyard with the beech trees in particular showing some stunning colours as the green chlorophyll breaks down to reveal a rich golden brown beneath. Squirrels, jays, magpies, wood pigeons, crows and jackdaws have all been busy eating the plentiful beech mast which is littering the ground.



The majestic beech is sometimes referred to as the queen of British trees. The tree near the Till Carr Lane entrance is a beautiful specimen with characteristic smooth, grey bark and a tall, straight trunk. The bark of a beech is quite thin and the wood relatively soft. Our English word “book” is derived from the Anglo Saxon “boec” (beech) as writing was originally carved on beech wood or bark. Even today, beech trees often suffer graffiti as people carve their names into the bark!



October seems to have been a very wet month this year but there was beauty to be seen in the churchyard, even in the rain. These **hawthorn berries** or “haws” are nutritious for both birds and people. They are rich in antioxidants and are thought to aid digestion and improve the health of the heart. The haws can be made into jellies, jams and wine.

Fantastic fungi

With the wet weather, some weird and wonderful fungi (with equally wonderful names) have been sprouting in the churchyard. I am no fungi expert but have had a go at identifying the eight species I found. Please tell me if you know differently!



Jelly ear fungus



Common inkcap



Shaggy scaly cap



Wood blewit

I found the jelly ear fungus on logs in one of the habitat piles. It apparently grows mainly on the wood of the Elder tree. The common ink cap and the shaggy scaly cap were both growing at the base of trees in the new part of the churchyard. The dead wood that our working party volunteers have stacked up around the edges of the churchyard is a great habitat for fungi which help to rot down the wood. This process gradually releases nitrogen back into the soil. Beetles, birds and small mammals make these habitat piles their homes.



Stump puffballs



Turkeytail fungus



Candlesnuff fungus



Large unknown flat-topped toadstool 8" across

The Latin name for the Stump puffball is *Lycoperdon pyriforme*, *pyriforme* meaning pear shaped (difficult to see from my photo but they are) and, wonderfully, *lycoperdon* literally means “wolf’s flatulence” – they did have an unpleasant smell but I have never been near enough to a wolf to discover how accurate the name is! I also love the name turkeytail fungus which originated in America and is now used here to replace the more boring “Many-zoned Polypore”.



Tangled centipede

This little fellow has tied himself into a knot! It’s a centipede of the “geophilid” type, meaning ground lover. These centipedes live in the leaf litter and soil and are one of our longest centipedes. They have more joints in their body than other centipedes so they can twist themselves into knots without any problem.

Ivy



The west wall of the churchyard and adjacent trees are covered with ivy which makes a good habitat for all kinds of wildlife. At this time of the year, the ivy is in full flower, providing valuable nectar for insects when other plants have finished flowering. Wasps, hoverflies and ladybirds are enjoying the feast at the moment.



Who lives here?

A spidery story for Halloween! Our churchyard walls are covered with these webs which belong to the **lace webbed spider**. It lives in a silken tube with a circular entrance leading into a wall crevice. The surrounding wall is a mass of lacy, sticky strands which trap passing insects. The spider sits inside its lair ready to dart out and devour its prey.



Lace webbed spider

Photo by Graham Calow



Another tree monster!



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