

**2010 International Year of Biodiversity ...  
in The Worthys  
October 2010**



*A celebration of life on earth and of the value of biodiversity in our area, this month we take a look at those funny looking living organisms ...*

## Fungi

What is the fascination that some of us have with fungi? Is it the fact that they are living organisms, yet neither plant nor animal? Is it the way that they mysteriously spring up overnight, apparently from nothing? Maybe it's their weird fantastical shapes – umbrellas, brackets or balls to name a few. Or maybe it's the strange phenomenon that, while some are highly poisonous, others are edible and extremely delicious.

The familiar umbrella-shaped fungi are often known as mushrooms or toadstools. Although there is no scientific distinction between the two, the former name is generally given to those species which are edible. Hence the Field Mushroom is a species very similar to the cultivated mushroom, both in appearance and taste. However, another similar species, the Yellow-Staining Mushroom, proves to be an exception to the

general rule and is in fact, poisonous. So if in any doubt about the identification of a fungus that you come across, it is best not to try it.

A good place to search for fungi in the Worthys, particularly in the autumn, is around the disused railway platform near Worthy Down Army Camp. Here you might come across the distinctive **Shaggy Inkcap**.



This fungus, egg-shaped at first, quickly

grows into an elongated umbrella resembling a lawyer's wig, before dissolving into a messy black liquid. If caught before it does this, it can be very rewarding to eat.



Another species which has been found in the vicinity of the platform is the **Elf-Cup**. As its name suggests, this fungus is a small cup-shaped species. The bright red insides of the cup provide a striking contrast to the moss-covered pieces of wood which it seems to favour.

Further afield, Micheldever Wood provides a varied habitat of coniferous and broad-leaved trees for a large number of different fungi. One of my favourites is the **Sulphur Tuft**, a lovely golden yellow umbrella fungus growing in clusters around old tree stumps. Its real glory, however, is on



the underside of the cap where the tightly-packed yellow gills have a blue-green almost phosphorescent tinge to them. In complete contrast to this, the **Stinkhorn** has a phallic shape and is white with a sticky olive-green tip. You may first detect it by its strong smell, said to resemble a blocked drain.

Space permits me to only briefly mention some of the many other species of fungi such as the **Death Cap** (see photo right) and Destroying Angel, both deadly poisonous species. The familiar red and white toadstool of fairy stories – the **Fly Agaric** – is also highly poisonous. On the other hand, the **Amethyst Deceiver** is a small violet-coloured mushroom and, despite its name, is very tasty. Then there are the different species of **Earthball** and **Puffball**, roughly spherical fungi, some of which can be as large as footballs. Also there is the **Fairy Ring Mushroom**, so called because a group of them can often be found growing in a circular pattern in the grass. Finally, I must mention the smooth, round charcoal-like fungus found growing on the branches of broad-leaved trees and called, appropriately enough, **King Alfred's Cakes**.



**Jonathan Smith**

*If you spot any fungi and would like to record them on our database, log onto [www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk/naturewatch](http://www.worthysconservationvolunteers.org.uk/naturewatch)*