



## GROUPS

Examples from left to right: Pink waxcap (*Porpolomopsis calyptriformis*), Hairy earthtongue (*Trichoglossum hirsutum*), Scarlet waxcap (*Hygrocybe coccinea*), Meadow coral (*Clavulinopsis corniculata*) Peter Sturgess

# Grassland fungi (esp. waxcaps)

Information: Peter Sturgess

### All about grassland fungi

- Grassland fungi are typically found in old pastures and are primarily associated with relatively short, unfertilised grasslands with a long history of management by grazing or cutting, but have escaped agricultural improvement such as ploughing or treatment by fertilisers or herbicides. This habitat is increasingly uncommon and therefore many species are rare and declining.
- The most well known grassland fungi include waxcaps, earthtongues, fairy clubs and coral fungi.
- Waxcaps are often the most obvious grassland fungi. There are about 50 species in the UK. This diverse group tends to have brightly-coloured species with a waxy cap (sometimes scurfy or slippery). Most are 1–5cm in diameter but some can reach 15cm. A few have distinctive smells.
- Earthtongues are often hard to spot as they are rarely taller than the grass and moss they grow amongst. They are typically dark coloured or black. Earthtongues do not have gills but the spores are released from the surface of these dark club-shaped structures.
- Fairy clubs and coral fungi also have no gills. They include a wide range of colours though the most common are white, yellow or orange. The structures vary from simple clubs to richly branched bushy clusters.
- A few species of waxcaps and other grassland fungi can be identified in the field but most require a microscope to confirm identification.

### Why do grassland fungi need our help?

The UK is one of the most important countries for grassland fungi in the world. 50% of the world's population of waxcap species are just found in Scotland and Wales! Many grassland fungi are in rapid decline because they are very sensitive to small environmental changes. Big threats for grassland fungi include plowing, fertilisers and grass reseeding.

More recently one of the biggest threats is the planting of trees on grasslands for carbon offsetting which will reduce the population. Also with less grazing and less money to manage scrub, the destruction of complex grasslands will inevitably lead to the decline of fungi.

**DID YOU KNOW? Grassland fungi mainly appear from late summer to winter. They may not appear every year, but their underground mycelium is present all year round and may live for over a hundred years.**

#### How can we help?

- Churchyards, cemeteries and other regularly cut lawns can be excellent sites for grassland fungi.
- Mowing is important to provide short grass during the autumn to allow the fungi to produce fruiting bodies. Ideally the cuttings should be removed to keep nutrient levels low (especially if grass has been allowed to grow long and flower during the summer). Do not to cut whilst they are actually fruiting as thus would potentially damage the population in future seasons.
- Do not use herbicides or other lawn treatments on long established grassland. Don't worry about mosses in your lawn; many grassland fungi prefer mossy turf.
- Don't assume that mown grass has no value for biodiversity. If considering activities such as tree planting in grassland please check first to see if it is already a valuable site for fungi.

#### Learn more

- [plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/waxcaps-and-grassland-fungi](http://plantlife.org.uk/uk/our-work/publications/waxcaps-and-grassland-fungi)
- [aber.ac.uk/waxcap/](http://aber.ac.uk/waxcap/)
- The fungi of Irish Grasslands and their value for nature conservation [researchgate.net/publication/261510690\\_The\\_fungi\\_of\\_Irish\\_Grasslands\\_and\\_their\\_value\\_for\\_nature\\_conservation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/261510690_The_fungi_of_Irish_Grasslands_and_their_value_for_nature_conservation)
- Griffith, G.W., J.L. Bratton & G.L. Easton (2004). Charismatic megafungi: the conservation of waxcap grasslands. *British Wildlife*, 15(3), pp. 31–43.
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