

BMS Group Leaders' Meeting 16th-18th June 2006

Richard Iliffe

The regional fungus groups loosely gathered under the British Mycological Society 'umbrella' are now referred to as the BMS Recording Network (BMSRN). There are 38 groups, of which 30 are formally affiliated to the BMS using the system adopted shortly after the 2004 group leaders meeting. Three other known groups have not responded to communications from the BMS. Meetings of group leaders are held every two years unless there are pressing matters that call for annual discussion. This meeting was held at Alston Hall, near Preston, when 18 groups were represented with 16 sending apologies.

The President, Geoff Gadd, sent a message wishing the meeting well and giving an overview of the relationship between the Society and the local recording groups.

The General Secretary, Geoff Robson, sent a message apologising for difficulties with collection of subscriptions and sending out of journals. These problems are now mostly resolved. A full-time Administration Officer would be appointed shortly to be responsible for these matters.

The Membership Secretary, Julian Mitchell attended the first half of the meeting and in his presentation referred to problems with the membership database. There were over 500 associate members who had not upgraded to full voting members, even though the subscription was now the same. Many of these associates had been "lost" because they did not reply to mailings (possibly sent to out-of-date addresses), and names could not be matched to subscriptions received because many direct-debits cannot be traced back to the sender because of banking procedures. Group leaders were issued with a list of "lost" contacts and requested to ask any that they knew to contact Julian Mitchell or his assistant Sarah Hodgkiss. Once the membership database has been updated, it will be possible to write to existing associate members to assess whether they wish this category of membership to be maintained. There were also apologies for difficulties with 'Field Mycology' following the change of publisher from CUP to Elsevier. This had been caused by several factors, including staff changes, errors in lists sent by CUP to Elsevier, and problems with the BMS database. It was thought most had been resolved but anybody still not receiving FM or not having received an invoice in £ sterling was advised to email d.busby@elsevier.com.

Publications and Library

As well as the change of publishers from Cambridge University Press to Elsevier, there are to be changes in the BMS publications themselves. From 2007 a new journal '**Fungal Biology Reviews**' will be introduced '**Field Mycology**' will continue as at present and it is proposed that members will be able to choose which of these two journals they will take for their subscription. If they take both they will pay for the additional journal, both journals costing the same amount. '**Mycological Research**' will continue as at present as this is the biggest source of income for the Society. The Mycologist will no longer be published but it is hoped that The Mycologist News will be issued quarterly from Jan 2007.

Gill Butterfill has continued to fill the role of Librarian in an unofficial capacity with Anne Andrews managing the abstracts service. If anybody knows of a person interested in taking on the Librarian's role, please make contact with Gill or Nick Clipson (Publications Officer). The move into new facilities at Kew has been successfully completed and initial reports suggest that the new accommodation is very satisfactory.

New Constitution

The new Constitution should be ratified at the forthcoming AGM. Liz Holden has submitted an amendment which acknowledges the existence of the BMSRN, and this was expected to be adopted. She said that field mycologists were well represented on the BMS Council with herself, Paul Kirk, Stuart Skeates and Carol Hobart as Ordinary Council Members (OCM) and Peter Spencer-Phillips as Field Mycology Officer. Shelley Evans has been nominated as an OCM for 2007.

Kew Report

The BMS office and library were now in their new headquarters. The address is British Mycological Society, The Wolfson Wing, Jodrell Building, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond Surrey, TW9 3AB. Herbarium material can be sent to Kew from the end of June and should now be addressed to The Mycology Section, The Wolfson Wing, etc.

The new telephone numbers are Brian Spooner 020 8332 5381; Peter Roberts 020 8332 5382.

Kew mycology staff now comprises:

Brian Spooner – Head of Mycology and research into ascomycetes.

Peter Roberts – research into heterobasidiomycetes, corticioid and clavarioid fungi.

Heidi Doring – laboratory manager and molecular-based research into lichens.
Begonia Aguirrez-Hudson – loans, curator of specimens, and research into lichen taxonomy.
Martin Bidartondo is based at Kew but employed by Imperial College, working on mycorrhizal relationships.

The Checklist of British and Irish Basidiomycota was published in 2005. It will shortly be available on the BMS web-site as a reference document. The planned book on clavarioid fungi is now firmly in the programme for publication in 2 to 3 years time. Sir Peter Crane retires as Director this summer and is succeeded by Prof. Stephen Hopper presently at the Botanic Gardens, Perth, Western Australia.

Changes to the BMS committee structure (to be confirmed at the 2006 AGM) were reported by Peter Spencer-Phillips, the Field Mycology Officer and are outlined as follows:

The **Field Mycology Committee** meets twice annually. Its function is strategic planning and co-ordination.

Chair – the Field Mycology Officer (Peter Spencer-Phillips)

Foray Manager (Sherry Stannard)

Conservation Advisor (Shelley Evans)

Recording Network Co-ordinator (Liz Holden)

Fungal Records Database Manager (Paul Kirk)

Advisor (Martyn Ainsworth)

Ex officio - the President, President-elect, General Secretary and the Treasurer.

The Society plans to appoint a full-time administrator who will attend this committee.

The **Foray Sub-committee** arranges and delivers the foray and workshop programme.

Chair – the Foray Manager (Sherry Stannard) – administration of the foray programme

Foray Assistant (Steve Kelly) - responsible for foray logistics

Member (Stuart Skeates)

Member (Irene Ridge)

Member (Carol Hobart)

Ex officio – the Field Mycology Officer (Peter Spencer-Phillips)

The BMS Foray Programme was outlined by Sherry Stannard (Foray Manager) and local groups were asked to investigate and suggest suitable venues in their area for forays or workshops. The possibility of reinstating BMS Day Forays was discussed.

2006: Autumn – Kingcombe Centre, Dorset

Overseas – Sardinia

Rotheroe Memorial Foray – Carmarthenshire

2007: Spring – Isle of Arran, April or May

Autumn – Sheffield University, visiting Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire & South Yorkshire

Overseas – Nice, South of France

Upland – possibly in Wales

Boletus Workshop – late summer at Romsey

2008: Groups are asked to suggest suitable meetings venues in their areas

Conservation Report

The revised Red Data List of threatened British fungi has been completed after wide consultation. A working group has submitted the final document to JNCC (Joint Nature Conservation Committee).

JNCC is also involved in a review of BAP species. 77 non-lichenised macrofungi were initially proposed and Martyn Ainsworth prepared data sheets for each. After consultation 66 species of macrofungi have been submitted plus 27 species of microfungi. JNCC expected to publish in November 2006.

Plantlife, together with partner organisations including the BMS, is in the process of developing a strategy document for fungal conservation planning. It is hoped that the document will help to concentrate effort and funding and people's views on fungal conservation priorities were welcomed. Existing suggestions are listed below:

NB it has been pointed out to Plantlife that targets should all read fungi not plant!!

1. Developing a working list of species
2. Assigning conservation status to species

3. Providing methods for plant conservation based on best practice
4. Protecting the world's ecological regions
5. Identifying and conserving Important Plant Areas
6. Conserving plants within production lands
7. Conserving threatened species
8. Linking ex situ and in situ conservation
9. Conserving crop diversity
10. Controlling non-native invasive species
11. Protecting species from international trade
12. Managing plant products sustainably
13. Providing sustainable livelihoods dependent on plant resources
14. Communicating and educating
15. Training in plant conservation

International initiatives include liaising with the European Congress for the Conservation of Fungi (ECCF) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN).

Suggestions for a conservation theme for the 2007 BMS Autumn Conservation and Taxonomy meeting, along with offers of help with organisation should be made to Shelley Evans or Peter Spencer-Phillips as soon as possible.

Education Matters

The word "fungi" does not appear in the science curriculum for schools up to GCSE level. It appears only once in the 16-18 year A-level Biology curriculum. David Moore, has been working with the BMS Education Officer on a three year programme to prepare material for primary and secondary schools e.g. 'Fungus Fred goes Foraging', 'How the Mushroom got its Spots', and 'Key Stages for Fungi' material aimed at science teachers. Efforts are now moving towards preparing material for higher education. There is a lot of interesting material on the BMS Web-site under Education and the linked website www.fungi4schools.org which local groups are encouraged to visit and use. The BMS Road-show has again visited all the major RHS shows i.e. Malvern in spring, Chelsea, Tatton Park, Malvern in autumn, and Harlow Carr in late autumn. A 'Pocket Guide to Common Fungi' has been produced based on water-colours by Peter Thwaites to be sold at £1 a copy. Groups can purchase from the BMS at 50p per copy to sell on at £1 to make money for group funds. See web-site www.fungiforfun.co.uk

BMS Fungal Records Database

A new name is being considered to better reflect data sources and area covered. The suggested name is "Fungal Records Database of Britain & Ireland (managed by the BMS)" (FRDBI). This suggestion will be put to Council on June 23rd. The data has not yet been published on the BMS web-site in full because some major contributors have not yet signed copyright licence forms. There was agreement at the meeting that the data which had been licensed should be made openly available to the National Biodiversity Network in its present "unverified" format, even though it contains many errors. Cleaning up the data will be a lengthy process, though it can be attempted in stages (records from N. Ireland and Leicestershire are currently the only fungal data available on the NBN). This decision has now to be referred to the BMS Council.

English Nature and Natural England

Jill Sutcliffe is currently Manager of the Botanical and Mycological Unit of English Nature, based at Peterborough. She explained that English Nature would cease to exist this year and would be combined with part of the Countryside Agency and the Rural Development Service to form a new body – Natural England. This follows recommendations made in the Haskins Review.

Jill went on to stress the poor attention fungi received compared with animals and plants when related to their abundance e.g. c.12000 fungi, 1830 lichens, 1052 bryophytes, 1689 flowering plants and c380 birds, ignoring vagrants. The corresponding figures from the most recent revision of BAP listed species were: about 80 for fungi, 141 lichens, 111 bryophytes, 231 plants and 58 birds. Similarly the designated SSSI sites for the same groups were 9 for fungi, c120 for lichens, c130 for bryophytes, 1500 for plants and 573 for birds. If one looked at the number of statutory agencies dealing with each group, or the numbers of staff monitoring them, an even more dramatic difference is revealed.

On the positive side 9 SSSIs had now been designated in the UK solely on account of their fungi, the most recent being at Leicestershire's Roecliffe Manor. Recent work had resulted in 27 species BAP plans, and a great deal of good work had been done on protecting special habitats, such as the late Maruice Rotheroe's

input to grassland and dune fungi, work on ancient woodlands, churchyards and some conifer woods. Leaflets had been published on the 'Conservation of Fungi' and the 'Mushroom Pickers Code of Conduct'. Since 1998 the EN Botanical & Mycological Unit had funded Plantlife to employ a staff member on fungi and lower plants, helped set up the Fungus Conservation Forum as part of Action for Plants, funded half the time of a staff member on fungi in their Essex office, later to be succeeded by four part-time staff and a part-time BAP fungi officer (Martyn Ainsworth). Other projects had been the Important Areas for Fungi, Managing Sites for Fungi, English Names for Fungi and various English Nature Research Reports. These reports can be ordered free of charge from the EN Enquiry Office at Peterborough or from the Plantlife website. EN had also helped to fund Nick Legon's three years at Kew working on the Basidiomycete Checklist and was hoping to obtain funding for a Fungus Unit to be based at Kew.

Drugs Act 2005 BMS recommendations, drawn up in consultation with the Home Office, on how the new law should be interpreted have been published as an Appendix to the 'Guide to Collecting & Recording Fungi'. Field mycologists could continue to collect, take home and identify fungi listed as possibly containing psilocyn or psilocybin as long as their intention is to destroy the fungi or forward them onto a licensed establishment (eg RBG Edinburgh or Kew) as soon as reasonably possible. They could not be held in a personal herbarium without a licence, which would be unlikely to be granted to a private individual. Group leaders were warned not to take risks by ignoring these guidelines or by publishing their own interpretations. It was agreed that Council should be asked to consider making an application for a herbarium licence from the Society on behalf of its members. Writing to MPs was also suggested as a means of highlighting individual frustrations.

General

A CD was issued to all group leaders containing updated versions of the starter pack for new groups, and 'Guide to Collecting and Recording Fungi' with the new appendix on the 2005 Drugs Act. The CD also contains the primary school resource 'The Good, The Bad and The Fungi', with leader's notes, teacher's notes and a folder of props and images. These could be freely printed and distributed for non-commercial purposes.

Sheila Spence gave two excellent evening presentations, the first on the Herefordshire Fungus Festival – giving a very helpful overview of the highs and lows of organising such a large event. The second presentation introduced the meeting to 'Caring for God's Acre', a project initially restricted to Shropshire but so successful that it might well be extended to churchyards across the country, giving local groups the opportunity to assist with the management of churchyards for fungi.

Paul Kirk ran an informal clinic on the Saturday evening to illustrate features of the BMSFRD and to give any help that group leaders needed with regard to recording.

General discussion covered topics including Recommended English Names, Mapmate, Sentinel Sites, Agri-environment schemes, grid references, the New Forest commercial picking court case, the recruitment of young people into the recording groups and how to deal with people who join groups only to pick edible fungi. Lively debate took place and further detail is available in a full set of notes from the meeting that is available from Liz Holden.

Date of Next Meeting

Thanks were extended to all for attending and contributing to the success of the 2006 meeting, and Peter Spencer-Phillips thanked Liz Holden on behalf of the BMS for organising and chairing an excellent programme. The next meeting is provisionally booked for 20-22 June 2008 at the Alston Hall venue – which all agreed was very satisfactory.

