

# Somerset

*Biodiversity Partnership*

**Report on the  
Quantock Hills  
Waxcap fungi survey  
2011**



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Funding from the Sustainable Development Fund of the



# **Report on the Quantock Hills waxcap fungi project 2011**

## **Summary**

The Somerset Biodiversity Partnership promoted a public waxcap survey in autumn and winter 2011, following the success of its 2010 survey. Training in identification of these fungi was arranged. Recording and identification material was made available, together with various media activity to encourage recording.

This report provides an update of the survey results for the Quantock Hills AONB area for 2011. Over 200 individual waxcap records were submitted on-line, by email and via return of postcard out of which 115 were within the Quantock Hills AONB area.

Sixteen different waxcap species were recorded in 2011. The site with the highest number of species recorded was near Cothelstone, with 11. Species recorded in the AONB for the first time were the Goblet waxcap, with an unconfirmed report of the Spindle-shank waxcap. The former UK BAP species Ballerina waxcap was recorded for the first time at Durborough Farm, with it again appearing at Fyne Court church fields. Other 'notable' records were also made.

This year's survey again confirms the importance of the Quantock Hills AONB area for waxcap fungi. Through the project a new Local Wildlife Site has been designated for its fungal value and the criteria for selecting such sites improved.

## **1. Why was the project carried out?**

There is a West Somerset Waxcap Biodiversity Action Plan and a similar one for the Quantock Hills in preparation. Waxcaps are often an indicator of unimproved grasslands and are one of the criteria for designation of Local Wildlife Sites. In addition, they can be recognised by non-experts and encourage conservation surveys late in the year when there are less opportunities for this type of public engagement in biodiversity.

Quantock Hills Sustainability Development Fund (SDF) grant funding was secured by the Somerset Biodiversity Partnership to continue the waxcap survey that started in Autumn 2010. The "Report on the Quantock Hills and West Somerset Waxcap fungi survey 2010" gives full details. In 2011/12, SDF funding was also secured to deliver advisory work to five important waxcap sites. A report on this will be presented separately to the Quantock Hills AONB as it

contains landowner details, although the survey records have been included in the analysis below.

## **2. The project aims were to:**

- Update records of waxcap distribution and species present
- Raise awareness of waxcaps as an indicator of important grassland
- Give targeted advice on managing land for fungal interest

## **3. How was the survey carried out?**

Following the 2010 training day at Fyne Court and survey, in 2011 we received funding to initiate survey in the Blackdown Hills AONB area. We therefore decided to run the 2011 training event at Clayhidon in the Blackdown Hills to engage new volunteers in that area. The event attracted 25 people, including some Quantock Hills residents.

To engage new recorders, the strategy used was to publicise all the training events happening during the autumn and to make it easy to submit records. Additional supplies of the recording postcard were reprinted with the Quantock Hills AONB SDF logo (attached).

The survey and the training days were publicised through the Somerset Wildlife Trust and SERC websites and highlighted on their news pages. The SWT Wild Somerset magazine autumn edition featured an article on the survey and also in Network News that goes to volunteers. For the first time, the survey was featured on social networking sites. Quantock ECO also helped with publicity locally.

An on-line waxcap identification guide specifically for Somerset has been developed by SERC and is posted on their website. Some improvements have been made to this as a result of feedback from surveyors. Records could be sent in by filling in and returning the postcards or on-line from the biodiversity pages of the SWT website. Other records were sent in by post or email.

Maps showing waxcap records and public footpaths in the Quantock Hills for the 2010 survey were supplied to volunteer surveyors where appropriate to help them target suitable survey locations,

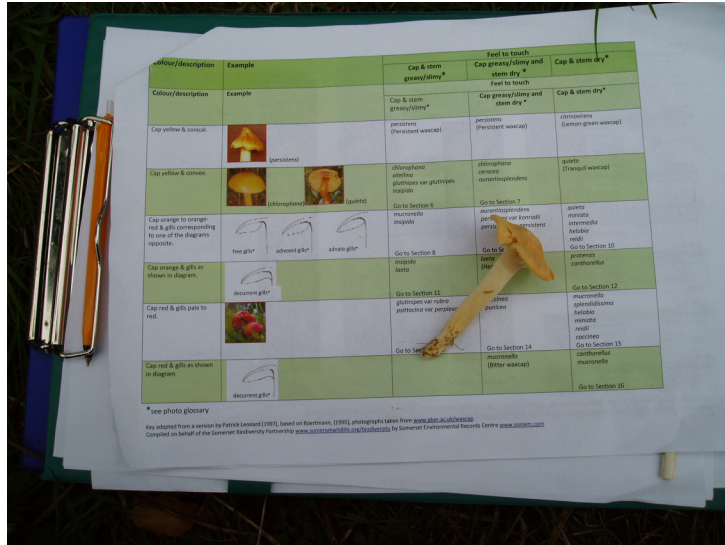


Photo: SERC waxcap ID guide

#### 4. Training days

The following training days were publicised for 2011

Exmoor National Park Pinkery  
13<sup>th</sup> October

Clayhidon Parish Hall, Blackdown Hills  
15<sup>th</sup> October

Nettlecombe Court, Field Studies Council, Monksilver  
30<sup>th</sup> October  
13<sup>th</sup> November

#### 5. Survey Results for the Quantock Hills

At the time of writing, around 90 individual records had been submitted within the Quantock Hills AONB area in 2011. The records collected during the advisory work are included in the totals. A list of all species recorded is appended. As well as the SERC surveys, another seven recorders submitted records. The location of waxcap records for the last two years of the survey have been mapped by SERC and shown on the attached Map 1. A separate report is being prepared on the results of the Blackdown Hills waxcap survey.

The most frequently recorded waxcaps in the survey area were Snowy waxcap (*Hygrocybe virginea*) and Meadow waxcap (*H. pratensis*) as for 2010, although this year Golden waxcap (*H. chlorophana*) was more frequently recorded than Blackening waxcap (*H. conica*). In total, 16 different species were recorded.

The most diverse site recorded in 2011 was Higher Lawns near Cothelstone, recording 11 different waxcap species together with earth-tongues, pink-gills and coral type fungi, followed by Holford, Yarford and Fyne Court Church Fields, which all recorded eight species this year, followed by Durborough Farm where Quantock Hills AONB rangers recorded seven types.



Photo: Highly diverse waxcap grassland at Holford Combe

The survey asked people to look in churchyards and up to three species were found at St Mary the Virgin churchyard, Kilve and St Mary the Virgin churchyard, East Quantoxhead.

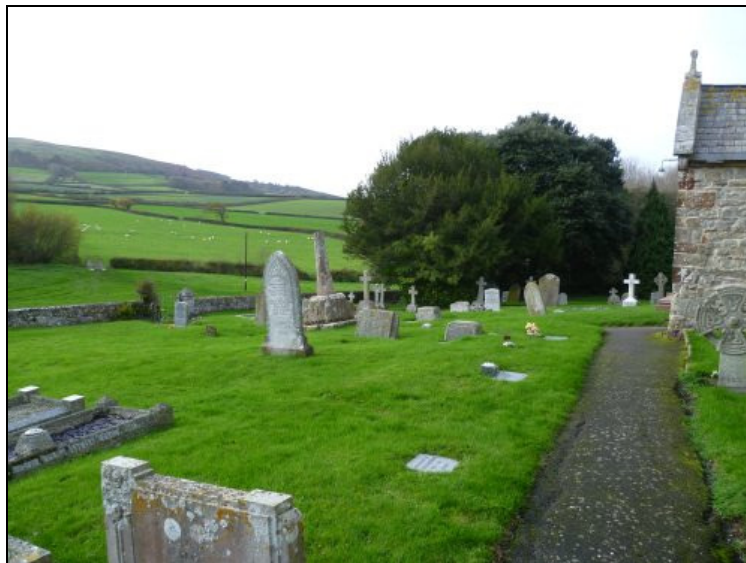


Photo: The Blessed Virgin Mary churchyard, East Quantoxhead

### Species of note

The goblet waxcap (*H. cantharellus*) (Somerset notable\*) was recorded for the first time in this survey at Higher Lawns Local Wildlife Site, near Cothelstone, this year.



Photo: Goblet waxcap at Higher Lawns credit Agni-Louiza Aramapolgou

There was an unconfirmed volunteer record of the spindle-shank waxcap (*H. ingrata*) at Holford, which is the first record of this species for the AONB. There was a confirmed record of this species at Nettlecombe Court in November 2011.

The Ballerina waxcap (*H. calyptriformis*) (Somerset notable\*) was recorded at two locations in 2011 – again at Fyne Court ‘church field’ and a new record at Durborough Farm.

The Persistent waxcap (*H. acuticonica*), formerly known as the Yellow waxcap (*H. persistens*) was recorded this year at a number of sites, but with few previous occurrences in the Quantock Hills.



Photo: *Hygrocybe persistens* at Yarford

The Crimson waxcap (*H. punicea*) is a Somerset notable which was recorded at a number of sites in both survey years.



Photo: Crimson waxcap near Fyne Court credit Christopher Hancock

In 2010, 12 species were recorded at Fyne Court 'church field' with the assistance of Richard Thompson. The orange waxcap (*Hygrocybe aurantiosplendens*) was only recorded at this location during the survey. This is a new record for the Quantock Hills AONB area and only recorded previously in one location on the Mendip Hills. It was not recorded in 2011.

*Hygrocybe vittelina* had been recorded in 2010 at only one site, south of Crowcombe Road, by members of the North Somerset Fungi Group. This is a rare species nationally but not recorded in 2011.

## 6. Discussion of results

The 2011 survey season was much longer than the previous year, due to experiencing the second warmest autumn in over 100 years. It was exceptionally warm in late September and early October. November was relatively dry and December experienced high rainfall (information from the Met Office website). These conditions extended the waxcap survey season, with waxcaps still fruiting into mid January.

Except for showing a preference for sloping land, no particular concentration of records is evident from the map. New locations that had not had waxcaps previously recorded were discovered in the Yarford, Holford, Robin Upright's Hill and East Quantoxhead areas.

The Local Sites panel meeting in January 2012 designated Fyne Court Church Fields (shown on the plan below) as a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) for its fungal interest.



Waxcap Survey Site: Field at Fyne Court

Client ref.

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Most of the best waxcap sites found to date are already within a SSSI or Local Wildlife Site designation, such as Holford and Higher Lawns. However recording from public footpaths has thrown up some sites which could be of County or greater value where it would be desirable to seek landowner permission for a full survey.

The results the survey threw up that the criteria for designating LWS were rather lax and were not selecting only those sites of particular importance. The criteria are therefore being changed, and the changed criteria will be available from the SERC website. This will result in more robust and defensible protection for important waxcap sites.

## **8. Conclusion**

The 2011 survey again successfully encouraged the recording of waxcaps on the Quantock Hills. Valuable results were submitted, which will inform future conservation work. Sites not previously recognised as of nature conservation value continue to be discovered through these surveys.

## **8. Acknowledgements**

Quantock Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund  
Wessex Water Partners Programme funding for in-kind time  
Agni-Louiza Arampolgou at SERC  
Cathy Baldock for research and production of SERC waxcap ID guide  
All the surveyors  
Richard Thompson for leading the training days

## **Attachments**

Quantock recording postcard

Map 1: 2010 and 2011 Waxcap survey records within the Quantock Hills map  
List of species recorded within the Quantock Hills AONB

\*The Somerset notable species system concentrates recording effort on rare and uncommon species or those with recognised ecological importance.