

HFRG Code of practice

There is mounting concern over the significant decline in fungi in recent years. This has undoubtedly resulted from a number of causes, the most important of which are believed to be loss of habitat, acid rain and air pollution. In addition collecting for the pot has become more popular with both restaurateurs and individuals and there has been a marked increase in collecting forays by those interested in identification and recording.

This decline in fungi affects not only the fungal flora itself but has serious implications for a large number of the organisms which are dependent upon it. More than 1000 insect and other invertebrate species depend on fungi during their life cycle, using them for food, shelter and breeding - many could not exist without them. Similarly many plants and trees could not survive without the benefit of their symbiotic relationship with mycorrhizal fungi.

In order to draw attention to these threats faced by fungi and as a positive measure to try to ensure their conservation English Nature has prepared a Code of Conduct for wild mushroom pickers. EN consulted with a number of interested bodies, including the British Mycological Society and the Association of British Fungus Groups, in preparing this code and it has their full support. Included in the Code of Conduct are specific guidelines for scientific forays such as those undertaken by the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group. These guidelines recognise that on occasion it is often necessary to collect specimens in order to ensure correct identification but they recommend that only the minimum amount of material should be taken for this purpose. They also indicate that care should be taken to avoid damage to habitats and to minimise the visual effects which result in taking specimens. Given the support that this Code of Conduct has received it is suggested that the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group should ask those attending its forays to comply with the following conservation measures.

1. A fungus should only be picked when it is not otherwise possible to carry out a satisfactory identification, when it is needed to demonstrate particular features of the species (to those attending the foray) or when it is necessary for the purpose of compiling a permanent record by means of a voucher specimen, photograph etc.
2. Whenever practicable forayers should be taken to the fungus rather than the opposite.
3. Where the collection of a specimen is considered necessary only a single fruit body should be taken unless there is a particular need to collect more. When a specimen is taken from a colony thought should be given to the one collected, e.g. if a group of agarics are visible from a path and the same species is also present obscured by undergrowth collect from the latter and leave the prominent group for others to enjoy. Likewise if a bracket occurs on several sides of a trunk collect from the side that is less visible. Where brackets are concerned it is often only necessary to remove a small slice.
4. Specimens should not be taken away for identification or further study unless there is a genuine intent to carry out this work. Too many fungi collected for later study are subsequently discarded without any further examination.
5. Searching for fungi and any collection of specimens should be undertaken with minimum disturbance to the vegetation, leaf litter, soil and other features.
6. Specimens which have been picked for identification or demonstration and which are no longer needed should be replaced as near as possible to where they were found and in such a way as to give maximum opportunity for further spore dispersal. The route taken by the foray party should not be marked by a trail of discarded fruit bodies nor should the car park be used as a dumping ground for the contents of members foray baskets.
7. No fungus which is suspected of being rare should be picked without the consent of the foray leader. Some fungi are now protected by law and it is an offence to disturb them.