Bryngwyn Hall and Woodland, Bwlch-y-Cibau 11/10/26

Organisers: Jane Phillips and Judy Abbey

Forty-three members gathered in the car park at Bwlch-y-Cibau for our final excursion of the year. Before we had even set off, members spotted a Clouded Yellow butterfly (*Colias croceus*) fluttering in the adjoining field, providing an exciting start to the day. We were also delighted to welcome back mycologist Les Hughes, who once again generously shared his knowledge and expertise in identifying the fungi discovered.

Bwlch-y-Cibau, meaning the 'pass of the husks', lies between the valleys of the Rivers Cain and Vyrnwy. Its geographical position has historically made it a natural thoroughfare, while its name is thought to reflect the traditional use of locally abundant acorns 'husks' to feed the pigs.

We were extremely grateful to Lady Linlithgow for kindly allowing us access to private areas of the fields and woodland at Bryngwyn Hall. This historic, privately owned family home is set within nine acres of award-winning gardens, which lead down to beautiful eight-acre lakes. The estate also boasts 60 acres of parkland dotted with magnificent oak trees, providing a wonderful setting for our exploration.

Members divided into groups to investigate the different habitats across the estate. Some accompanied Les along a woodland track, where a variety of fungi were recorded, including the remarkably tiny Holly Parachute (*Marasmius hudsonii*) beautifully captured in an amazing photograph by Sue Southam.

One of the pleasures of having Les with us was discovering the stories behind the often unusual and amusing names of the fungi. The Weeping Widow (*Lacrymaria lacrymabunda*) was a particularly interesting example. Its name reflects its tearful appearance, as the mushroom can produce clear, watery droplets along the edges of its gills and cap through a process known as guttation. These droplets mix with its dark spores, creating the impression that the fungus is weeping black tears!

Another species that raised a few smiles was the aptly named 'Wolf's Fart'. Les explained that the scientific name *Lycoperdon* derives from the Greek words lykos, meaning wolf, and *perdomai*, meaning to break wind. These puffball fungi release a cloud of spores when disturbed, squeezed or struck by raindrops, making their name particularly memorable!

Some members explored the fields surrounding the lakes, recording wax caps and a variety of other fungi. Meanwhile, I joined a further group enjoying a slightly longer walk along the woodland paths, discovering more species along the way and enjoying some wonderful views. Fortunately for us one member – Sue Swindells – had brought a box in which specimens could be collected for Les to examine and identify later. Larger specimens were photographed, and one particular photograph caught his attention. Several members retraced their steps to locate the specimen so that it could be examined more closely. Their efforts were rewarded when it was identified as an Oyster Mushroom (*Pleurotus ostreatus*). Les explained that the Latin name *pleurotus*, meaning 'side-ear', refers to the sideways growth of the stem in relation to the cap, while *ostreatus* refers to its resemblance to an oyster shell. The common name may also relate to the mushroom's slippery texture. Even more remarkably, this species is reported to have approximately 22,000 possible sexual mating types — a fascinating fact that certainly added to our appreciation of this fungus!

Despite the enthusiasm of our members, Les explained that fewer species had been found than might be expected in some years. The unusually hot summer and the resulting poor conditions had restricted the fruiting of many fungi, particularly mycorrhizal species. Many more species are likely to be present across the estate and may emerge when the weather conditions become more favourable. Fungi can survive for long periods without reproducing, and the mushrooms we see are simply their reproductive structures. All in all, over 60 species of fungi were recorded, which really makes you appreciate just how many different species there are to discover.

Following an enjoyable and productive afternoon in the field, more than 30 members made their way to Meifod Village Hall, where the Meifod Women's Institute had prepared a delicious tea. This provided a welcome opportunity to relax, share our discoveries and reflect on the day's activities.

Overall, it was a thoroughly enjoyable final excursion of the year, combining beautiful surroundings and the opportunity to learn from Les's expertise.

Our sincere thanks go to Lady Linlithgow for allowing us access to the estate, to Les for sharing his knowledge so generously and to the Meifod WI for their warm hospitality and excellent refreshments.

With so many fascinating specimens to discover, I for one definitely need to come better prepared next time. As one member aptly remarked, “I think we’re going to need a bigger box!”

Report by Judy Abbey