

Autumn Woodlands/ Fungi

For many, the defining feature of autumn is the leaves changing to a golden, fiery hue. Triggered by the cooler temperatures and shorter days, deciduous trees stop producing chlorophyll, revealing the yellow and red pigments that were previously masked.

However, when a summer features long dry spells and high temperatures, like this year, a phenomenon called 'false autumn' occurs. Instead of waiting for the natural triggers of autumn, trees shed their leaves prematurely as a survival strategy to conserve water. So if you see this within the park, don't panic, this is just a fine example of the resilience of trees to adapt to their surroundings and conserve energy when required.

With a damp autumn forecast for this year, woodlands will be the ideal conditions for fungi to grow. Some species to look out for in the park include Fly agaric (pictured- often spotted beside birch trees), Beefsteak fungus and Chicken of the woods (both brackets often found on oak trees).



Where appropriate, we try to retain as much dead wood in the park as we can. Fungi are the main agents of decay in wood, breaking it down using enzymes. So looking among these piles of dead wood is a great place to start on your fungus hunt. However, with many fungi species being poisonous, please make sure to only look, and not touch.



Spider Season

We see a noticeable increase in the number of spiders during autumn as many species reach adulthood during this season. Combined with the decrease in cover as leaves fall and foliage dies back, your chances of coming across spiders in the park are raised. Often associated as pests, ecologically they are quite the opposite. Spiders control insect numbers and act as a food source for many birds, amphibians and small mammals. They also contribute to soil health by decomposing organic material and aerating the soil. Despite their reputation they should be celebrated for the important role they play in the complex balancing game that is nature.

Winter Visitors Arriving

In autumn, there is a gradual exchange of bird species that you are likely to see in the park. Our summer visitors (sand martins, house martins, swallows, swifts, chiffchaff, blackcap etc) start to depart, migrating to an area with warmer climates and more food availability. At the same time, winter visitors start to arrive in the UK from the north and east, as the gulf stream creates a milder winter in the UK than other countries of the same latitude, making it a very attractive place to visit for many species.

This autumn keep your eyes peeled for the influx of thrushes such as redwing and fieldfare. A small finch called a brambling escapes the Scandinavian snow to visit UK woodlands, not to be confused with the chaffinch which can look similar.

Last year, we had a visit from 3 whooper swans, smaller and with a yellow bill, they look very different to the common mute swan that we are all so accustomed to, fingers crossed they drop in on us again this year.

Rutting

Autumn is the time when the deer are rutting. The males compete to mate with the females, making themselves look and sound as intimidating as possible. They do this by wallowing in mud and adorning their antlers with grass. The red deer bellow loudly whilst the fallow have, what can only be described as a rasping, belching snort! The fallow deer can be seen parallel walking, weighing each other up before challenging a rival.

Fighting is a last resort when the stags and bucks lock antlers together in a show of strength to determine the dominant animal. The stronger stag will keep more hinds together in his harem and a dominant buck will attract more does to his 'stand'.

Reminiscing On Summer– What Did We Spot?

- * Rare Lesser Emperor Dragonfly spotted in mid June, causing quite a stir in the dragonfly spotting community.
- * A Hobby was spotted in the first week of August, hunting low over Tatton Mere for dragonflies, swallows and martins (their favoured food source).
- * A Clouded Yellow Butterfly was spotted at the start of August on the edge of Melchett Mere.
- * South Lancashire Bat Group found an increase in numbers of nesting Brown Long-Eared and Soprano Pipistrelle Bats in the Old Hall. With 2026 being the highest count of the last few years.
- * First Moth trap results are in– August results from the Old Hall found 15 species, and 144 individuals including Oak Hook Tip, Lime-Speck pug and Flame Shoulder.

