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BOOK REVIEW

A county fungus flora.* 1971 saw the appearance of a landmark in the history of biological recording in Britain in the form of *A Computer-mapped Flora: a study of the County of Warwickshire* by Cadbury, Hawkes & Readett. This was the result of a 20-year survey and included vascular plants and bryophytes. The gathering and processing of data for a vascular plant flora in Europe are, of course, accompanied by many problems, but the recording of fungi is fraught with many additional difficulties including: the seasonal, sporadic, often short life, and often minute size of fungus fruiting-bodies, frequent requirement of a good quality (expensive) microscope to observe diagnostic microscopical features, dearth of easily obtainable literature, and a shortage of expert taxonomists to determine the identity of troublesome specimens. In 1965, undaunted by such problems, a small group of amateur mycologists from Birmingham University and the Birmingham Natural History Society met and embarked on a fungus survey of Warwickshire (vice-county 38).

In its formative years the survey had continually to change and adapt its aims and methods to allow for such difficulties as mentioned above. The detailed history of the survey forms the opening chapter, invaluable reading for anyone wishing to begin a recording scheme for fungi or any of the other less popular plant or animal groups. For a detailed account of such matters as geology and land-use history the reader is referred to the *Computer-mapped Flora*. However, the second chapter expands on those features influencing the occurrence and distribution of fungi, and also gives a brief description of the best worked sites in the county.

Warwickshire has a long mycological tradition dating back to John Ray, who resided there from 1666 to 1678, and continued by, for example, William Withering, Thomas Purton, and J. E. Bagnell & W. B. Grove who listed about 800 fungi in Bagnell's *Flora of Warwickshire* (1891). The history of mycology in the county is given in sufficient detail to be worthy of the attentions of the natural history bibliographer as well as the mycologist.

The following chapters form the main part of the Flora. The 'Fungal Kingdom' comprises an enormous number of morphologically and ecologically diverse organisms but all the main groups, with the exception of the elusive entomogenous Laboulbeniomycetes, are treated, albeit with varying degress of intensity. On the one hand, the Agaricales, Discomycetes and Myxomycetes are exceptionally well covered, and on the other, the Deuteromycetes and Phycomycetes receive relatively scant, but by no means insignificant, attention. For each major group, the genera and species are listed alphabetically, and for each entry such details are given as source of name in the literature, month and in some cases (e.g. Agaricales) years in which the species was seen fruiting, substrate and habitat, localities, and previous records or the first record for the county. Occasional notes are provided on such matters as field recognition, taxonomy and nomenclature. Entries for the less well treated groups are more concise. For the Uredinales (rusts) each species is entered with a list of hosts and concomitant spore stage(s) of the fungus recorded during the survey. The main part of the Flora ends with a chapter on the lichens by D. C. Lindsay, including a separate account of their history of recording and ecology in the county. This is followed by appendices giving lists of contributors and expert referees consulted, an index of place names with grid-references, and a host and substrate index. A few late additions to the main species lists and some supplementary information on other species is given in an addendum.

The initially small group of amateurs 'mushroomed' into a sizeable group of expert mycologists who recorded about 2600 species of fungi, including 30 new to science and numerous additions to the national flora. The results of their enthusiastic endeavours are presented in this highly professional and well edited volume.

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* *A Fungus Flora of Warwickshire*. M. C. Clark (Ed.). Pages vi + 272, 6 maps. Paperback. 1980. [ISBN 0 903130 05 X]. Published for the Birmingham Natural History Society by the British Mycological Society, London. Price £8.00.