

## Bernard's Blog No. 15

It feels as if we are entering the autumn season. Summer has been strange this year with dramatic changes in the weather confusing the flora and fauna alike, but autumn is upon us so I will take inspiration from one of England's great Romantic poets who in addition to writing odes to Nightingales and Grecian Urns wrote **Ode to Autumn**. Two of the stanzas are appropriate now, and beautiful:

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves run;  
To bend with apples the moss'd cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For Summer has o'er-brimm'd their clammy cells.*

*Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too,—  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day,  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly bourn;  
Hedge-crickets sing; and now with treble soft  
The red-breast whistles from a garden-croft;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies*

*John Keats 1795- 1821*

Srambling through the holly hedge beside the lych gate and abundantly within the hedge of St John's school field is the familiar, evergreen **Ivy** (*Hedera helix*). This month the ivy flowers are borne in globular pale green pincushion clusters soon to become the yellowish flowers which act as an entomological service station for many species of insects. Glutinous with sweet nectar they are irresistible to the young **Wasp Queens** stocking up their bodies for the winter. **Honeybees** jostle for a share of the nectar and will remain active on warm days throughout the winter, but for most of the wasps this will be the final feast as all but the queens will die. Later in the year the flowers will give way to clusters of black berries providing food for the birds when other berries are scarce.



Within the churchyard many of the trees are ivy wrapped and form a sheltering space for all kinds of creatures as the ivy defies the dying back of autumn and becomes brighter and greener.

A further note on wasps. For most of the summer the worker wasps have been fully occupied feeding the larvae in their papery nests, now the work is done they are like bored teenagers and go on a sugar frenzy, so go off to find any sweet thing they can to replace the food they had been fed. This is why they are so bothersome when you

plan to eat outside. But try to remember the good things about them. They are great pollinators and play a large part in maintaining the balance of nature in the garden by eating huge numbers of spring and summer insects. But perhaps you were unaware that they led to the discovery of paper.

Around the first century BC a Chinese monk noticed how a wasp made the finest paper nest from peeling off and mashing up fine layers of wood. If you have ever had a wasps nest in your home you will see exactly the source of his inspiration!



And you can put a glass over them until you have finished your picnic.

I have always been confused about the little flowers that cunningly impersonate dandelions and walking along the churchyard paths at this time of year, I thought I would try to identify them. It has not been easy, I struggled to tell a Hawkbit from a Hawk's-beard or a Hawkweed. I sought the assistance of Jane McLauchlin, a wildflower expert who is currently working on the Hall Grange Wilderness Scheme and did a wildflower survey in the churchyard last year. I have also noticed masses of little flowers whose leaves are now upturned showing a hairy, silvery underside and hoped they were Silverweed because I could tell a tale about Roman soldiers using the leaves as padding for their sandals. I was wrong! They are **Common Catsear**, (*Hypochaeris radicata*) another dandelion impersonator. We did find **Common Mouse-ear** (*Cerastium fontanum*) and some helpful(?) pictures are below.



Hawkbit

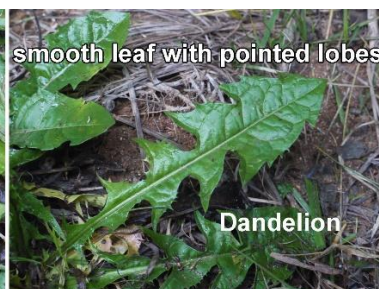


Silverweed



hairy leaf with rounded lobes

Cat's ear



smooth leaf with pointed lobes

Dandelion



Common chickweed



Mouse-ear chickweed



I don't know about you, but I am still confused.

However.....

The Giant puffballs have gone but other fungi are appearing and I'm expecting a fairy ring on the grass in front of the church. You are never too old to believe in fairies I am told.

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