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**Working for wild Birds of Prey and their Habitats**

## **Press Release**

### **Rarely seen, benign cousin of the Ash Die Back fungus has been found on a North Norfolk nature reserve and is aiding national plant experts in their search for a cure for the dreaded Ash Die Back.**

In September this year the Hawk and Owl Trust's Sculthorpe Moor Community Nature Reserve, just outside of Fakenham, held their first BioBlitz. A BioBlitz is an extensive biological survey of the reserve involving dozens of experts studying species ranging right across the board from mammals, birds and insects to flowers, lichen and fungi. It's an excellent way to survey the reserve but also to engage the public, especially children, with nature. The BioBlitz concept originates from the USA, where the first BioBlitz took place in 1996. Since then, the idea has become increasingly popular and spread around the world. In the UK, BioBlitz have been organised since 2006, with numbers rising year by year. It is part of the 'citizen science' movement that strives to bring the sometimes impenetrable world of science into the realm of the normal person in the street.

Sculthorpe Moor's 2013 Bioblitz was a massive success attracting 600 members of the public and the cream of Norfolk's biological experts over the weekend of 21/22 Sept. One of the experts present was fungi specialist Tony Leech. In between fungi surveys Tony, like the other experts present, were leading guided tours around the reserve talking to members of the public about his specialist subject.

During one of these 'fungi forays' Tony noticed an unusual little fungus and took a sample to take back to identify. On further examination he discovered that he had found an example of a benign relative of the Ash Die Back fungus, the 'friendly native' version. This is really exciting because our national plant scientists are always searching for this fungus to allow them to study the organism in the hope that they may be able to find out from this close relative, how to stem the spread of the deadly 'foreign invader'. Not many examples of this harmless version of the fungus have been found and this one was in particularly good condition.

The discovery of this species caused much excitement amongst the Norfolk plant community and the tiny fungus was whisked off to fungi expert Ann Edwards at the John Innes Centre in Norwich for use in research.

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Reserve warden Nigel Middleton says:

'The Hawk and Owl Trust isn't just about hawks and owls. To conserve these top predators we have to concentrate on the whole web of life that supports the eco-system in which they thrive and we work hard to create habitats that support a wide spectrum of species. We have been managing the habitat at Sculthorpe Moor for ten years now and finding this rare fungus is really exciting, especially if it can help find a cure for Ash Die Back and save these lovely native trees.'

So, this rarely seen, benign cousin of the Ash Die Back fungus has been found alive and kicking on a North Norfolk nature reserve and is aiding national plant experts in their search for a cure for the dreaded Ash Die Back.

To Editors:

There are lots of good pictures of the fungus and contact details of fungi expert Tony Leech and John Innes Centre plant scientist Ann Edwards. Our Education Officer Leanne Thomas will be presenting the findings of our Bioblitz at the National BioBlitz conference in Bristol tomorrow.

Tony Leech has details about when and where other examples of the benign fungus have been found.

There is a National BioBlitz logo.

For more information contact:

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