Dynamic Dunescapes Dune Engagement Case Study

Sand dune system	Sandscale Haws Nature Reserve
Case Study Subject	Volunteer-led Event Mushroom Foray
The Engagement Intervention	

Background information

The sand dunes at Sandscale Haws Nature Reserve in Cumbria have been named one of the most important sites in the UK for fungi. There are over 300 different kinds of fungus which have previously been recorded, atleast 10 of which are extremely rare, and can only be found in dune systems, like the tiny earthstar fungus and the dune cup fungus.

What was the focus of the event?

This September, our volunteer, Colin Doull, organised and led 2 guided mushroom walks at Sandscale Haws Nature Reserve. The aim of the walks or 'forays' were to teach the public about fungi, why they're important to sand dunes, and then search of mushrooms in the dunes, recording the species we found to feed back to site managers.

What did you do and how?

Colin started the session with an introduction to fungi, including what a mushroom is, their role in ecoystems (including dunes) and some ID tips, we then headed out into the reserve to explore the dunes from strandline to grassland. Once we found a mushroom, we then took a photo, identified it (if possible!) using sight, smell and feel, and uploaded the photo to the 'iNaturalist' species recording app.

Prior to the forays we had set up a project on 'iNaturalist' meaning all mushrooms sighted at Sandscale and uploaded to the app are held in one place or 'project', making it easier for site managers to monitor fungi diversity on the reserve.

Who did you work with?

As a keen amateur mycologist, Colin attended our World Sand Dune Day Bioblitz event in June to look for and record mushrooms at Sandscale. From the event, Colin became interested in helping to keep up to date records of wildlife on the reserve, and realised fungi seemed to be underrepresented in our current records. He then got in touch with me (Holly, Engagement Officer) and expressed interest in volunteering and potentially running guided mushroom walk in the autumn. We then worked together to iron out the details, and advertise the event locally and on social media!

What was the outcome?

We found 30 different species on the day (and counting, as more records come in). Species included waxcaps and witches hats, fairy ring mushrooms, parasols, dwarf earth stars, yellow stainers, and the rare 'dune cup' fungi which hasn't been recorded on the reserve since the 90s! There is also now a project set up at Sandscale Haws to monitor fungi, which can be added to by anyone who visits the reserve, and can be used by site managers. We are also looking at setting up similar projects in other Cumbrian dune sites.

We also had a fantastic time searching for mushrooms and engaging with a wide range of people, all brough together by their interested in fungi.

Any highlights?

Holly: *For me, I had two main highlights, the first was seeing how engaged and excited the public were to find fungi on sand dunes – as it wasn't somewhere they'd associated with having a wide diversity of mushrooms, and then hearing feedback that they couldn't wait to come back and explore again, or visit other local dunes.*

The second was how well Colin led the walks and his extensive (self-taught!) knowledge on mushrooms. I'd like to say a huge thanks to Colin for all of his hard work, and for running such an informative and enjoyable event!

Colin: *"I really enjoyed the day, it felt good to offer people a little bit of knowledge about the fungi that are integral to the sand dune system at Sandscale. I was delighted that we found some of the quite rare sand dune specialist fungi such as the Dune Cup and Dune Cavalier. However, the highlight was spending time with like-minded people who are interested in mushrooms, nature and conservation"*

How can the public get involved?

To take a look at the project and our finds so far, head to: https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/mushroom-foray.

To contribute, if you find any mushrooms whilst out for a walk at Sandscale Haws Nature Reserve in Cumbria, please take a photo and upload it to the 'iNaturalist' app or website, making sure the location is set to 'Sandscale Haws Nature Reserve' and it will be automatically added to our project. If Cumbria is a bit too far away but you know your fungi, you can also help by suggesting identifications for our finds via iNaturalist no matter where you are in the world!

Images