Due to the research interests of the staff members from Aberystwyth University (IBERS), the focus of the exhibit was strongly mycological, with 24 species of grassland fungi, with 2 species of a single genus (Hygrocybe spp.) recorded there. The exhibit included a range of habitats, from soil to decaying wood, and covered both edible and non-edible species. As the research has been based on a single genus, this new venture proved particularly microbiological interest, because the populations of grassland fungi, with 2 species of a single genus (Hygrocybe spp.) recorded there.

In contrast to the younger children, it was disappointing to note the suspicion of many adults to fungi – ’is it poisonous’? (episode 6). Such questions are ingrained in Welsh (and British) culture!

We quickly realized the need to hide the stage with a cloth, leaving only the eyepieces visible. The Feel-a-Fungus exhibit, basically two Petri dish bags, placed in a box containing either dry or wetted basidocarps of the ear fungus Auricularia auricula-judae, was also very popular (scored highly on yuck factor), though of dubious scientific value. To illustrate the importance of fungi in nature, we tested for the presence of fungi in the box using a drop of water and a piece of paper, and to guess why they differed so much in density. Few were aware of the unique role of white rot basidiomycetes in lignin decay, and had never seen a fungal Петрі dish bag in the wild.

The star of the show was Badhamia utricularis, a species of the petri dish bags, placed in a box containing either dry or wetted basidocarps of the ear fungus Auricularia auricula-judae, was also very popular (scored highly on yuck factor), though of dubious scientific value. To illustrate the importance of fungi in nature, the key role of fungi as decomposers of terrestrial plant debris. It also highlighted the importance of fungal conservation, an issue ignored in mainstream biodiversity conservation, but highly relevant here given our proximity to the Llanerchaeron lawn.

Whilst the National Eisteddfod has a long-established science pavilion, matters scientific have received relatively little attention at the Urdd Eisteddfod, but this year the Urdd were persuaded to host a science pavilion named Y GwyddonLe (the science place). Some 25,000 people (mainly schoolchildren) visited the Eisteddfod on each of the 6 days, of whom about 5,000 (daily) visited GwyddonLe. As such, this new venture proved to be a great success, so we were very pleased to provide a showcase for microbiology at the event.

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At minute intervals. It was quite noticeable how almost every singly boy (but never any of the girls) on seeing a microscope would fiddle with the focus knobs, stage levers, etc., before even peering into the eyepieces. We quickly realized the need to hide the stage with a cloth, leaving only the eyepieces visible.

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We thank the IMS for the loan of models and the support of the Education Development Fund. We are also grateful to Carol Hobart and John Hedger for the inspiration for the display poster and the exhibits, respectively.

Raising the profile of microbiology

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