

Catalonia

Catalonia's other crisis: dry autumn shrinks wild mushroom crops

Mushrooms are a key feature of Spanish autumnal cuisine but are in thin on the ground

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Barcelona

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While street protests and riots in Barcelona continue to grab the headlines, deep in the woods of northern **Catalonia** another crisis is unfolding: a scarcity of wild mushrooms that is being blamed on climate change.

Mushroom hunting is a serious and lucrative business in Catalonia when the autumn rains come and the precious fungi appear overnight on the damp woodland floor. But so far this season, mushrooms have been thin on the ground in Catalonia and elsewhere in **Spain**.

A 20-year study carried out by Sergio de Miguel Magaña and Juan Martínez de Aragón of the University of Lleida shows a decrease in the number of mushrooms throughout Catalonia.

What mushrooms need to thrive is moisture and warm but not high temperatures, whereas the tendency in recent years has been towards dry autumns and, in 2017, a drought.

Even one of the most common and popular species, the rovelló (*Lactarius deliciosus*) is scarce this year, pushing prices up to around €30 a kilo.

While fungi are a victim of the climate crisis, their absence may also exacerbate it as they are involved in carbon capture through their symbiotic

relationship with trees.

According to the Catalan Technological Forestry Centre, in some parts of the Pyrenees the quantity of mushrooms has declined 100-fold compared with last year, and in the foothills there has been a sevenfold decrease.

Wild mushrooms are a key ingredient of autumnal cuisine in northern Spain, and restaurants and markets depend almost entirely on individual mushroom hunters for their supplies.

The lore of where to find the precious fungi is a well-guarded secret kept in families or small clubs of *boletaires*, as mushroom hunters are known in Catalonia. One retailer complained that this year “there are more *boletaires* than *bolets* [mushrooms]”.

The climate crisis is also affecting the mushroom season in Galicia, in north-west Spain, often known as “green Spain” because of its traditionally high rainfall. A dry summer this year meant the mushroom season began a month later than normal, and the crop is down by 50% in some areas.

“Climate change is having a really big effect,” said Fernando Ramos, of the mycological association in A Coruña. “The seasons aren’t as clearly defined as they used to be. We are seeing species in September that normally appear in late autumn, while some that usually appear in summer appear later and are few and very small because of the lack of rain.”

In Mallorca, the temperature now is ideal for mushrooms but they are scarce because of a particularly dry summer. In desperation, some Mallorcans have taken to watering areas where mushrooms habitually appear.

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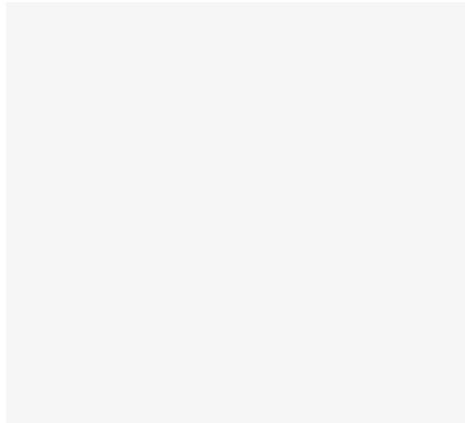
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