

## FUNGI WALK at HOCKERIDGE WOOD on Sunday April 28<sup>th</sup> 2019

Penny Cullington

When I made arrangements for this event back in the winter I'd envisaged members enjoying a warm sunny spring morning with wild flowers and bird song to add interest even if the fungi were in short supply. Our morning, however, was decidedly silent and on the chilly and grey side but at least free from rain and wind as storm Anna had luckily blown itself out the previous day. It was no surprise that our group of nine, led by Ascomycetes expert Kerry Robinson from our neighbouring Herts & Beds Fungi Group, found extremely few agarics – even *Calocybe gambosa* (St. George's Mushroom) failed to make an appearance, the weather over the last few weeks having been unseasonably warm and dry – great for everyone enjoying the Easter break but not so good for fungi, especially agarics.



Margaret turned up one of our few agarics, belonging to a genus of just three, all of which occur typically in late spring but are confined to the specialised substrate of fallen cones of Pine or Spruce according to species. As all three look almost identical, the identity of the cone is important and confirmation using a microscope is required because either the cone can have completely disintegrated (as was the case today) or was not noted at the time. In woodland like Hockeridge with a wide variety of trees including both Pine and Spruce, identification often comes down to comparing the shape of cystidia found on the gill edge. Today's find was the commonest of the three species: *Strobilurus tenacellus*

(Pinecone Cap), and displayed the typical brown cap, orange-tinted long flexible stem and crowded white gills of the genus, though sometimes the cap can fade to almost white. When checking it at home I discovered another useful field tip to separate this species from the other two: whereas they both have a mild taste, this one is bitter (I tested it and it was!). However, it is the distinctive lanceolate (sharply pointed) and thin-walled cheilocystidia which must confirm any identification.

Above, various views of typical *Strobilurus tenacellus*, the photos taken from material found in Stoke Common 2010 (PC)

We generally focused on searching amongst fallen wood and litter and soon our list was growing, albeit mainly consisting of those affectionately known as 'bums on seats' species – really common springtime woodland species one can almost guarantee to find as a matter of course given the presence of certain habitats and substrates. Last year's dead nettle and bracken stems are usually good for a few species, and Kerry pointed out one easily missed which frequents the blackened dead stem bases of bracken. Only visible with a hand lens, the infinitesimal white cups of *Micropodia pteridina* were found on several likely stems once we knew what to look for.

On fallen Birch we found several old brackets of *Piptoporus betulinus* (Birch Bracket – another 'bums on seats' species) but one specimen displayed another fungus growing on its underside of fine pores: this was *Hypomyces aurantius* (Orange Polypore Mould), a species that frequents rotting fungi, particularly brackets, and one that is easy to spot owing to its bright colour.

Right, *Hypomyces aurantius* growing on the underside of *Piptoporus betulinus* today – one of several fungi which frequent this host when past its sell-by date. (CVS)



We found two Myxomycetes (slime moulds) today. The first is an unusually large species for this group of normally small to very small organisms: *Reticularia lycoperdon*, its species name reflecting its similarity in appearance to the stump puffball, i.e. white, smooth, round and growing on wood. The second is *Trichia varia*, a common member of a genus of about 15 somewhat similar species characterised when mature by tiny round ochre yellow blobs - some stalked, some sessile - found on a variety of rotting fallen wood. Ornamentation of both the spores and the elaters (strands of tissue surrounding the spores until maturity) viewed under a scope are essential to confirm the species.



Above right, *Reticularia lycoperdon* (photo from Stoke Common 2011 PC), and left, *Trichia varia* (photo from Whitecross Green 2014 NS) with views of elaters and spores from today's find, x 400 and x 1000 (below) showing the round spores with fine black dots (ornamentation) and the typical tangle of elaters with sharp pointed ends and well separated spiral bands. (PC)



Of our list of 43 species nearly half were new to the site! This was due in part to the fact that we've not visited that often before but mainly because we were privileged to have Kerry with us - an expert who specialises not only in Ascomycetes but also in Corticioids and other specialised fungi and thus was able to find and - more importantly - identify things we'd otherwise no doubt have missed. In fact, of the 20 new species 3 were new to the county - one being of particular interest and found by new member Reg submerged in litter under Western Hemlock (the fungus, not Reg!). On showing it to Kerry he wondered if it was just a small yellowish pebble, but Kerry's knife proved otherwise when she sliced through it to reveal the wrinkled folds of some sort of truffle. So back we went to the same spot and sure enough several more were uncovered. At home Kerry was able to identify it as *Hydnotrya michaelis* (Michael's Fold Truffle) and sent the details to Carol Hobart, the country's expert on hypogeous fungi (those that are found underground) because today's specimens lacked the strong smell associated with that species. Carol was able to confirm that it is certainly extremely close to *H. michaelis* though not a perfect match: as well as the lack of smell, the spore ornamentation was not as marked when compared with the collection held at Kew though this could be accounted for if they

were immature. However, Western Hemlock is a known associate – the only other record on our database was with that host in the Forest of Dean a few years back. Ideally more material, preferably old, is needed but it's rare for our group to come across any truffle so this was an exciting find.



Left, the truffle *Hydnотrya michaelis* found today under Western Hemlock by Reg – new to the county. (RM)

To finish we have a mystery species found by Claudi also on Western Hemlock: this was a small cluster of white flattish fungi, the largest only about 1cm across, having a poroid surface and short stems and not nameable, even to genus, by any of us. This has been sent to Alick Henrici in the hope of getting an identification. Watch this space and I'll update here with new information when available.

Right, mystery fungus awaiting identification. (RM)



Many thanks to all attendees and particularly to our guest leader Kerry and to our photographers. For more details of what we found see the complete list.

Photographers: CVS – Claudi Soler, NS – Nick Standing, PC – Penny Cullington, RM – Reg Mellis