

FUNGI WALK at PULPIT HILL on Sunday October 13th 2019

Penny Cullington

We had a dismal wet morning for our walk today but spirits amongst our group of 12 (plus a friend) were high at the prospect of plenty about to keep us busy: at last fungi is starting to fruit in good numbers in this area (though still with disappointingly few mycorrhizals in evidence). This was the group's first visit here for 4 years when (a week earlier in October) we recorded just under 100 species: this time we topped that with 109 and it was interesting to note that quite a few species which I illustrated then also featured today. However, today was not the day to get the camera out, it being not only raining but dark with everything looking pretty soggy, so only some library photos to share with you here, I'm afraid.

The most prolific species which we kept commenting upon was also one of the tiniest and most insignificant, carpeting the floor wherever Beech was prevalent. This was *Marasmius bulliardii* (one of several species in various genera named after the 18th century French mycologist Bulliard). Like a small version of the common and familiar *Marasmius rotula* (Collared Parachute, another we recorded today) it grows exclusively on fallen rotting Beech leaves and petioles and is recognisable by its pale beige caps (only about 5mm across) having a dark dot in the (often sunken) centre, its dark horsehair-like stem seen in many of the genus, also the telltale 'collar' to which its widely spaced gills adjoin rather than to the top of the stem itself. The light being so dreary today this feature was not easy to see in the field even with a handlens, but under low magnification at home it was very apparent. Herewith a photo taken by Neil (also present today) at our previous visit here in 2015.



Above: *Marasmius bulliardii* common today. (NF)

Another species we came across several times was an attractive medium-sized *Lepiota* – a genus recognisable by its pale caps, often fleecy or scaly, white crowded gills which are free of the stem top, also often with a ring or ring zone on the stem. This particular species needed checking at home to name and the spores, as I'd suspected, were suitably large and 'penguin-shaped' to



match with *Lepiota magnispora* (Yellowfoot Dapperling). The common name refers to the fluffy girdles on the lower stem which sometimes (but not always) are a pale creamy yellow as in the cap. The species does seem to be somewhat variable both macroscopically and microscopically (as is often the case where synonymies have been made as here). My photo, taken in the Forest of Dean, was of a collection with considerably more colour on the cap than today's specimens which had of course had a good soaking which might explain their pallor in part.

Above, *Lepiota magnispora*, seen today in several places but in a paler form than shown here, the photo taken in 2011. (PC)

Another much smaller species of *Lepiota* was also found: this was *Lepiota castanea* (Chestnut Dapperling), similar in size to the common *Lepiota cristata* (Stinking Dapperling, another we also saw) but lacking its distinctive smell and with a darker more coloured cap.



For comparison, above left: *Lepiota castanea* (nr Beaconsfield 2012), and right: *Lepiota cristata* (Penn Wood 2006) (PC).

We took a route which covered an area of conifer, offering the opportunity to find some different species with a preference for that habitat. This added several more to our sizeable list of 15 *Mycena* species (Bonnets), many of which needed checking at home, plus others such as

Tricholomopsis rutilans (Plums and Custard), *Suillus grevillei* (Larch Bolete – yes, a mycorrhizal species at last!) and the unmistakable bright peachy orange plasmodium of the Myxomycete (slime mould) *Tubifera ferruginosa*. In the vast majority of slime moulds the plasmodium (their early slimy stage) is white, in a few it is yellow, but they cannot be identified until past this stage, i.e. mature and dried off, so this particular species is one worth looking out for because it can be recognised purely from its strikingly colourful plasmodium and occurrence on damp fallen conifer. Once mature it is far less interesting to look at!



Above, the plasmodium of the Slime mould *Tubifera ferruginosa*. (Culbin Sands, Banffshire 2005 PC)

We came across a very broken specimen of an unusual species of club – one recognised as an indicator species of ancient Beech woodland. This was *Clavariadelphus pistillaris* (Giant Club) though the genus name completely eluded me till I looked it up at home. Checking on our database, we have just 4 other county sites for this species and have recorded it once here before in 1993!

Right: *Clavariadelphus pistillaris*, this photo taken in Kings Wood Tylers Green in 2010 though today's rather smashed specimen was hard to recognise. (PC)

At the top of the wood near the old fort we caught up with Paul sitting on a large Beech





trunk which was liberally dotted with the distinctive ascomycete *Bulgaria inquinans* (Black Bulgar). I've not before noticed that this species can have a reddish rather than black look to the central soft part as was the case today. Each 'blob' is about 2-3 cm across.

Left: *Bulgaria inquinans* found in quantities at one point today. (Wotton Park Estate 2017 JD.)

For me the star of the show today was a species of *Cortinarius* (Webcap) belonging to Section Phlegmaceum (i.e. having a sticky cap especially after rain). Three separate specimens were found, all with very slimy yellow caps, beautiful violet gills and the meshlike 'cortina' below



them typical of the genus, also a stem having an extremely broad marginate bulb (like a platform) at its base. At last we had an example of this challenging and often attractive mycorrhizal genus. There are quite a few members of Section Phlegmaceum which occur in the Chilterns owing to their preference for growing under Beech on calcareous soil. Today's species I determined later as *Cortinarius calochrous*.

Right: *Cortinarius calochrous* found in several places growing under Beech today. The collection in the photo came from Mousells Wood in 2006 (PC)

We had a very enjoyable morning despite the weather and amassed a good range of species, thanks to all the diligent searching. What's more, no one fell over in the extremely slippery chalky mud which at several hilly points proved quite a challenge. See the separate detailed list for more information on what we found.

Library photos: JD = Joanna Dodsworth; NF = Neil Fletcher; PC = Penny Cullington.