

BFG Fungi Walk at Wotton Park Estate
March 16th, 2019

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On a somewhat wild and windy but thankfully dry morning it was gratifying to see a good sized group of thirteen foregathering for our first Springtime visit here and we were particularly pleased that the Estate Manager Michael Harrison was able to join us. His familiarity with the site and its trees was a bonus and meant that we covered some woodland areas new to us which proved beneficial. Fungi-hunting at any time of year is unpredictable and is particularly so in March but after the exceptionally warm spell in recent weeks followed by substantial rain we were hopeful of finding enough to keep us busy. At least last March's 'Beast from the East' had left us unmolested this year.

It is often the case that at fungi events held at this time extremely few Agarics (mushroom-types with a cap and stem) appear on the species list, but today we were suitably surprised with around a quarter of our list of 40+ species being Agarics. The first of these was a dapper specimen of *Lepista sordida* (Sordid Blewit). This delicate member of the genus is quite possibly under-recorded, being easily mistaken for the somewhat similar but clearly more robust *Lepista nuda* (Wood Blewit). The epithet '*sordida*' presumably refers to its darkish dingy colours though it seems to me misleading that given our modern meaning of the word sordid it should have been chosen also for its common English name. We have over 20 county records for this species, all in October or November bar two in January but none previously for March.



Above: *Lepista sordida* – a nice find today. (NS)

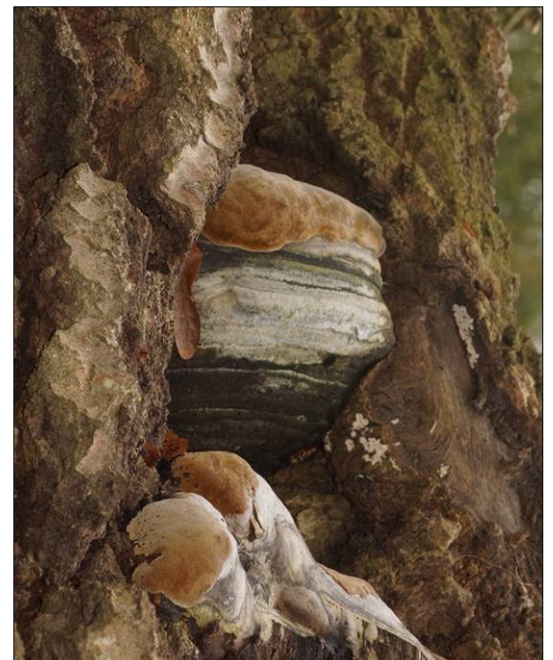
Early on Toni found a large fallen Horse Chestnut trunk with two species much more commonly found on other host trees. *Auricularia auricula-judae* (Jelly Ear) is regularly found on Elder, much less often on Beech but possibly only rarely as it was here on Horse Chestnut. Similarly the common *Daldinia concentrica* (King Alfred's Cakes) is found frequently on Ash but is unusual to find on other host trees.

Below: the rare *Phellinus populicola* (NS)



Left: *Daldinia concentrica* found growing on Horse Chestnut (NS)

A little further round the lake we came across a large pile of felled trunks which Michael informed us were of a Poplar hybrid. This was in the area where several years back Martyn Ainsworth was pleased to find the rare bracket, *Phellinus populicola*, growing on Poplar. We've recorded it here on several of our visits since and sure enough when we checked the pile several large logs held examples of the brackets. FRDBI (the national online database) shows just 13 British records (though does not include records after 2015 at present); of these about half are from Bucks (Langley Park and Wotton), the remainder from Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire, furthermore it is interesting that several records specify the host tree as *Populus canescens* – the hybrid found at Wotton.





Above: the underside of *Ganoderma applanatum* covered in fly galls. (NS)

Another bracket of interest: Joanna picked up an old specimen of *Ganoderma* which she noticed had the tell-tale bumps on the underside which help to identify this bracket to species – often a difficult task in this genus even with a microscope. The bumps are in fact the galls of the fly *Agathomyia wankowiczii* which it would seem does not share our difficulty in discerning between the very common *Ganoderma australe* and the much less common ***Ganoderma applanatum*** (Artist’s Fungus) – it apparently only infests the latter!

On our autumn visits here we have often found good numbers of Inkcap species. It was a bit surprising, however, that in March two of these should turn up – the common ***Coprinellus micaceus*** (Glistening Inkcap) together with one which was more interesting. When we spotted several clusters on soil, possibly burnt ground, today Derek had hoped that it might be the unusual *Coprinellus angulatus* – not recorded here before. However, when checked at home he identified it as ***Coprinellus hiascens***, a species with five previous records in the county from just four different sites, today’s find being the third time we’ve found it here.



Above, *Coprinellus hiascens* just emerging in soil. (cvs)

On now to another agaric - this time the genuine article! Bob at one point thought he’d found a couple of large puffballs emerging through moss in a wooded area. It was not until the surrounding substrate was carefully removed that it was clear they had caps and stems. On turning one fruit body over the pink gills and ringed stem confirmed our thoughts that this was some form of true *Agaricus* (Mushroom) though it was a mystery as to what species this was likely to be at this time of year. Scratching the base, the stem and cap produced no yellow or red discolouring – often helpful clues in this genus, furthermore it lacked the familiar ‘mushroomy’ smell which would have suggested maybe the common *A. campestris* (Field Mushroom) though the wooded habitat made this unlikely. This was obviously going to be a challenging task for Derek at home: the genus may be easy to recognise as such in the field, but that’s where the easy bit ends! There are around 40 British species - many of them very similar in appearance – and microscopic characters



are often not simple to evaluate, sometimes with little variation between species. Derek later informed me that he’d found an interesting combination of microscopic features in our collection but sadly these did not match any one species satisfactorily when checked against the detailed descriptions given by recognised authorities. So it’s frustratingly a case of drying the material and waiting until someone in Europe undertakes the much-needed work on DNA analysis for this genus.

Left: *Agaricus* sp. awaiting molecular sequencing to provide a possible name. (cvs)

I took another often challenging genus home to look at, having collected a small *Galerina* from grass towards the end of the morning. This somewhat ‘Mycenoid’ genus also has around 40 British species, many of them appearing pretty well identical in the field with fragile often translucent pale rusty caps and concolorous gills – it’s the rusty gill (and spore) colour which in the field distinguishes the genus from *Mycena* which has white gills and spores. *Galerina* together with the very similar genus *Conocybe* are in fact the quintessential LBJs (Little Brown Jobs). Luckily for me my collection keyed out quite easily to one of the commonest grassland species though not previously recorded here: *Galerina clavata* (Ribbed Bell) – its common English name presumably describing the translucent striations clearly visible on the cap (though many other species also have this character!). The Latin species epithet refers to the stem base which is slightly swollen / clavate (also visible in the photo) though again this character is not distinctive enough within the genus to identify it safely. It is its combination of microscopic features which separate it from others.



Above: *Galerina clavata*, a species of damp mossy grass. (PC)

Several things of interest turned up in the bare disturbed soil at the top of the lake. With the many specimens of *Tubaria furfuracea* (Scurfy Twiglet) here Jen found a single bright orange-red flattish disc less than 1 cm across. Derek suggested it might be *Melastiza cornubiensis* (Orange Cup, previously known as *M. chateri*) and later the spore shape amongst other things confirmed this. Also at this spot were some clumps of fanlike stemless but gilled off-white to yellowish caps, up to about 3cm across. These were *Crepidotus mollis* (Peeling Oysterling) – the only member of the genus which can safely be named in the field owing to its distinctive gelatinous cap covering which, as Derek duly demonstrated, can be peeled off.



Above left: *Melastiza cornubiensis* and right: *Crepidotus mollis* showing its stretchy gelatinous cap cuticle. (CVS)

To conclude, just a few more photos of things we don’t often have the chance to feature: *Trametes hirsuta* (Hairy Bracket) is far less common than the two somewhat similar and very common brackets *Trametes versicolor* (Turkeytail) and *Stereum hirsutum* (Hairy Curtain Crust), both of which are also on today’s list. To my eyes it shares some features of both (the clustered habit on fallen deciduous wood, the zoned slightly furry caps sometimes with green tinges caused by algi) but the underside is white and clearly pored - unlike the smooth orange under-surface of the *Stereum* – and though *T. versicolor* also has this feature *T. hirsuta* tends to grow in tiers and is considerably thicker-fleshed and solid – not flexible as in either of the other two species. To complete the picture it’s worth mentioning here another fairly common species of *Trametes*, *T. gibbosa* (Lumpy Bracket), also white underneath but with really strong almost ridged



mazeli-like pores. It forms much larger brackets which are tough and difficult to tear off the substrate and is nearly always prominently covered in green algae. For further comparison try clicking on Images then googling their Latin names for a range of images (probably not all of which are correctly named!)

Left: *Trametes hirsuta* growing on a fallen Horse Chestnut trunk (CVS)

On an old bonfire site we found colonies of tightly clustered orange discs, each one well under 1 cm across. These were *Anthrachia macrocystis*, one of several quite similar species which are confined to this particular substrate. Bonfire sites are always worth a quick check as there are a range of different kinds of fungi to be found on such sites. Nick suggested the common English name (Firecup) for our species but this does not appear on my copy of the official list?



Right: *Anthrachia macrocystis* on burnt ground (NS)

Myxomycetes (Slime Moulds) are not really fungi but are somewhat similar and tend to be recorded by mycologists because we regularly come across them. Most have very similar white plasmodium at their 'slimy' stage and from which they cannot be identified. Today we found one which sports bright orange plasmodium which I recognised as that of *Trichia decipiens*.



Luckily there were a few dried off mature specimens nearby giving the photo opportunity to show both stages. When mature with a scope one can identify the species from its brown spore mass together with the protective fine mesh of hairlike structures (elators) which form the capillitium (top of the fruit body). Once these blow away in the breeze the tiny fragile cup is all that is left behind.

Left: the orange plasmodium and (top right) mature specimens of the slime mould *Trichia decipiens* (CVS)

No springtime fungi event would feel complete without coming across the eye-catching *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet Elfcup). I was hopeful we'd find it today (though it's not been recorded here before) because it turns up regularly at the nearby Rushbeds Reserve and the habitat here was perfect: it grows on mossy rotting or submerged fallen wood of Willow, Alder, Maple, Elm, often near water or in damp clay soils. Towards the end of the morning when I was beginning to lose faith, luckily two separate cups turned up. Derek unearthed the stick on which the first smaller cup was growing to prove that it was indeed on wood, a photo was duly taken to record the event, and I breathed a sigh of relief that we'd found it!



Above: *Sarcoscypha austriaca*, a first for the site today (PC)

Thanks to all attendees who made today's event such an enjoyable and successful one. Thanks also to the photographers for supplying me (so promptly!) with the ammunition I needed to complete this report. For details of what we found see the full list.

Photo credits: CVS - Claudi Soler, NS - Nick Standing; PC - Penny Cullington



The group admiring one of several veteran oaks at Wotton Park Estate today (PC)