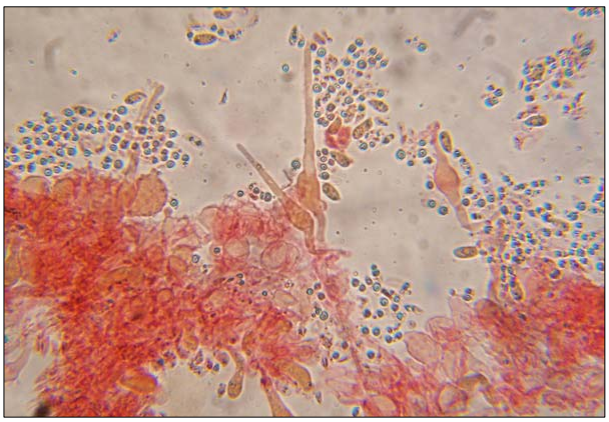
FUNGI WALK at BURNHAM BEECHES on Sunday October 6th 2019

Penny Cullington

It was pleasing to greet a large group 18 strong this morning, several new members amongst us. The rain, having clearly tipped it prior to our arrival, was kind and stayed away so we enjoyed a fine sunny morning though with a chilly wind. We were looking forward to a decent amount of fruiting at last though suspected that mycorrhizal species would still be few and far between – for the second year running they in particular have been really stricken by our dry Septembers. This indeed proved to be the case with pathetic numbers of *Amanita, Boletus, Lactarius, Russula, Tricholoma* and no representatives of *Cortinarius, Hebeloma, Inocybe*. Nevertheless we listed just over 100 species with some notable finds: in a well recorded site such as this finding new species for the site is a challenge but our list includes 10 such finds, 2 of which are new to the county.

We spent our time in the south of this sizeable site, covering the 'Mire' (always interesting for fungi) with its surrounding area of Pines, then an open grassy scrubby area (which produced virtually nothing!), followed by mixed woodland leading to and round the two ponds. Thus the different habitats gave us a fair chance of a good variety of interest. The first of the species new to the site today was one also new to Hodgemoor a few weeks back and illustrated in that report: this was ***Fomes fomentarius*** (Hoof Fungus / Tinder Bracket) and found by John. This species, more or less confined to Scotland and the North till the turn of the century, now seems to be rapidly spreading south. Last year we noticed it at Ashridge for the first time when it was new to the county, so it's one to look out for wherever you're walking amongst Birch trees with which it is host specific.



I was particularly keen to visit the Mire today because it was here that two years ago I found a small nondescript *Mycena* (Bonnet) growing with *Sphagnum* which eluded first me and then top *Mycena* expert Thomas Laessoe as to species. Though insignificant in appearance it has remarkable cells on the gill edge which seem to match nothing else. At my request several people searched and found it again today though only one specimen survived long enough for me to study at home (the others sadly just shrivelled away in the box once removed from their host plant). At least this enabled me to note and photograph the microscopic details, get a spore print and dry the specimen; so I hope now to take the investigation further and get it sequenced for DNA with a view to either discovering its identity or maybe even describing it as new.

Left and above: *Mycena* sp. from the Mire growing on *Sphagnum* – caps < 1cm across, with amazing lanceolate cells on the gill edge (cheilocystidia). Could this be a species new to science? (CVS last year & PC)

I took home a box full of various *Mycena* specimens handed me during the morning and worked my way through most (but not all) of them. Many were examples of ***M. galopus*** (Milking Bonnet) despite lacking their telltale diagnostic white latex with which one can determine them in the field. Sadly the dark-capped larger specimens from the Mire which we'd hoped might be the rare *M. megaspora* turned out to be nothing more than ***Mycena galericulata*** (Common Bonnet),

presumably rooting into submerged wood. Both species have some similar characters and are closely related but the spores were no way large enough for the rarer species.

Beautiful fresh specimens of one of my favourite *Mycena* species was growing all over a fallen Willow trunk just after we'd left the Mire, another species new to the site and found by John (on good form today!) This was the distinctive and very attractive ***Mycena pseudocorticola*** (no common name), instantly recognisable by its subtle blue/grey colour, small size and habit of growing on bark of deciduous trees. We have just 5 other county records, all from different sites.

Right: beautiful photos of the delectable but tiny *Mycena pseudocorticola* growing on mossy bark of Willow. The caps are under 1cm across and some often seem to lose their blue colour but these were in pristine condition. (BW)

The last Mycenoid type from my box proved to be the most interesting and not a *Mycena* at all despite its appearance. Under the microscope the spores were completely the wrong shape for that genus but were alantoid (sausage-shaped) – an extremely unusual spore shape for an Agaric (mushroom type). This together with the enormous cells I found on the gill edge fitted with a species I've rarely come across before. ***Hydropus subalpinus*** (no common name) is a rare species of woodland litter, particularly Beech, new to the site and to the county. No photo, I'm afraid, as it was a bit bedraggled by the next day when I realised what it was, nor can I remember who handed it to me – sorry!

On now (at last!) to things other than Bonnets. On pony dung under the Pines were a couple of different species, one being a miniscule Inkcap later identified by Derek as ***Parasola misera***, the other being ***Stropharia semiglobata*** (Dung Roundhead), quite common on dung and recognisable by its shape and colour, sticky surface and stem ring which appears dotted black due to its very dark spores landing on it from the gills above. The Funga Nordica key informs us it grows on dung of horse, cow, sheep and elk (not so relevant to us!) and is therefore not particularly a woodland species, as here, but occurs wherever its substrate might be.

Left: *Stropharia semiglobata* found today on pony dung. (BW)

We found on the Mire two species of *Hygrophoropsis* – one common and one rarely recorded or recognised though found here and identified by Geoffrey Kibby last year. The common ***Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*** (False Chanterelle) has a bright orange cap and distinctive sharp-edged decurrent gills (running down the stem) – a species of conifer litter and mixed woodland, less often found in open areas. The

considerably paler ***H. macrospora*** (no common name) is a species of heathland and wet meadows and has larger spores than the False Chanterelle as its name suggests, though this is a complex of species still in need of further clarification through DNA analysis.

Right: *Hygrophoropsis macrospora*, a rare and much paler version of the common *H. aurantiaca.* It was good to find this species fruiting again after discovering it here for the first time last year. (CVS)

Many of us picked up pine cones with small pale brownish mushrooms (typical LBJs) growing on them. These were ***Baeospora myosura*** (Conifercone Cap), recognised by its extremely crowded pale gills and that fact that it's on cones – though there are other quite similar mushrooms (for instance, the genus *Strobilurus*) tied to this host but which lack such crowded gills and have a darker colours too.

Left: *Baeospora myosura*, a common species today growing on fallen Pine cones. (CVS)

Another somewhat similar LBJ was around in quite good numbers in woody litter including conifer; this was the very common ***Tubaria furfuracea*** (Scurfy Twiglet), one which rather like *Laccaria laccata* (Deceiver) tends to confuse people as several genera are basically similar, in particular *Conocybe* and *Galerina*, also *Flammulaster*. The caps of the *Tubaria* are not smooth and shiny as often (but not always!) in *Conocybe* or *Galerina* and the very similar but not at all common *Flammulaster carpophilus* (not seen today) grows exclusively on Beechmast. Note also the warm reddish brown of the entire fruitbody, the gills which tend to be slightly decurrent and of course the 'scurfy' white flecks on the cap.

Above: *Tubaria furfuracea* - a very common typical LBJ which frequents woody litter of all sorts. (CVS)

Today's list was of reasonable length though mostly comprising small quite nondescript species – very few real eye-catchers with wow-factor seemed to be in evidence partly because they tend to belong to the mycorrhizal genera which, as already mentioned, it would appear are clearly not thriving in this autumn's conditions as yet. Could it be, however, that these particular fungi are so comfortable with present conditions that they have no need to send up fruitbodies?

(Those of course are our only way of knowing they're there!) Who knows! One thing is for sure: this business is nothing if not unpredictable.

See the separate complete list for more details of what we found. Many thanks to all attendees for making it such an enjoyable morning. A big thank you also to the photographers for sharing their escellent photos – a few more follow.

Photographers: BW = Barry Webb; CVS = Claudi Soler.

Left: young material of *Pleurotus ostreatus* (Oyster Mushroom) which fooled a few people today as to its identity. (BW)

Left (BW) and below (CVS): Two views of the same species which go to illustrate how confusing it can sometimes be to recognise common things until they've fully developed. *Oudemansiella mucida* (Porcelain Fungus) is very common at Burnham Beeches, growing as it does exclusively on the wood of Beech – both living and fallen. The slimy coating typical of the species can already be seen glistening on the undeveloped 'buttons' which tend to have a grey appearance (sometimes quite dark grey) to begin with. The lower example is still far from fully developed because the stem ring later develops a dark underside, not yet visible here.