

Fungi Walk at Rushbeds Wood on March 15th, 2020

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A group of 11 of us met up on a rather drear and drizzly morning, all having decided to attend despite the apparently rapidly spreading pandemic Coronavirus constantly in the news at present. After an extremely wet and mild early spring we were not surprised to find somewhat muddy and slippery paths here but were hopeful these conditions favourable for fungi would provide us with enough to keep us busy. We did manage a list of just over 40 species but it was hard going and when the drizzle turned to something more like a downpour it was obviously high time to cut our losses and make for the carpark.

It was to be expected that few agarics would be about at this time, but we did find *Psathyrella spadiceogrisea* (Spring Brittlestem), also *Tubaria furfuracea*, (Scurfy Twiglet), *Coprinellus micaceus* (Glistening Inkcap), *Panellus stipticus* (Bitter Oysterling), a rather weatherbeaten specimen of *Mycena galericulata* (Common Bonnet) and a couple of species of *Crepidotus*. The best find, however, was John's cluster of miniscule dainty white mushrooms growing on dead leaves; Derek worked on these at home and identified them as *Hemimycena hirsuta*, a first for the site and also for the county.

Right, *Hemimycena hirsuta* in various stages of development but, to give an idea of scale, all on one rotting Oak leaf. (RM)



Above and far right, more images of *Hemimycena hirsuta* showing how the whole fruitbody (cap as well as stem) is covered in fine hairs (the Latin *hirsuta* meaning hairy). Centre above is a view of those hairs from the cap stained in congo red and magnified x 400. Below this is a x 400 view of the gill cells showing a 2-spored basidia, another unusual feature of this species. (DJS)

Another surprising find today was *Gaeastrum triplex* (Collared Earthstar), odd at this time of year and also apparently the first time we've found an earthstar here though the specimens were clearly well passed their sell-by date and thus not very typical, having only indistinct remnants of the give-away collar. (This, however, did not surprise me as I've noted before that this feature can sometimes be missing). At home Derek was satisfied that this was the correct identification, however.



Left, *Geastrum triplex* looking a bit atypical owing to the specimens being quite a few months old. (CVS)

We often find Morels here in the Spring but failed this time, however another early season favourite which is always a pleasure to see turned up fairly soon along the old tramway path. *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet Elfcup) has hardly ever let us down on springtime visits to Rushbeds – one of the reasons we come here! – though I don't recall

finding it on this particular path before. I know we already have many images of this species in our 'Find a fungus image' page - if you've not checked out this page on the website it's well worth a look, by the way - but today's were particularly photogenic specimens.

Right, *Sarcoscypha austriaca* found in a log pile. (RM)



Other cup fungi we found were *Rutstroemia firma* (Brown Cup) and *Encoelia furfuracea* (Spring Hazelcup), both on Hazel and this last also brought in for identification by Bob on a stick from his

wood. Though the strongly inrolled and pale specimens looked unlike the photo we found in a handbook produced at the time, checking online later I found images of many collections of this species looking exactly like ours today.

Left, the rather shrivelled *Encoelia furfuracea* specimens on the stick from Bob's wood today. (RM)



Hazel abounds at Rushbeds and we also found on this host the very common *Hypoxylon fuscum* (Hazel Woodwart), also Jen noticed an impressive patch of

what at the time we named as *Hymenochaete corrugata* (Glue Crust). However when Derek checked the identity of the sample later he came to the conclusion that as it clearly had a poroid surface on part of the fruiting body this surely had to be a species of *Phellinus* (now mostly moved to the genus *Fuscoporia*) maybe *F. ferrea* or *F. contiguus* though he preferred not to commit himself and has dried the specimen.

Right, the resupinate bracket found on Hazel showing the pored surface suggesting the genus *Fuscoporia* rather than *Hymenochaete corrugata* as we suggested at the time. (CVS)



John found a further cup fungus, one which we assumed in the field to be a brown species of *Peziza*. However, at home I found that adding Melzers reagent to a squash for microscopic examination failed to produce the expected blue reaction to the tips of the asci (cells in which the spores form prior to their expulsion). This fact alone should straight away eliminate the genus *Peziza* but having then struggled to find a possible alternative solution I took another look at the now more mature specimen 48

hours later and wondered if it might be that my very old bottle of Melzers reagent wasn't giving the reaction it should. Spore shape and size, the paraphyses type, also the short stem, the pale outer surface with a finely hairy bloom together with the springtime fruiting all pointed to *Peziza micropus* – a species we recorded here in April two years ago. So I shall send the specimen to Kerry Robinson, asco expert from the neighbouring Herts. & Beds. Group, in the hope that she can either confirm my identification or confirm that my Melzers is indeed working and that therefore this is not a *Peziza* at all!



Above, two views of the possible *Peziza micropus*, the identification of which awaits confirmation. (RM)

Four species of Myxomycete (Slime mould) were found today, one of which was new to the site. Towards the end of our morning I was handed a small piece of bark with a patch of fresh pale yellow plasmodium (the slimy early stage of a slime mould) resembling maybe a tight cluster of eggs of some tiny creature. The yellow colour in itself was enough to point to a few possible names because the vast majority of slime moulds, having white plasmodium, could be eliminated. However, extremely few slime moulds can be identified with any certainty until they are mature. So to this end we carefully boxed the specimen, keeping it upright in order not to disturb its development, and at home by late

afternoon it had starting transforming with each 'egglike' section extending upwards, the mass becoming gradually darker. By morning it had mutated as if by magic into a mini forest of chocolate brown short stemmed pipe cleaners, typical of the genus *Stemonitis* (exactly as Derek had predicted!). *Stemonitis flavogenita*, as the Latin species name suggests, is alone in the genus in having yellow plasmodium, so once you're sure you have that genus, there's not much doubt as to its full identity. Wouldn't identification in



mycology be easy if that simple sort of logic could be applied more often?!



From top left moving clockwise, the various stages of development of the slime mould *Stemonitis flavogenita* starting with the typical yellow plasmodium and ending with the cocoa brown 'pipe cleaners' which are in effect a mass of spores to be distributed by air currents. (These are library photos from a Penn Wood collection and not of our Rushbeds Wood collection) (PC)

See the separate complete list for more detail of what we found. My special thanks to the photographers who kindly supplied me with those included above. There you have it: probably my last report for who knows how long depending on how the world manages to cope with the Coronavirus in the ensuing months. The fungi will no doubt still be out there but who knows when BFG will be able to go out and enjoy them again as a group?

Photographers: CVS = Claudi Soler; DJS = Derek Schafer; PC = Penny Cullington; RM = Reg Mellis