FUNGI WALK at PENN WOOD on November 14th 2021

Penny Cullington

On a typically misty and murky but mild November morning a group of 20 of us met up in the busy church car park for this our penultimate autumn walk. Our membership has increased substantially this season and it was good to welcome two new members today even at this late stage in our activities. Though fruiting is now clearly on the wane, the lack of frost this week meant there was a good chance of finding waxcaps and other grassland species in and around the cricket pitch and also in the churchyard – both areas having proved quite prolific in past years, so our chosen route covered both these areas with a generous helping of woodland sandwiched in between. The amalgamated lists from these three areas came to over 130 species but there are obviously a number of duplicates where species common to two of the areas – or even all three – have been recorded. Nevertheless, for a walk so late in the season this is still a remarkable number. Though we have recorded regularly here over the 22 years of the group's existence we added three new species for the churchyard, two for the cricket pitch area and eight for the woodland.

We headed first to the cricket pitch but with many stops on the way as specimens were handed in for identification. One such stop was for the miniscule bright white litter-loving ***Marasmius setosus*** (Hairy Stem Parachute). This is a very common woodland species but often missed for obvious reasons: don't be misled by our stunning photo which belies the fact that the cap is well under 5mm across, but once you get your eye in and have spotted one poking through the litter there are nearly always more nearby. The stem is finely hairy and its colour is typical for the genus, i.e. white at the top but progressively darker orange brown towards the base.

Left, the delectable and utterly tiny *Marasmius setosus* spotted in the Beech litter. (BW)

We've noticed a decline in the number of waxcaps in this area over the last ten years – before that it could be spectacular here in early November both for the rich number of species and for the amazing quantities of fruitbodies. Whatever the cause - whether a less sympathetic management regime or something else environmental - it is quite clear that sadly the decline seems to be continuing. Nevertheless we listed nine different waxcaps though several of the rarer species recorded from here were missing. One it was good to see – and which we also saw at Stampwell Farm last weekend – was ***Gliophorus laetus***, Heath Waxcap. (See the photo taken there in my previous report.) We can't miss the opportunity to include here the very similar and crowd-pleasing species ***Gliophorus psittacinus*** (Parrot Waxcap), equally slimy in cap and stem but missing the detachable line of mucus on the gill edge of ***G. laetus*** though making up for it with its wonderful range of colours which always include green somewhere on the fruitbody.

Right, *Gliophorus psittacinus* near the Cricket Pitch today. (BW)

There was discussion about the identity of a pale buffy pink to whitish *Clitocybe* (Funnel) which we found here – a species also quite common on garden lawns often growing in rings. The highly toxic ***Clitocybe rivulosa*** (Fool's Funnel) can be confused with other grassland species,

particularly *Clitopilus prunulus* (The Miller), but it lacks the key features of that species: the strong mealy smell, the strongly decurrent and decidedly pinkish gills and the cap surface which feels like kid gloves – all features to confirm the Miller. I'm including a photo of the *Clitocybe* taken here in November last year because it's a species not often illustrated but should be known owing to its renowned toxicity.

Left, *Clitocybe rivulosa*, a common but dangerously poisonous grassland fungus seen here today, the photo taken here last year. (PC)

Moving into the woodland we started picking up a range of common mushrooms, some of which can often be challenging to name at this stage of the season. One which regularly causes confusion is ***Rhodocollybia butyracea*** (Butter Cap), one of our commonest woodland late season fruiters and one I happened to have taken a photo of the day before for Finds. The cap colour can vary from deep reddish or purplish brown when moist through to almost white as it dries, but its greasy feel is a fairly constant feature – hence its common name. Note also the white gills which contrast with the stem which tapers upwards and often has purple tints at its base. (The white patch visible on the far right cap was a spore deposit from its neighbour before I picked it!)

Right, *Rhodocollybia butyracea* showing some of its guises, the photo taken elsewhere in the county the day before. (PC)

Few photos were taken of the larger agarics today, none of which were particularly notable or really looking their best, but another which I'd taken a snap of the day before turned up on the verge of the cricket pitch as well as in the woodland. ***Paralepista flaccida*** (Tawny Funnel) has had a couple of genus name changes in the last few years and was originally in *Clitocybe* for obvious reasons reflected in its common name (which thankfully remains unchanged). However, its spores are ornamented as in *Lepista* and not *Clitocybe*, hence its first move, and I assume DNA sequencing has prompted its second. The species is common in litter – both conifer and deciduous – and its strongly decurrent gills and brightly coloured cap make it quite an easy one to identify.

Left, *Paralepista flaccida*, a species seen several times today – the photo taken elsewhere in the county the day before. (PC)

At one point a search amongst a pile of fallen deciduous wood produced several nice species for our growing list and also a couple of photo opportunities. ***Scutellinia scutellata*** (Common Eyelash) is always a crowd pleaser (and certainly pleased the gloating finder this morning!) and this stunning photo shows its eyelashes off to perfection. As with many of Barry's photos, one has to

keep reminding oneself that the subject is ridiculously tiny and in this case no more than 3mm across at most.

Right, the singleton *Scutellinia scutellata* found today on wood. There are quite a few different species of Eyelash, all except this the commonest of them having considerably shorter hairs around the perimeter, thus allowing us to identify only this one species in the field. The others all need careful study at home to name. (BW)

In the same wood pile a little group of tiny white Bonnets was spotted on some twigs, the small 'disc' at their stem bases pointing to their identity as ***Mycena tenerrima*** (Frosted Bonnet) though the 'frosting' – like a fine coating of icing sugar usually clearly visible on both stem and cap – was not very apparent. At home, however, the microscopic features were correct though the material was old and a bit soggy, hence the lack of obvious frosting.

Left, a photogenic cluster of *Mycena tenerrima* spotted today. Note the mushroom's ability to develop at first sideways and then upwards from its substrate to allow the cap to function as an umbrella to protect the spore-dropping gills beneath. (BW)

We were handed a large lump of pale bracket as probably *Fomitopsis betulina* (Birch Bracket) which both Derek and I were confused by. It had the wrong 'jizz' for that species - too thick with some yellow above and pores underneath which were not fine enough, but what on earth was it?! It just didn't compute for either of us. Derek took it home and though it declined to be helpful and drop any spores he eventually worked it out from the yellow waxy top surface. This was an immature ***Ganoderma resinaceum*** (no common name), one of the more unusual *Ganoderma* species and in fact new to the wood today.

Right, a confusing and atypical specimen of *Ganoderma resinaceum*. (DJS)

On our walks we are now familiar with the sight of Barry constantly on his knees searching for tiny Slime Moulds. He found a few today, two of which were new to the wood, but also found a species which often fools people because it looks so like a typical small Slime Mould but in fact is not one. The miniscule ***Phleogena faginea*** (Fenugreek Stalkball) is not rare but also is not often recorded due to the fact that unless one recognises it and knows the species it is difficult to locate in reference books and is missing from many handbooks. It is unlike any other Basidiomycete and classed on its own though tends to be listed with the Brackets, having a tough dry texture and usually found on fallen Beech. Its common name reflects its remarkable curry-like smell which develops once its been collected and starts to dry out and in fact is retained for a long time afterwards – unusual in fungi.

Left, a dainty row of the unusual *Phleogena faginea*, each Stalkball only 5 mm tall at most, and new to the site today. (BW)

Moving now to the Churchyard where we finished up, several interesting things were found. Derek identified a small grassland LBJ as ***Galerina clavata*** (Ribbed Bell), a common member of a genus we tend to overlook as the many species look almost identical and it takes time and skill to work through long keys to arrive at a name.

Right, *Galerina clavata*, a typical species of short grass. (DJS)

I meanwhile made a beeline for the spot where an unusual and interesting species can sometimes be found. This was the Ascomycete ***Spathularia flavida*** (Yellow Fan). I first found this species at Penn in the woodland in Larch litter (its normal substrate) back in 1999 when it was new to the county. We continued to record it there every year till 2004 when felling work appeared to have put an end to it. Then to our surprise in 2005 it popped up in the short grass in the churchyard near a large conifer where we've found it sporadically ever since. This is still the only county site for it, however, and it was very pleasing to find it still here today.

Left, *Spathularia flavida* found in the short mossy grass near a large conifer. (PC)

In another patch of lawn in the Churchyard it was pleasing to find a cluster of black grassland clubs called *Geoglossum* (Earthtongue), not having been spotted here previously. There are several very similar species of Earthtongue and it is always necessary to key them out carefully using

microscopic characters. Today's species turned out to be ***Geoglossum umbratile*** (Plain Earthtongue), apparently a fairly common species but with only two other records in the county and none in the last 20 years.

Right, *Geoglossum umbratile*, new to the site today. Far right shows the long thin spores, each having seven septa (divisions) and the paler paraphyses having swollen blobs on top (all x 400). (PC)

Also new to the churchyard was the Slime Mould ***Mucilago crustacea*** (Dogs Vomit) which was forming several patches on the short grass and also up one of the gravestones.

Right, *Mucilago crustacea* showing how realistic its common name is! (BW)

Here we also found nice fresh specimens of the brightly coloured ***Hygrocybe coccinea*** (Scarlet Waxcap), and right at the end nearby I spotted a species often common here at this time but which it looked as if we were going to miss out on. This was ***Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis*** (Goblet), similar to a dark brown Funnel and an easy one to recognise, often found in grassland late in the season.

Below, *Hygrocybe coccinea* (BW) and below right, *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis* (GF)

Thanks to all for coming. We had a great morning and it's sad that there's only one more Walk this season. Thanks also to our brilliant photographers for sharing their images here. For more details of what we found see the complete list.

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; DJS = Derek Schafer; GF = Gill Ferguson; PC = Penny Cullington