

Fungi Walk at Kings Wood Tylers Green - September 4thth, 2022

Penny Cullington

Today's walk was our first of the season (having cancelled last week's at Wotton Park Estate due to the incredibly dry and hot recent conditions) and was also only the group's second visit here, the first being in 2019 at the end of September. We were 12 strong today, including two new young members who proved diligent finders, and were pretty well resigned to the fact that we were unlikely to find much and that what we did find would be mainly species on wood rather than on the hard concrete-like soil. This proved to be the case but everyone was pleasantly surprised just how much we did manage to turn up – it's amazing how often this happens!

Predictably there were no early fruiting mycorrhizal mushrooms in evidence – *Boletoid* genera, *Amanita*, *Russula*, *Lactarius*, *Inocybe*, *Cortinarius*, *Tricholoma* - except for one immature *Russula* found by Bob. At least it was a species I could name straight off: *R. violeipes* (Velvet Brittle-gill) was new to the site and when young is often pure pale lemon yellow and lacks any violet colours in the stem (despite its Latin name). Other distinctive features are its rather matt cap cuticle which is reluctant to peel and – under the scope – this cuticle has remarkable cells which always remind me of witches' fingers! (I've included a couple of library photos, the lower specimens from Hodgemoor looking spot on for ours found today.)

Right: *Russula violeipes* (a collection from Hodgemoor Woods) showing how the violet stem colour tends to develop only as it matures. The micro-image of the cap cuticle is stained with Cresyl Blue and magnified x 400. (PC)

Below: *Pleurotus cornucopiae* found early on today. (PC)



Two species of interest kept turning up in surprising numbers as we went round – both species which occur on fallen deciduous wood. The first was a *Pleurotus* (Oyster) on fallen Beech, its rather upright habit

and strongly decurrent gills running well down the stem pointing to *P. cornucopiae* (Branching Oyster) rather than the commoner *P. ostreatus*. Later we came across a large fallen Beech trunk liberally dotted with what at first glance appeared to be several different mushroom species. The colours varied from smoky brown to cream, grey, even yellowish and the size from tiny buttons to substantial - some tightly clustered, others single. Once a few had been picked it became obvious they were in fact all the same – *Pleurotus* again and most likely *P. ostreatus* this time. The species is so varied in colour and often tends to yellow as it ages, though the decurrent gills tend to stop abruptly before the rather shorter stem compared to *P. cornucopiae*.

Right: our large Beech trunk adorned with *Pleurotus ostreatus* (PC).



A little later on a small branch was found with some clusters of smallish almost pure white Oysters though their shape was rather flatter and stems rather shorter, without the continuation of gills downwards as seen earlier. I suspected this was a third species: *P. pulmonarius* (Pale Oyster) though the name eluded me at the time. (No photo, I'm afraid.) After taking a spore print overnight from both our first and third collections (as did Bob also) and consulting various texts, I eventually reached a decision: we had all three species! Taking into account that neither print showed any sign of violet present in *P. ostreatus*, also both collections developed a sweet smell, slightly of aniseed – lacking in *P. ostreatus* but present in both the other two, I rest my case! Unfortunately microscopic detail proved of little use here, there being discrepancy in the literature and in any case little significant difference in spore size between the three species.

Our second species of interest and appearing in amazing numbers today – I'd estimate around twenty fruitbodies – was a scaly-capped Polypore which I was hesitant to name at first though by the

end of the morning was fairly sure it was *P. tuberaster* (Tuberous Polypore). This kept popping up on fallen branches, probably Beech, and though the pores underneath were consistently quite large the brown cap colour and scaly surface seemed to vary considerably. It was not until checking the spore size later that I could confirm its identity with certainty – they were much too large for any other Polypore species other than *P. squamosus* (Dryad's Saddle) which I knew it could not be – much too small a cap.



Left: *Polyporus tuberaster* found in surprisingly large numbers today. (The insert showing the toothed edge and widely spaced pores of the species is a library photo from Penn Wood – the shot of the underside taken today unfortunately was not in focus!) (PC)

Several people handed me specimens of a small rather insignificant-looking brown mushroom (affectionately known as an LBJ) found growing on fallen Beech. This I suspected was *Simocybe sumptuosa* (Velvet Twiglet) – neither name being particularly appropriate to my mind! It does, however, have a dull matt velvety cap surface but is otherwise somewhat nondescript. It is not often recorded though quite possibly overlooked or misidentified, and its one revealing feature is found on the gill edge when magnified x 400! It has nicely capitata cystidia - cells with swollen blobs on top! There is another very similar *Simocybe* species also found on fallen branches but it lacks these gill cells – hence my reluctance to commit to species until I'd checked it at home.



Right: *Simocybe sumptuosa* found today on fallen branches. The insert is of its capitata gill cells which confirmed its identification. (PC)



Other things of interest: a couple of people handed me a few stemless tiny white-capped mushrooms on twigs / bits of wood. Several checked out as *Crepidotus cesatii* (Roundspored Oysterling) – a common species, the genus having pale brown spores and consequently gills that colour as well when mature. A couple of collections, however, looked a bit different to me and had white gills – a fact that could have been due to immaturity but also indicated the possibility of a different genus, one having white spores (and therefore gills). Checking at home I noticed that the spores were in fact faintly ridged, furthermore (unlike *Crepidotus*) the gill edge lacked cystidia – sure indications of *Clitopilus hobsonii* (Miller’s Oysterling), a rarer species (though easy to miss and write off as a *Crepidotus* unless you look carefully at the spores) and another one new to the site today. The common *Clitopilus prunulus* (Miller), a larger white mushroom species of grassy path edges and from the same genus, will be much more familiar to you – the name Miller refers to its ‘mealy’ smell of flour. No photos of these two finds unfortunately but I’ve included library photos of both which show their similarity in shape and small size but their different gill colour.



Above left: *Crepidotus cesatii* (from Stampwell Farm JE), and right: *Clitopilus hobsonii* (from Turville Heath PC). Both are the typical ‘sea shell’ shape, up to 1 cm across or so, but when mature the gill colour is clearly different.

At one point we spent some time discussing the differences between the common *Gymnopus dryophilus* (Russet Toughshank) and its less frequent but probably under-recorded look-alikes, *G. ocior* (Spring Toughshank) and *G. aquosus* (Watery Toughshank). All three occur in woodland litter and tend to fruit early in the season – often being one of the first mushrooms to appear. *G. ocior* has a darker more intensely coloured cap and sometimes (but not always!) has yellow gills – seen clearly in one collected today. *G. aquosus* is apparently almost indistinguishable from *G. dryophilus* but the mycelial strands attaching it to the litter are pink, not cream. Microscopic differences are microscopic(!) and help a little but are not that clear cut, but in the end today I decided – as with our *Pleurotus* discussed at the start – we had all three species! Again no in-situ photos today, but reading through my report on this site in 2019 we clearly had this same discussion then, resulting in my taking some material (having pink mycelium) to show Geoffrey Kibby who, however, thought it was just *G. dryophilus*! Here are our 2019 photos, and for comparison one which I’ve named *G. ocior* just sent me by Jackie Ewan from Stampwell Farm.

Below left: *Gymnopus dryophilus* here in 2019 (BW) (though with pink mycelium! (RW)), and right: *Gymnopus ocior* from Stampwell Farm 05.09.2022 (JE)



Looking down our final list, nothing else stands out as meriting special comment though half the species appear to be new to the site. This in itself is not as surprising as it might seem: prior to our first visit here in 2019 the only records we have are mine from private visits since I discovered the potential for fungi here about 20 years ago. When fungi-ing on my own I tend to focus on species which interest me most (mushrooms - mycorrhizal species in particular and which in a good year are particularly plentiful here). Hence many of the things on wood we found today I'd probably have overlooked previously, such species not being my strong suit in any case. Quite a few which I took home to look at remained unnamed.

One last photo to end with: the remarkably vivid clump of *Laetiporus sulphureus* (Chicken of the Woods) noticed by Bob near the end of our walk and fruiting on an old Cherry stump. My camera skills don't do it justice, I'm afraid. Many thanks to all who came – we made the most of the morning which we suspected at the start might disappoint but in fact turned out not too bad. For more detail of what we found see the complete list.

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; JE = Jackie Ewan; PC = Penny Cullington; RW = Roger Wilding.

