

FUNGI WALK at RUSHBEDS WOOD on April 16th 2022

Penny Cullington

A group of ten of us met up on a warm and calm sunny Easter Saturday and we were soon enjoying a springtime treat with an abundance of wild flowers, birdsong and butterflies (even the Fern, the Bee Fly and Orange Underwing moth were identified – see images at the end) – quite enough to keep us happy even if we didn't find much in the way of fungi. But we did! Despite the recent dry spell there were still bits and pieces to keep us interested with several old springtime favourites turning up. Our species list is short, yes, but that is to be expected at this time of year.

Having received a report of *Calocybe gambosa* (St. George's Mushroom) from elsewhere in the county a week ago I was hopeful we'd find it today, and sure enough there were a couple of patches where it was fruiting well in the grassy tram track edge. There we also found just a singleton small morel which Derek later verified was *Verpa Conica* (Thimble Morel). We quite often find *Morcella semilibra* along this track at this time but have only one previous record for *V. conica* from here, in 2018, with just 5 other county sites.



Above left, *Calocybe gambosa* (CS), and right, *Verpa conica* (LS) – both found in the tram track path today.

Later on a small cluster of another Rushbeds springtime favourite was found, fruiting amongst a pile of dead deciduous sticks – this was *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet Elfcup), always a crowd pleaser and new today to Trish who was joining us for the first time. This species made its first appearance this season back in late November when a few tiny fruitbodies turned up during our final walk of 2021 at this same site.

Right, *Sarcoscypha austriaca*, a regular at this site and still turning up having been found just beginning to fruit here nearly six months ago! (TG)



We don't often feature rusts in these reports but two species quite common in Spring were found today, both with a tale to tell. The first is now called *Melampsora rostrupii* but was previously *M. populnea*. Its common name (Dog's Mercury Rust) makes it easy to recognise as it is host specific to that plant (*Mecurialis perennis*). The name change has been brought about by molecular sequencing revealing that *M. populnea* is a species complex, therefore the various host plants involved now have their own rust species.



Above, two examples of the rust *Melampsora rostrupii* which infects Dog's Mercury. (The sharp eyed amongst you will notice the tiny orange unidentified discs in one of the photos!) (LS)

The second rust I found on a plant growing out of the mortar on the railway bridge we cross to enter the wood. I thought I recognised the plant as the familiar Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) and therefore assumed its rust would be easy to identify later at home. Not so! I eventually consulted Alan Outen, known for his expertise on plants, mosses, lichens, liverworts, as well as fungi, and it was he who solved the puzzle. There is apparently no rust which is host specific to *Fragaria*, nor is there any rust known to occur at all commonly on that host. However, the rust *Phragmidium fragariae* (no common name) occurs on *Potentilla sterilis* (Barren Strawberry) – a plant which to the uninitiated (like me) looks pretty well identical to Wild Strawberry. Having checked that my microscopic details fitted this rust OK, I then looked the species up in FRDBI (the national fungal records) where I caught my eye in one from Rushbeds Wood in 2002 made by recognised expert Nick Legon, who had included the comment that the plant was growing out of mortar on an old railway bridge!! This cannot surely be a coincidence: there's only one railway bridge at Rushbeds so the fungus has to have been continuing to infect these plants here for at least the last twenty years or so.



Above, the rust *Phragmidium fragariae* infecting Barren Strawberry growing out of the railway bridge here today. (Left BW and Right LS)



A tiny white stemless speck of fungus was found on a piece of rotting wood which was clearly going to need work to identify. This Derek carried out and though the stem was missing there were enough distinctive characters remaining to name it as *Hemimycena mauretana* – no common name, new to the county and with only around 30 national records. One can only assume that the stem had been eaten off by some miniscule creature.

Left, *Hemimycena mauretana* – new to the county here today. (BW)

There are many species of corticioid fungi (those growing flat like a splash of paint and often on fallen wood) which look extremely similar and nearly always need skilled microscopic work to identify with any certainty. One found today thankfully looked a little different and was clearly coloured grey rather than white but still needed Claudi's expertise to identify. This was *Scopuloides rimosa* (no common name) found on fallen Ash, new to the site and with only a handful of previous county finds.



Right, *Scopuloides rimosa* on fallen Ash. (CS)

A couple of common slime moulds were found and photographed, one having typically tiny fruiting bodies and one being one of our largest species. *Metatrachia floriformis* (as with the majority of these organisms) has no common name but is recognisable in the field with its bright orange fluffy spore mass emerging from the round black casing which splits open in a petal-like fashion – hence its Latin species name. *Reticularia lycoperdon* is for obvious reasons sometimes known as False Puffball but Barry informs me another name for it is Moon Poo! It forms large whitish eyeball-like splodges on wood - anything up to 10 cms across.



Right, *Metatrachia floriformis* and far right *Reticularia lycoperdon*. (BW)

So in our list of 25 species we have one new to the site and another new to the county. Several things we found were not nameable for various reasons – too old and dry to produce spores or in one case an Inkcap belonging to a complex of species still awaiting clarification and molecular work. We had a thoroughly enjoyable morning and below are a few photos of non-fungal but interesting things identified either in the field or later at home.

Many thanks to all attendees and also to all the photographers who make these reports possible. For more details of what we found see the complete species list.

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; CS = Claudi Soler; LS = Linda Seward; TG = Trish Glenn.

Left, Bee Fly on Celandine (LS); Centre, Dog Violet (LS); Right, Orange Underwing moth (LS) and underneath, the fern *Aspenium ruta-muraria* on the railway bridge (CS) Group photo (LS)



