

FUNGI WALK at HODGEMOOR WOOD, September 23rd 2023

Penny Cullington

It was a chilly but beautiful autumn morning and we were 18 strong today, hoping for a good showing of fungi after a fairly wet week. The previous hot dry spell had really stopped things in their tracks but there were clear indications today that things were kicking off again despite many of the expected common species here being absent. Nevertheless our species count is gradually on the rise! Just 22 species at Rushbeds Wood, 45 at Deangarden Wood, and today 61 – still very low, however, for such a prolific and well recorded site.

The first nice find was of an unusual Bolete though this is possibly the best site in the county for it with the vast majority of our records from here. *Gyroporus castaneus* (Chestnut Bolete) is quite an easy Bolete to recognise with its chestnut brown cap and stem with contrasting white pores which do not change colour when damaged. The stem develops cavities, eventually becoming almost hollow inside, and it grows in association with Oak, less often with Sweet Chestnut.

Right: *Gyroporus castaneus* found under Oak today. (PC)



We found plenty of Earthballs, recording three different species, and because *Scleroderma citrinum* (Common Earthball) was much in evidence today we were on the lookout for but failed to find *Pseudoboletus parasiticus* (Parasitic Bolete) which grows in association with it. In fact this unusual Bolete has not been recorded here yet and we have records only from a very few county sites, so it's one to keep an eye out for wherever the host Earthball is plentiful. We also looked for and failed to find either of the intriguing 'Piggyback' mushroom species which grow only on black and decaying *Russula nigricans* (Blackening Brittlegill) although several suitably old and rotting hosts were found. (See Members Finds dated August 28th and 30th for recent examples of both *Asterophora* species from Bernwood Forest.)

Many of the mushrooms on our list were represented by just one fruitbody, even the really common things like *Russula ochroleuca* (Ochre Brittlegill). The exception to this was *Gymnopus fusipes* (Spindle Toughshank), often very common here around the base of the plentiful Oaks and today found in good numbers. By the end of the morning those unfamiliar with this species were beginning to recognise it, especially when typically in tight clusters, but small singletons and one exceptionally large example - possibly 9 cms across – were still causing confusion (not unusual with fungi!). As no photos were taken today I'm including one taken here several years ago as a reminder.



Left: *Gymnopus fusipes* in one of its many guises – the photo taken here in 2020. (PC)

Early on I was not surprised to be handed two separate dead Holly leaves suitably adorned with the exquisite and absolutely tiny *Marasmius hudsonii* (Holly Parachute). The reason for my lack of surprise - though this is by no means a common species: Gill Ferguson is becoming a dab hand at rooting around under prickly Holly bushes to find it, and though it was only first recorded in the county from

Naphill Common in 2015 and from here in 2021, we have only three other sites where it's been found – one of these being under Gill and Barry's garden hedge in Beaconsfield! Gill clearly has the knack and turns it up regularly here now. If you're lucky enough to find it (the cap gets to 5mm across at most and more often is much smaller than that!), with a handfuls the remarkable and unique covering of fine dark bristles together with its reddish stem and occurrence only on old Holly leaves make it one of the easiest mushrooms to identify. Today's find is in fact two for the price of one because the sharp-eyed amongst you will notice the tiny black dots of the very common Ascomycete *Trochila ilicina* (Holly Speckle) covering the same leaf.



Left and above: *Marasmius hudsonii* together with *Trochila ilicina*, both species only found on dead Holly leaves which here help to give an idea of scale to these tiny species. (BW)

Hodgemoor Wood is one of our best recorded sites with records dating from visits by the Herts Fungus Group well before BFG was formed in

1999. Hence it is not that often that we find species new to the wood – one of which was the aforementioned *M. hudsonii* two years ago. It was exciting today, therefore, when Sarah Ebdon found a bright yellow species on fallen wood which she and I both hoped would turn out to be the rare *Pluteus leoninus* (Lion Shield). There are two yellow-capped members of this genus and we have a number of records for one of them, *P. chrysophaeus* (Yellow Shield), though it is not that common. However, I've only seen *P. leoninus* once, outside the county, and we have just one previous record for it from Burnham Beeches in 2015. Sarah and I both took part of a cap home to examine in detail, hoping to find long cylindrical cells in the cap cuticle and not the round cells which would indicate *P. chrysophaeus*. Success! There was no doubt (see the photo below), so this was a nice find of quite a rare mushroom.



Above right: the rare *Pluteus leoninus* new to Hodgemoor today (SE), and left: the elongate cylindrical cap cells x 400 which distinguish it from *P. chrysophaeus* which has spherical cap cells. (PC)

This is usually a good site for the genus *Amanita* but today was practically devoid of specimens. Just one cap (no stem) of *A. citrina* (False Deathcap) turned up – confirmed by its distinct smell of potato peelings, also the broken remains of a cap of *A. rubescens* (Blusher), but the star find was a small but perfectly formed *A. phalloides* (Deathcap). It was useful to be able to show the salient features of this deadly toxic mushroom to those unfamiliar with it, particularly its sweet slightly sickly smell – very different to that of *A. citrina* with which it can be confused when the cap is very pale (as often happens) and not the distinct olive green of today's specimen.

Right: *Amanita phalloides* found today. (AP)



The only *Cortinarius* (Webcap) we found was one which is often abundant here under Beech and also happens to be distinctive enough

to name in the field – quite a rare occurrence with this enormous and difficult genus: *Cortinarius bolaris* (Dappled Webcap). We found first one, then later two more, and luckily I'd hung on to the first one in the hope of forming a group photo. The red dappling on a white background – both on cap and stem – are really enough, but also the species tends to yellow where damaged and with a handles the meshlike cottony cinnamon-red web can be seen under the stem apex. The gills are typically rusty brown, as are the spores.

Left: *Cortinarius bolaris*. (PC)



Our only two *Russula* specimens found in good condition were of *Russula velutipes* (Dawn Brittlegill and in most books as *R. aurora*), one of the many pink-capped species which often cause confusion. I have it on *Russula* expert Kibby's authority that the name *R. aurora* is no longer valid and will in time disappear to be replaced by *R. velutipes*, hence its use here. With experience the peachy pink outer cap with cream centre together with cream gills and a slightly powdery stem make it recognisable in the field, and it is fairly common under a range of deciduous trees.

Right: *Russula velutipes*. (AP)



We have photos of two yellow Ascomycetes which we were able to identify - both quite common species which occur in crowded swarms on bare fallen deciduous wood. *Calycina* (previously *Bisporella*) *citrina* (Lemon Disco) has bright yellow cups anything up to 3mm across and often found conspicuously smothering a branch.

Left: *Calycina citrina*. (BW)



Orbilia xanthostigma (Common Glasscup) is a duller more orange colour, smaller, flatter and much less conspicuous and has a translucent appearance.

Left: ***Orbilia xanthostigma***. (SE)

Finally two very common Slime Moulds (see below). Thank you to all attendees for a very enjoyable morning. Thanks too to the photographers without which my reports would be so much less interesting. I'm sure more of you were using cameras today, so do feel free to send me your photos after our walks – I seldom have time when leading to do justice with the camera to what we find and would welcome more images to share with everyone. For more details of what we found see the separate complete list.

Photographers

AP = Alison Peace; BW = Barry Webb; SE = Sarah Ebdon; PC = Penny Cullington.



Above: ***Fuligo septica var. flava***. (BW)

Below: *Ceratiomyxa fruticulosa* (BW)

