

## FUNGI WALK at NAPHILL COMMON on Sunday October 1st 2023

Penny Cullington

We were a group of 21 today including Peter Davis – our much valued webmaster - and Chris Miller, both representatives of Friends of the Common and who led us round and made sure we didn't get lost. We covered an area near to the entrance of the Common, one we usually speed past on our way to the Dew Pond area so not previously explored much for fungi by the group. Conditions were still pretty dry and not that productive but our moderate list of around 70 species includes 10 new to the site and one unidentified LBJ which we hope to have sequenced.

Our first species of interest was found under a large Hawthorn right at the start. This was *Tubaria dispersa* (Hawthorn Twiglet) – an insignificant little mushroom which grows specifically on fallen rotting often submerged haws (though I suspect I've found it once on old plum stones!). Though the books may say it is common we've not recorded it for the last nine years when one of our records was from this site. It is certainly much less common (also yellower) than the closely related and brown *Tubaria furfuracea* (Scurfy Twiglet), one of our commonest LBJs (Little Brown Jobs) and far less selective in its choice of host material, happy fruiting on any old woody debris. This was no doubt the most prolific mushroom we saw today, thriving in the piles of decaying woody remains everywhere.



Above: *Tubaria dispersa* (LS)



Above: *Tubaria furfuracea* in sheets amongst woody litter (PC) and in detail (BW)

Several people handed us some rather nondescript mushrooms with dark stems found in woody litter but past their best. We suspected these were *Gymnopus erythropus* (Redleg Toughshank) but were unsure till a nice fresh collection turned up having typically shiny smooth red stems in contrast to the pale gills and buff caps (which sometimes can fade to almost white). The species is somewhat similar to *G. confluens* (Clustered Toughshank) sharing the clustered habit, crowded gills and buff cap, but that species has a stem concolorous with the cap and is finely furry all over - not smooth and red - also its gills are even more crowded. Both are quite common, *G. erythropus* less so, however.



Right: *Gymnopus erythropus* (LS)



The genus *Clitocybe* (Funnel) is often easy to recognise by its pale colours and decurrent (sloping) gills but much harder to name to species – many members being small to medium and looking much like our example today, found first in the grassy area as we entered to Common. Smells can be very important if not diagnostic in this genus, but in our first specimen it was not convincingly strong though still recognisable as wet feathers / soggy dog to those who know it well and were not hampered by having a cold! Later examples were much more convincing, however, and *Clitocybe phaeophthalma* (Chicken Run Funnel) was confidently added to the list. (Incidentally there is a pending genus split here which will move this particular species to the new genus *Singerocybe*.)

Left: *Clitocybe phaeophthalma* was quite common today. (LS)

An attractive trio of the delicate and pretty *Pholiotina*

*rugosa* (no common name) was noticed in debris under Bracken. Branched off from and previously included in the genus *Conocybe*, *Pholiotina* is yet another genus of typical LBJs but one does have a fighting chance of naming it when following complicated keys for these genera because it has a distinctive ring on the stem, showing beautifully here and thus eliminating the majority which don't have one. With a scope at home I was able to identify it to species, noting also its characteristic rather wrinkled cap surface also clearly seen here.



Right: a photogenic group of *Pholiotina rugosa* (BW)

A nice cluster of the small but distinctive and quite common *Panellus stipticus* (Bitter Oysterling) was found on a fallen damp log – a species we record regularly here. Though sharing the common name Oysterling with the genus *Crepidotus* (along with several other similarly shaped mushrooms though in different genera) this is somewhat misleading and does not in fact imply that they are in any way



scientifically related. What Oysterlings share in common is their shape – ie similar to some sea shells (not oysters as it happens!) with either no stem or at most a short 'eccentric' stem (as seen here) – one that is to the side rather than central. One can surmise the name was chosen because of their similarity to the genus *Pleurotus* – traditionally called Oyster Mushroom and also with an eccentric stem, hence Oysterling - a smaller version. I digress – back to *Panellus stipticus*! The gill surface of this species is sticky to the touch and leaves a tacky residue when pinched between thumb and finger – giving a useful diagnostic confirmation in the field if in doubt.

Right: *Panellus stipticus*, both immature and mature. (LS)

Plenty of Earthballs were on display today, mainly the large and strongly scaly *Scleroderma citrinum* (Common Earthball) but, as last week at Hodgemoor Wood, we looked hard but failed to find *Pseudoboletus parasiticus* (Parasitic Bolete) growing around it though the species was found here last year. (There was debate, however, as to whether the babies seen at the base of several examples might be this Bolete rather than baby Earthballs. It is just possible in this particular case but I couldn't be sure!)

Right: *Scleroderma citrinum* showing its typical scaly yellowish surface and maybe undeveloped *Boletus parasiticus* at the bottom! (LS)



A good example of *Stereum gausapatum* (Bleeding Oak Crust) provided interest, found on fallen Oak and fresh enough to exude convincing bright red stains where damaged.



This is by no means the sole reddening member of the genus and not as common as *S. rugosum* (Bleeding Broadleaf Crust) which however is generally smoother and paler and, as its name suggests, not restricted to Oak. *S. sanguinolentum* (Bleeding Conifer Crust) is only found on fallen conifer. Hence being able to identify your wood can be significant in making a correct ID.

Left: the bleeding *Stereum gausapatum* on fallen bare Oak. (LS)

We have eleven species of *Mycena* (Bonnet)

on the list which is not unusual at this time: any woodland with plenty of fallen branches and woody debris is likely to have abundant Bonnets fruiting now, and today several I was handed turned out to be the very common *M. vitilis* (Snapping Bonnet) – the common name reflecting its often long and supple stem which has been described as making an almost audible snap when broken! One can hardly use something 'almost audible' as a useful character(!), furthermore there are several very similar and equally common species resulting in the need for microscopic confirmation to determine any of these to species.

One tiny white Bonnet we found several examples of today *does* have a useful field character, however, in the form of a tiny fringed disc at the stem base, best seen with a handlens but nicely depicted here. *Mycena stylobates* (Bulbous Bonnet) was also confirmed at home with a scope to be certain.



Right: the tiny *Mycena stylobates* found in litter and attached here to a piece of leaf. (BW)

Left: the much larger though here rather misshapen example of *Mycena rosea*. (CW)



Several of the larger Bonnets on our list could, however, be identified in the field from their distinctive features. One of three related species all found today and which share a sharp 'radishlike' smell was *Mycena rosea* (Rosy Bonnet) – the commonest of the three. These three

occur in deciduous litter but the beautiful pink colours and pale often pure white stem of *M. rosea* should be sufficient to differentiate it from the other two – one with lilac colours and the other with a deep purple edge to the gills.

When handed another small possible Bonnet on a stick I immediately suspected it might quite possibly be something very different and quite rare. *Hydropus subalpinus* (no common name) is a *Mycena* lookalike with a pale yellow brown cap, white gills and a shiny white stem but has in fact no close relationship to that genus. This becomes clear under the scope where the very unusual allantoid (sausage-shaped) spores and very large smooth cystidia found all over the gill confirm its identity. Though not mentioned in any descriptions I've seen, if you nick the stem with a razor blade it leaks colourless fluid, presumably hence its placement into the genus *Hydropus* (meaning watery stem) though recent molecular work is about to bring about its move to its own separate genus *Hydropodia*. Our first county record for the species was mine from Burnham Beeches in 2019, since when I've recorded it from Hodgemoor Woods, Dancersend, Burnham Beeches again and here at Naphill all in 2022. Maybe it's on the increase in the area but is so easily overlooked as yet another nondescript Bonnet.



Right: the rare and easily overlooked *Hydropus subalpinus*, here no more than 3cm tall over all. (SE)

We have images of two *Russula* species to share, both very common though not always correctly identified. *Russula ochroleuca* (Ochre Brittlegill) is one of several yellow-capped species but two chemicals Derek had to hand today help to separate it from the others: a drop of the resinous stain Guaiac turns instantly blue on the stem, also a drop of KOH (potassium hydroxide) at the stem base turns instantly red – both reactions visible in our photo. There is a simpler trick to confirm the ID of *Russula betularum* (Birch Brittlegill): if your mushroom is small, fragile, pink and under Birch, try peeling the cap cuticle which in this species will come off almost entirely in your hands.

Below left: *Russula ochroleuca* showing the stem reaction to both Guaiac and KOH, and right: *Russula betularum* showing its peeling cuticle. (LS)



Finally to our most unusual and also most beautiful find. *Leucocoprinus brebissonii* (Skullcap Dapperling) was found under Oak in good numbers in woody litter, on roots and fallen wood. It was new to the site and only our fourth county record, the last being in 2006. Its distinctive and unique appearance leaves one in no doubt as to its identity though recalling its name took Derek and I some minutes today! With a clear affinity to and distinct look of the genus *Lepiota* (Dapperling), it shares with that genus the free white gills and fragile ring which is often soon lost, also an unpleasant smell. The delicate white cap with blackish fibrils and dark central disc are diagnostic. We are fortunate to have these stunning images to share, taken by Barry Webb to whom congratulations are due as he's just been elected a Fellow of the Royal Photographic Society. No surprise there! These reports are often adorned with his exceptional photos – we are so lucky to be able to benefit from his amazing skill. (Apologies for the snap below, included here to show the range of fruitbodies, also a sense of perspective and size.)

Immediately below (PC), others (BW): *Leucocoprinus brebissonii*.



Thanks to all for attending. Though there was not an abundance to find today, it was a very enjoyable morning. Thank you too to *all* the photographers without whom I would not be able to make my reports anything like as useful as a teaching tool, this being my main purpose in writing them. For more details of what we found see the separate species list.

#### Photographers

BW = Barry Webb FRPS; CW = Claire Williams; LS = Linda Seward; PC = Penny Cullington; SE = Sarah Ebdon.



Above: Barry Webb as we regularly see him! (LS)