

FUNGI WALK at RUSHBEDS WOOD on April 2nd 2023

Penny Cullington

This, our first outing of the year, was well supported and in fact fully booked (19 attendees + Derek and myself) within 24 hours of the booking opening, and it was good to welcome some new faces to the group too. The morning was not the beautifully warm sunny one we'd hoped for but at least was rainfree - which is more than can be said for the paths which were exceedingly muddy in places! Birdsong was getting going and the primroses and violets provided some brightness in the sun's absence. Fungi? Well, we ended up with a species list just short of 50 – not far off twice the number found here at this time last year (but today we had twice the number of eyes looking as well!).

Usually recording fungi at this time is dominated by non-gilled species of one sort or another on wood or plants, be it brackets, corticioids, cup fungi or other ascomycetes, rusts or myxomycetes. Last year at this time we found just two gilled fungi (mushroom types) but today rather bucked this trend with gilled fungi providing not far off half the list. Within minutes of our setting off the first of these appeared, a nice clump of *Kuehneromyces mutabilis* (Sheathed Woodtuft) found on fallen deciduous wood – though on collection we named it the very similar *Galerina marginata* (Funeral Bell) and it was not until Linda sent me a photo of the spores that I realised the error! The discovery was only made because she'd taken a fruitbody home with her to experiment on with her new microscope. This shows how easily mistakes can be made at this game.



Above: *Kuehneromyces mutabilis* – an unusual April find. (NF)



Predictably we were spoilt for choice with specimens of *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet Elfcup) which popped up all over the place in a variety of sizes - some spectacular, wide open and intense in colour. Rushbeds Wood is perhaps the most reliable site in the county to find this beautiful spring species - always a delight to see.

Left: *Sarcoscypha austriaca* seen in good numbers here today. (CW)



Another springtime mushroom often found here is *Calocybe gambosa* (St. George's Mushroom) and though St. George's Day is still a few weeks off it was found just beginning to fruit along the old tram track though only at the 'button mushroom' stage. The diagnostic mealy smell helped to confirm it in the field.

Right: Immature specimens of *Calocybe gambosa* (LS)



This particular path is where we hope to find Morels at this time, and today just one immature specimen was found. *Verpa conica* (Thimble Morel) lacks the typical chambered outer surface of most Morel species, remaining merely wrinkled with a contrasting white stem – not yet developed in our somewhat immature and rather nibbled specimen. It is one to look out for in grassland as well as woodland and was in fact new to Rushbeds Wood last April.

Left: *Verpa conica* just emerging in the tram track path (LS)

Lepista nuda (Wood Blewit) which he'd found in his garden. I promptly commented that this was an unusual find for April, whereupon we then found a good clump of it here in a pile of rotting vegetation! I've now lost count of the number of times a sighting of a particular species is reported from one part of the county, promptly followed by further sightings elsewhere. These organisms must presumably be responding to suitable weather conditions which trigger fruiting - or else are in touch by some mechanism we have yet to fathom! Checking records on our database proved interesting: of over 200 records for this species all are from autumn months except for a handful for January and now three for April – today's and one other from this site.



Above: an unseasonal fruiting of *Lepista nuda*. (cw)



Of the three species of Inkcaps found one was new to the site. *Coprinellus xanthothrix* (no common name) is not rare and occurs on woody debris (as here) or litter and, like the similar and very common *C. micaceus* (Glistening Inkcap), has copious flecks of 'veil' on the cap surface. It, however, lacks the clustered habit of the commoner species (also found today) and has different microscopic characters – checked today by Derek.

Left: *Coprinellus xanthothrix*, new to the site today. (DJS)

The most interesting of the bracket-types we found was probably *Hymenochaete corrugata* (Glue Crust), the majority of our records for the species being from this site. Though occasionally reported on other hardwoods, by far its most common host is Hazel – as here at Rushbeds. The fungus is easiest to spot when literally affixing a dead branch to its neighbour thus preventing it from falling. Thus looking for thinnish branches which appear to be at an uncharacteristic angle often reveals its presence where one branch crosses another, as was the case today. (See below)



Above (cw) and right (LS): two views of *Hymenochaete corrugata* found firmly cementing branches together in several places in this particular Hazel tree.

Two tiny Ascos to share with you now, one a cup fungus and one a pyrenomycete (i.e. black and crusty). The first, *Calloria neglecta* (Nettle Pox) is one of two very common species found towards the base of last year's Nettle stems in Spring, the other being *Leptosphaeria acuta* (Nettle Rash). The Pox is peachy orange, the cups only 1mm across, and the Rash - equally tiny - is shiny black with a prominent pointed centre and may or may not be those seen in our photo (though I know they were present on this stem in more typical form elsewhere).

The second, *Lasiosphaeria ovina* (Woolly Woodwart) was spotted on the end of a log, also equally tiny and much smaller than other Woodworts – in fact the name is misleading because they are in no way similar! At first glance they could be a species of Slime Mould but not so. They form colonies of tiny globes, the surface black underneath but with a white fibrous fine coating and a tiny black central ostiole (opening) through which the spores are expelled. The species is common, can be found at all times of year on damp rotting wood, though is probably often overlooked.

Right: *Calloria neglecta*, and below *Lasiosphaeria ovina*, both species only 1 mm across. (NF)



(The sharp eyed amongst you will notice the black fungal 'drawing pin' in the top right hand corner spotted by Neil in his photo – this is unidentified!)

I'll finish off with a few Mycomycetes (Slime Moulds) – for those of you new to this game these are not in fact fungi though originally thought to be so and still traditionally recorded by mycologists. We have an enthusiastic band of 'Slimologists' (my word!) amongst our number, one of whom is an exceptional photographer and fast becoming very skilled at their identification. Hence these extraordinary organisms often feature in my reports. (Very few have common names.)



Left: *Badhamia utricularis*, the minuscule blobs only 0.5 mm across, spotted by Barry on the underside of a rotting log. New to the site today. (BW)

Above: *Lycogala terrestris* (Wolf's Milk), one of the larger and more eye-catching species with blobs up to 2 cm across – a very common species. (NF)

Below left: *Hemitrichia decipiens* – previously in genus *Trichia*. The bright orange shiny blobs, only 0.8 mm across, and white stalk make this distinctive species nameable in the field. (BW)

Bottom left: *Reticularia lycoperdon* (Moon Poo) is one of the largest species forming blobs on tree-trunks anything up to 10 cm across which eventually become smooth and shiny (like an eyeball) and filled with a mass of brown spores – like cocoa powder. (CW)

Below right: *Physarum pusillum*, new to the county from Burnham Beeches in 2021 and new to the site today – an exquisite little species only 0.5 across, the orange stalks quite distinctive. (BW)



It remains to thank all attendees for coming; your efficient searching provided us with an impressive list with several additions for the site. It was a most enjoyable morning with a great group of people, and I look forward to meeting up again at Burnham Beeches in a few weeks' time. Thank you to all the photographers who make these reports so much more valuable for everyone and who so efficiently send images to me enabling the report to get onto the website so promptly. I couldn't do it without you!

For more details of what we found see the separate complete species list.

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; CW = Claire Williams; DJS = Derek Schafer; LS = Linda Seward; NF = Neil Fletcher



Today's group at Rushbeds Wood. (LS)