

FUNGI WALK at STOKE COMMON, November 5th 2023

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Reading through my report for last year's walk here, held at the end of October, not surprisingly much of what I said then applies to today's walk as well: A slightly smaller group today (22), an equally mild and fine morning, a slightly larger final species list (120) and a very muddy carpark! I was on my own leading last year but this time both Derek and I were ably supported by Jesper Launder and Claudi Soler which made my task of keeping the list a bit less fraught, nevertheless my wellies were glued to the spot on many occasions as I was bombarded with somewhat soggy specimens to try and put a name to and scribble down. Another comment I made last year applies here: when continuously presented with fungi from a wide mix of trees and habitats without the advantage of seeing each specimen in situ, the identifier's task becomes that much harder. Thus being able to ask for second or even third expert opinion is a great help.

This site is possibly our best for the genus *Suillus* – a small branch of the huge family of Boletes in which most species associate with Pine. Today I almost squashed our first find of *S. luteus* (Slippery Jack) as I alighted from my car and this species continued to turn up throughout the morning, always under or near to Pine. It is certainly one of the easiest within this genus to recognise, having a cocoa brown cap which is very slimy especially after rain, pale yellow pores which don't turn blue when pressed, and a distinctive ring on the stem which in immature specimens often completely covers the pores.

Right: *Suillus luteus* found in various places under Pine. (cw)



Last year's report features a photo with a good selection of *Suillus bovinus* (Bovine Bolete) specimens though on that occasion we'd failed to find its 'friend' *Gomphidius roseus* (Rosy Spike) – an unusual mushroom which often accompanies this particular *Suillus* and in fact never occurs without it. Today, having just been handed this *Suillus*, I was in the process of suggesting that people should be on

the lookout for the accompanying *Gomphidius* when at that moment I was handed a specimen of both species together (found by my daughter!). No photo here but see my Burnham Beeches report (October 7th) where both species were much in evidence together under the Pines .



We found early on quite a few examples of *Russula emetica* (Sickener) - a striking Brittlegill with a really bright red cap – domed when young, contrasting white gills and stem, and only occurring under Pine. Quite a few examples were confusingly a bit paler with some cream patches as a result of the good soaking they'd recently received. This is common amongst Brittlegills and one of the reasons why this large and formidable genus is often so hard to determine to species with confidence.

Left: *Russula emetica* found in good numbers today. (AP)

A genus well represented today was *Lactarius* (Milkcap). The first of particular interest had a distinctive crimped 'piecrust' rim, found under Oak, which I recognised given a few moments' thought, though the name took a little longer to surface. The species was simultaneously shown to Derek who

went through the same mental process but came up with a different name! However, on conferring we realised we were indeed talking about the same species which has undergone several name changes in recent years. Confusingly Kibby's recent handbook vol 1 names it *L. serifluus* as does the equally recent FAN vol. 7, whereas Index Fungorum still favours *L. subumbonatus* – the name I gave it in the field. Hopefully its common name - Watery Milkcap - will remain (though I'd personally prefer Piecrust Milkcap as being the better description!).

Right: *Lactarius serifluus* found early on under Oak. (SE)



Lactarius helvus (Fenugreek Milkcap) is extremely common at this site and today was no exception. A species found under Pine and Birch, we have many records from here with a few also from neighbouring Burnham Beeches, from which one can infer that it favours acidic sandy soils. This is a large Milkcap with a tan brown dry cap and stem but which often causes confusion over its identity even to genus because it has scant milk at best, furthermore the so-called milk is entirely colourless therefore very easily missed. Its one redeeming character is its distinctive smell of curry – more specifically fenugreek, though today when many examples were waterlogged this feature was not that noticeable.

Right: *Lactarius helvus* (cs) with insert showing its telltale water-like 'milk' on the gills. (SE)



Another species for which we have records only from this site and Burnham Beeches is *Mycena megaspora* (Rooting Bonnet), an unusual species of heathland closely related to *M. galericulata* (Common Bonnet).

Today it was fruiting in abundance in the open mossy areas clearly relishing the boggy conditions. It shares with the far commoner species the distinctive cross ridges between the gills (shown here) as well as the same microscopic cells found on the gill edge, but has a much darker cap and roots deeply into the mossy vegetation as opposed to fallen deciduous wood. Both species can have either 4- or 2-spored basidia with the resulting wide variety of spore size this tends to produce; today's collection checked by Derek was 4-spored.

Left: *Mycena megaspora* with insert showing the typical cross ridges. (SE)



Abundant in the heathland areas were several species of *Hypholoma*. Many will be familiar with the very common *H. fasciculare* (Sulphur Tuft) which grows on wood or woody remains and is a regular on our lists, but in acid heathland the small yellowish brown *H. elongatum* (Sphagnum Brownie) is common and was much in evidence today. Another slightly bigger and browner heathland *Hypholoma* was also very common here today. There are in fact three almost identical such species, separated only by microscopic detail, and as luck would have it the

collection I checked was *H. ericaeoides* but those checked by Jesper were *H. ericaeum* with distinctly larger spores. Neither species has a common name and sadly we have no photos to share.

A further species - though very different - which favours heathland such as this is the distinctive and quite common but easily overlooked *Thelephora terrestris* (Urchin Earthfan) though it does also occur in woodland usually with conifers. As its common name suggests, its feathery soft dark fanlike structures grow flat to the ground forming rough dark brown hairy rosettes.



Above: *Thelephora terrestris* (CS)

Several specimens of *Panaeolus* (Mottlegill) turned up in the mossy disturbed soil where cattle had obviously been grazing. One of these was *P. acuminatus* (Dewdrop Mottlegill) which has distinctive moisture droplets on the upper stem especially in moist conditions, but a second species I nearly misnamed because the rainy conditions had all but washed away its diagnostic feature: the white frilly edge to its campanulate (bell-shaped) cap. Derek, however, was not fooled and guessed its identity, whereupon we came across another group in longish grass with much more convincing white flecks of veil along the edge. *Panaeolus papilionaceus* (Petticoat Mottlegill) favours dung or manured soil and we often find it in this area.



Left: *Panaeolus papilionaceus* in longish well manured grass. (NF)

Soon after this I noticed a cowpat with some simply miniscule white-capped species emerging through it. The call for Derek went up because this was a tiny species of Inkcap – the group of genera in which he specialises. He later identified it as *Narcissea cf. cordispora* (no common name and previously in genus *Coprinopsis*) and it will be dried for sequencing.



Right: *Narcissea cf. cordispora* on cow dung (each division of the ruler = 1 mm!) (DJS)



Under Birch a handsome and substantial species of *Leccinum* was found displaying the characteristic tapering stem covered in almost black scabers (flocks) which distinguishes this genus from the many other Bolete genera. Both Jesper and I suspected this would be *Leccinum variicolor* (Mottled Bolete) owing to the distinct greenish stains developing on the stem where slug damage had exposed the flesh to the air. A scope at home revealed the correct cap cuticle cells amongst other characters which then confirmed it.

Left: *Leccinum variicolor*, about 10 cm high. (SE)

We found mostly single rather damaged examples of the six *Amanita* species on our list, the rarest being *A. porphyria* (Grey-veiled Amanita) which grows here under Pine. Of interest, however, was an observation made by Sarah Ebdon that the immature 'button' of *Amanita muscaria* found under Birch was

showing surprisingly yellow (rather than the normal white) flecks of veil on both cap and volva. She checked this later at home, informing me that this made it *A. muscaria* var. *flavivolvata*. Though not a separate species this is a variety I knew nothing about so am in her debt for pointing it out.

Right: *Amanita muscaria* var. *flavivolvata* (SE)



Cortinarius (Webcap) is recognised as one of the largest and trickiest genera of mushrooms though the recently published and excellent *Cortinarius* monograph by Kibby and Tortelli (sadly neither of whom could join us here today) has gone a long way towards making it more approachable. Today we found several species, one of which was

nameable in the field:

Cortinarius semisanguineus

(Surprise Webcap) is a regular here under Pine (though if under Birch is now known to be a different species: *C. ominosus* which also occurs here) the surprise element being the fact that the gills – normally rusty brown in this genus – are deep red in contrast to its midbrown cap.

Left: *Cortinarius semisanguineus*. (CS)



Under Pine Jesper collected a few specimens of a smaller species of *Cortinarius* which had a faint smell of *Pelargonium*. This one needed work at home to key out and he was able to identify it as *Cortinarius flexipes* (Pine Pelargonium Webcap) new to the site today and with records from just four other known county sites. Closely related to this species is *Cortinarius lindstroemii* (no common name), found today also under Pine by Claudi Soler and identified using the same



monograph.

Above: *Cortinarius flexipes* (JL), and right: the similar but rustier *Cortinarius lindstroemii* (CS).

Already 4 pages long, this report is in danger of becoming too long-winded so I'm going to call it a day but will add a few more images below. Thanks to everyone for their contributions, and especially to our brilliant team of photographers. For more details of what we found see the separate complete species list.

Photographers

AP = Alison Peace; BW = Barry Webb; CS = Claudi Soler; CW = Claire Williams; DJS = Derek Schafer;
NF = Neil Fletcher; SE = Sarah Ebdon.



Above: *Baeospora myosura* (Conifercone Cap) (BW)

Below left: *Boletus edulis*, and right: *Calocera viscosa* (CW)



Below left: *Stilbella byssiseda* on old *Cribraria argillacea*, and right: *Lachnum apalum* (Rush Disco) (BW)



Below: a beautiful view of the Common today – a fitting finale. (SE)

