FUNGI WALK at STOWE LANDSCAPE GARDENS on Sunday November 19th 2023

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Our group of 13 met up this morning to find the normally deserted former NT car park heaving with people! No, this wasn't due to BFG members gone mad but to attendees of a local hockey tournament being redirected here as their parking area was flooded! No harm done, there was room for all and we met up with Lucy Wakeman, the NT Head Ranger, who came round with us. The rain forecast luckily held off till we'd finished though there was a chilly wind but we were reasonably sheltered in the Grecian Valley – the area we tend to focus on when coming here.

We last visited this site in 2019 just a week or so earlier in the month, and my report from that occasion makes interesting reading: we had a slightly larger group and a slightly longer species list though I made similar observations that our hot dry Septembers seem to be gradually pushing the main fungal season a few weeks later. Four years on this trend certainly seems to be continuing, hence our choice of a late visit here planned hopefully to coincide with the best time for Waxcaps for which this site is considered one of our best. Our records show, however, that although 16 different Waxcap species have been recorded here since our first visit back in 2004 numbers are worryingly declining (as they are also at Penn Street Cricket pitch – another previously oustanding site). Whether due to climatic conditions or perhaps land management it is impossible to tell, though it was clear today that the grass here is left pretty long with the mowings left in situ and causing a thick thatch which both clogs up the vegetation and increases the nitrogen content – both factors sadly detrimental to fungi and Waxcaps in particular.

Today it was a relief to find one speciality of this site still holding its own amongst the thick vegetation, though it was the only Waxcap we saw. ***Hygrocybe punicea*** (Crimson Waxcap) is one of our largest Waxcaps and certainly one of the showiest with a deep red cap often with yellow, these colours repeated on the thick stem. We've recorded this rare species at just a handful of county sites, the vast majority of records being from either here or Prestwood Churchyard where incidentally it is also up and fruiting at the moment.

Left: *Hygrocybe punicea* – our only Waxcap this morning. (CW)

We worked our way along the left side of the valley checking under the Pines mixed with a few deciduous trees and shrubs, then crossed over to return under the more varied deciduous trees with piles of fallen wood (always a good source of species, especially Slime moulds) and a smattering of different conifers also. Most mycorrhizal genera were in short supply today: We often find good *Russula* species (Brittlegills) here but today it appeared to be just too late in the season with only one

recognisable specimen found. Not a single Bolete appeared and only one Amanita too though under the Beeches at the start were a few *Lactarius* (Milkcaps), one of which is quite rare and was new to the site. Not having seen it this season, both Derek and I took some time to dredge up the name but we got there between us in the end! ***Lactarius rubrocinctus*** (no common name) favours Beech, has a bright orange cap often with an orange tinge to the gills as well and can have a reddish band at the stem apex (hence its species name) though this features is not always distinct. No photo was taken today but I'm including one of a collection from Mousells Wood back in 2017.

Above: the unusual *Lactarius rubrocinctus* (PC)

Continuing with the mycorrhizal genera theme, several species of *Inocybe* (Fibrecap) were found under the Pines (no photos), also a couple of grey-capped species of *Tricholoma* (Knight) which at first we were unsure of as there are many grey Knights which can easily be confused. Firstly under deciduous trees were good numbers of a pale grey to brownish-grey species which we recognised as ***T. scalpturatum*** (Yellowing Knight) though a specimen showing the typical yellowing as it ages was not found until much later in the morning. Then under the Pines was a much darker grey more scaly capped species which I eventually realised was ***T. terreum*** (Grey Knight) – not a helpful common name under the circumstances! Both are common species and noting the tree association – deciduous for one, Pine for the other – together with the differing shades of grey are the pointers to note, but one should bear in mind that there are plenty of others with grey caps to throw into the mix!

Above left: *Tricholoma scalpturatum* (CW), and right: *Tricholoma terreum* (PC)

Early on on a stump a bracket was found which from its unusual gill-like structure beneath we recognised as ***Lenzites betulinus*** (Birch Mazegill). The species is not that common and almost always though not exclusively on Birch stumps; we were unsure what the host stump was today.

Right: *Lenzites betulinus*, new to the site today (PC)

Still on the left of the valley, under some shrubs with Yew and Pine nearby a few Earthstars were found in the litter and though not in the most photogenic condition were nameable to species by the distinct collar around the central 'puffball'-like fertile part. ***Geastrum triplex*** (Collared Earthstar) is our commonest Earthstar though our records show that we've not found it here since 2005.

Left: *Geastrum triplex* ready to 'puff' its spores out of the central opening. (PC)

Also in this area we saw quite a few examples of another common late season mushroom, though one which often causes confusion over its identity. ***Rhodocollybia butyracea*** (Butter Cap) has a brown cap like many other species though the shade of brown is amazingly variable. Its common name refers to the cap's greasy feel when moist and not to its colour! The photo here, taken under Pine, shows some of the brown shades regularly encountered but the caps can be both darker and paler than these.

Right: a typical cluster of *Rhodocollybia butyracea* on show today. (PC)

Crossing over now to the other side of the valley (on our way over coming across the *Hygrocybe* already featured), our one and only collection of genus *Cortinarius* (Webcap) was soon made. As there was a nice selection of fruitbodies in good condition I decided to have a go at making an identification – often a thankless task especially with a member of the huge Section *Telamonia* (many of which are typical LBJs - Little Brown Jobs - and varying little in characters). The recent Kibby & Tortelli monograph has now made this genus much more approachable, however, and I was able to key our collection out to ***C. glaphurus*** (no common name) though with only one previous UK record this will need confirming with DNA sequencing. Reportedly most likely under Beech though in Europe recorded under conifers, here it was under Sweet Chestnut with Yew nearby so I'll update as necessary as and when we get a result.

Left: *Cortinarius glaphurus*, to be confirmed as the second UK collection. (PC)

Another late season species was handed in from this area – thankfully a much easier species to name! This was the quite common ***Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis*** (Goblet) which favours grassy areas and woodland clearings. Both the Latin and common names describe this mushroom well, the genus name meaning similar to *Clitocybe* (the Funnels), the species name meaning 'shaped like a cup'. It appears to be the only member of its genus which is in itself an unusual occurrence.

Right: *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis*, a species we've recorded here on most visits. (PC)

The weather was beginning to deteriorate and we were thinking of calling it a day as we headed for the large Cedar near the temple which has produced interesting fungi in the past. Here we were treated to an abundance of mushrooms clearly revelling in the woodchip beneath and providing us with an excellent finale to the morning. The rusty red-capped ***Leratiomyces ceres*** (Redlead Roundhead) was fruiting in good numbers here. Previously known as *Stropharia aurantiaca*, the species has been gradually spreading over the past 25 years or so with the increased use of woodchip as a garden / parkland mulch and is now very common wherever that medium is present, also sometimes occurring in woody debris in natural woodland.

Right: *Leratiomyces ceres*, one of several different species found under the Cedar. (PC)

Here also there were quantities of at least one species of *Psathyrella* (Brittlestem), some with brown caps, some having faded to almost white. It is quite likely that they were all the same species as they have a tendency to fade in this way, so I collected some fresh brown-capped examples to take home and check. These keyed out to the very common ***Psathyrella corrugis*** (Red-edge Brittlestem) despite the fact that the gills lacked a red edge – this feature is not always present despite its common name! Like the species above it favours woodchip and woody litter and is often to be found in large troupes as here.

Left + insert: *Psathyrella corrugis*. (PC)

Much more unusual, however, and new to the site in this same spot was a cluster of the tiny but stunning ***Sphaerobolus stellatus*** (Shooting Star) found on a small piece of bark. In fact this same species was found last week at Rushmere Estate (though I was unaware of it at the time), then taken home by Derek but eventually identified by Jenny by flicking through a large reference book till she located it! As a result, today it was instantly recognised when Barry found it and he was then on hand to work his magic with his camera - perfect! NB: bear in mind that each 'star' is less than 2 mm across,

like a miniature Earthstar, and when mature the whole central package – the peridiole - is literally 'fired' out containing the spores which are then dispersed.

Above and right: *Sphaerobolus stellatus* (BW)

What a finale to our morning! We returned to the cars happy people just as the rain set in. I've added a few more of Barry exceptional photos below but will end the report at this point. Many thanks for coming and making our visit such a successful one, and thank you too to our photographers. For more details of what we found see the separate complete species list.

Photographers
BW = Barry Webb; CW = Claire Williams; PC = Penny Cullington

Above : two tiny species of Bonnet, both no taller than 1 cm a most!
Left: *Mycena tenerrima* (Frosty Bonnet) and right: *Mycena capillaris* (Beechleaf Bonnet) (BW).

Above: *Calycina claroflava* (Sulphur Disco – previously *Bisporella sulfurina*), each disc no more than5 mm across. (BW)

Above: the Slime Mould *Hemitrichia decipiens* still immature.
Below: the Slime Mould *Arcyria ferruginea* also still immature. (BW)