

FUNGI WALK at BURNHAM BEECHES on Saturday October 5th 2023

Penny Cullington

Our group today was 23 strong and it was a pleasure to welcome several new members, also an honour to have Angus Wilkinson, recently appointed Conservation Officer for the Beeches replacing Helen Read, with us for the morning. It was warm and sunny for the duration – a beautiful autumn day – though fungi were still not exactly plentiful. Today was UK Fungus Day, organised by the BMS and traditionally held on the first weekend in October to coincide with the peak of autumn fruiting, but I have a feeling this event will need to be moved later in the month in future as there now appears to be an established trend in recent years for poor fruiting through September and early October – certainly in the Chilterns anyway. For several years prior to Covid BFG ran an impressive fungus display in Aylesbury Museum as part of UKFD, but it had been becoming a real struggle to find enough material to populate it and every time this date comes around I find myself heartily relieved we decided not to reinstate the display after Covid.

Our route today was planned to take in an area where we'd been advised by Barry that a very special species new to science from the Beeches was up and fruiting. *Hydropus inopinatus* has been published and described only in the last month, co-authored by Barry and myself plus two colleagues from Hampshire who'd also found and worked on it. The type (ie the first collection) was collected here and sequenced by Eric Janke – one of our other authors – and is now retained at RBG Kew for posterity.

Working our way parallel with Lord Mayor's Drive towards the *Hydropus* spot we found several interesting species, the first on a rotting deciduous stump. Genus *Lentinellus* (Cockleshell) is one of a group of 'pleurotoid' species – those having an eccentric stem – which grow on wood, the commonest of these being *Pleurotus* (Oyster Mushroom), familiar to all from supermarkets which often sell cultivated forms though it is common in our woodlands. *Lentinellus ursinus* (Bear Cockleshell) is, however, a rarity though when found today the genus was recognised but not the species. Its distinctive shape and clustered tiered habit together with deeply decurrent and sharp-edged gills suggested to us the unusual *L. cochleatus* (Aniseed Cockleshell) though the aniseed smell was missing – as is often the case! However, at home Jesper deduced that this had to be the much rarer *L. ursinus* on account of its flesh rapidly and strongly turning blue/black when treated with the iodine-based Melzer's reagent – a diagnostic feature of the species. Derek supports Jesper's view and had in any case already decided that a sample would be sequenced as part of our CoLC project, and the species is new to the site with just four previous county collections.



It was encouraging to see a few collections of some common *Amanita* species today, strangely missing from our lists so far this season. One of our less common *Amanitas* turned up under the Pines in this area though it is not particularly distinctive in appearance. ***Amanita porphyria*** (Grey Veiled *Amanita*) occurs mainly though not exclusively under Pine, it has rather a dingy appearance often with a slightly violaceous tinge, dirty removable grey veil remnants on the cap and a stem with a flimsy ring which tends to disappear and a round basal volva. We found it here on our visit last year (also on UK Fungus Day as it happens) and have a smattering of other records from sites where Pine occurs.

Right: *Amanita porphyria* under the Pines today. (AP)



Under the mixed Birches and Pines in this area a beautiful cluster of the small but distinctive ***Cortinarius flexipes*** (Pine Pelargonium Webcap) was found and much admired. This is one of very few members of the large and notoriously impossible Section *Telamonia* within genus *Cortinarius* which are recognisable in the field, not just from its dapper appearance with violaceous colours but also its distinct smell of *Pelargonium* leaves. It is not particularly rare but always a bit of a thrill to find, especially when in such perfect condition!



Left: *Cortinarius flexipes* (CW)

Next a few common species which were picked up in this area and caused some discussion. The genus ***Tubaria*** (Twiglet) is one of our commonest LBJs (Little Brown Jobs) but very often gives difficulty in the field. Those with experience can usually name it to genus with relative ease but deciding upon one of the two common species within the genus is not always straightforward. *T. furfuracea* (Scurfy Twiglet) is probably the

commoner of the two and tends to have wispy white veil remnants confined to the cap rim whereas *T. conspersa* (Felted Twiglet) tends to have wispy white veil covering the cap and also part of the stem. This sounds quite straightforward but as is often the case with fungi it is not always as clear cut as that in reality! For this reason Derek and I plumped here for ***T. conspersa*** but this collection posing nicely on the end of a stick will be sequenced as we'd like to see if we're correct! See what you think from Barry's photo here.

Right: *Tubaria conspersa* (probably) (BW)



Today's list includes 17 species of *Mycena* (Bonnet) which sounds a lot but is not exceptional for a site with such a varied range of habitats. Most were pretty common but one or two were notable. Many people showed me collections of a rather dirty pinkish to violaceous but dingy species which has a distinct smell of radish. This particular smell, when noticed in a *Mycena*, should point one straight away to the small complex of species around the common *M. pura* (Lilac Bonnet) which all have this smell. It's always good practice to put this genus to your nose when collected because with experience some can quickly be identified this way. Alone amongst the 'pura' group is one with a distinctly dark gill edge called *M. pelianthina* (Blackedge Bonnet – though it's not black but deep purple!). Another good practice: turn a specimen over and notice not just the gill colour but also its method of attachment to the stem and whether the gill edge is coloured! We have three Bonnets on the list which have different coloured gill edges, all of which we were consequently able to name on the spot. (More on one of these later.) So I'm including below a library photo of *M. pelianthina* (taken previously here at Burnham Beeches) together with an excellent photo taken today of the aforementioned gills! This is such a common species of woodland litter in our area that I'd like members to start recognising it for themselves. Remember: the smell together with the dark gill edge are the two diagnostic features!



Above left: a typical example of *Mycena pelianthina* (PC), and right: the dark purple gill edge from a specimen today (LS)

Now for the rather special *Hydropus inopinatus* which Barry by chance found fruiting in an entirely new place today, this making the third spot on site and it is not unusual to find it coming up in good numbers as we clearly witnessed today. It is really tiny and 'mycenoid' and seems to favour extremely rotten old Pine stumps which are disintegrating. (Forgive me for including here a shot taken

by Sarah who caught us together examining this new site – it was rather a special occasion for us both! It's not every day one gets to be involved with a brand new species like this.)



Far left: *Hydropus inopinatus*, now officially described and published as a new species to science from Burnham Beeches. (BW with inset SJE)

We moved across the road and into the wooded area picking up a few grassland species on the way but here found disappointingly little, particularly knowing how productive this area can be. It is often rich in a good variety of mycorrhizal species but they were not on show today. Derek picked up an ascomycete which he recognised and which occurs only on dead or fallen Willow. *Diatrype bullata* (Willow Barkspot) is one of the many 'pyrenomycete' ascos (ie basically hard and black) but compared to the very similar Woodwarts (*Hypoxyton* and related genera) it is much less rounded and generally flatter. If you notice a fungus of this type on Willow it is likely to be this species.

Right: *Diatrype bullata* on a Willow stick (SJE)



Stepping onto the boardwalk to take a look at the mire – often a very rewarding area for fungi – I noticed a small singleton LBJ to one side which puzzled both me and Jesper though he rightly suspected it might be a species of *Naucoria* (Aldercap) despite the fact that there was no Alder around.

This is a genus we don't get a chance to study that often owing to the lack of Alders in the Chiltern area though there are a few members of the genus which associate with other trees like Willow. Jesper worked on this specimen at home, identifying it as *Naucoria salicis* (Willow Aldercap), and we had noted the fact that there was Willow nearby which fitted nicely. The species is not that common, new to the site today and we've identified it only from Stoke Common and Naphill Common in the last 15 years.

Left: *Naucoria salicis* from the mire today. (NF)



The mire itself was pretty waterlogged today – no surprise there! – and we failed to find the rare *Mycena dasypus*, a species rediscovered growing in the sphagnum here in recent years though not having been seen anywhere in the UK for the last 30 years or

so. I did, however, find a small *Cortinarius* species belonging to Section *Telamonia* under a Willow on the edge of the mire which caught my fancy. Working on it at home it keyed out very close to *C. inconspicuus* which according to Kibby & Tortelli's excellent monograph has very few records mainly from Scotland! This will obviously need sequencing to confirm and may well be something different because not all features matched exactly. Since the DNA era and the publication of K & T's book which contains a very useful key, new species of this genus are turning up two-a-penny (excuse the pun!) now more people are taking an interest in trying to identify the genus. I shall also be sending the photo plus a full species description to Geoffrey and Mario to ask their opinion, and the material is dried.

Right: possibly *Cortinarius* cf. *inconspicuus* from the mire today. (PC)



Our large group rather splintered up at this stage and a small number of us searched through the Pines just to the north of the mire – often a very interesting area. Sure enough amongst several other species new to the list there were a couple of particular interest - both found by Sarah! I mentioned earlier another *Mycena* with coloured gill edges and when Sarah checked this rather ordinary-looking specimen she noticed the clear pink gill edges. I realised after she showed it to me that I'd passed them by, mistakenly dismissing them as probably *M. leptcephala*, often under conifer and with a strong bleach smell. We initially identified them as the rare *M. rubromarginata* but on checking at home, Sarah realised our error because this was in fact ***M. capillaripes*** (Pinkedge Bonnet), a species of conifer litter and also with a strong smell of bleach – not that common but not quite as special as we'd hoped!



Right: *Mycena capillaripes* under the Pines near the mire today (NF)

With time running out I was called back to this same area to see one of my favourite species. ***Cortinarius semisanguineus*** (Surprise Webcap) does what it says on the tin and gives one a delightful surprise when the gills are inspected. Their bright red colour, contrasting with the yellowish-brown cap, makes the species instantly recognisable. DNA has revealed, however, that we have two almost identical species in the UK, meaning that many past records may well have been this second species (*C. ominusus*) which apparently favours Pine and Birch whereas *C. semisanguineus* favours Pine, Beech and Oak. Clear as mud, you might say, especially if your collection is under Pine as today's! So this is another collection which needs sequencing.



Left: *Cortinarius semisanguineus* (or is it *C. ominusus*?!)(NF)

I'm in danger of outstaying my welcome so will end off now but will add a few extras below, some of which came to my notice later and one of which is a special find. Thank you all for coming – we had a great morning despite the apparent absence of the quantities of fungi one might expect at this time, and this is our first list of the season to top 100 species which we've done by some margin. Many thanks also to our photographers who've done us proud as usual. For more details of what we found see the separate complete species list.

Photographers

AP = Alison Peace; BW = Barry Webb, CVS = Claudi Soler; CW = Claire Williams; JL = Jesper Launder; JP = Jordan Payne; LS = Linda Seward; NF = Neil Fletcher; PC = Penny Cullington; SJE = Sarah Ebdon.



Left: *Clitocybe dealbata* (or for some *C. rivulosa* – Fool’s Funnel), a common but extremely poisonous grassland species now synonymised with *C. rivulosa* though there are many of us who reckon this is a separate species. A sample of today’s collection will be sequenced. (NF)

Right: *Pluteus chrysophaeus* (Yellow Shield) shown us at the end of the morning. (JP)



Far left above and left: *Scleroderma citrinum* (Common Earthball) (AP) with inset showing the typical thick rind around the outside with grey spore mass within. (LS) NB, this species is in fact far more scaly than *S. verrucosum* (Scaly Earthball)!



Left and below: a sizeable and very mature specimen of *Paxillus involutus* (Brown Rollrim) found today (LS) with no sign of inrolled cap margin! Compare with the inset showing an immature specimen taken previously at Stoke Common complete with typical tightly inrolled margin (PC).

Large examples of this mushroom regular cause confusion.



Right: *Gyroporus castaneus* (Chestnut Bolete) found just after our walk and one of extremely few boletes seen today. (SJE)





Above: not *Ramaria stricta* as we at first thought, but identified later by Jesper from this photo as the very rare *Artomyces pyxidatus* (Candelabra Coral) with just 6 previous UK records! Found in woody litter beside an Oak log (cvs)

Below: *Hericium cirrhatum* (Tiered Tooth) found by ranger and new member Jordan Payne just after our walk. This is a rare and beautiful species which favours fallen Beech and turns up occasionally at this site though our last record was 12 years ago! This was an exciting find and gave Jordan, Sarah and Jesper a real thrill! (SJE)

