

FUNGI WALK at BITTAM'S WOOD WEST, DANCERSEND on October 16th 2024

Penny Cullington

For this midweek walk our group of 10 plus Mick Jones met up at the Bittam's Wood car park in low cloud and a fine smur which continued for much of the morning, somewhat affecting the general visibility under the tree canopy. We worked our way gradually downhill covering an area not previously surveyed by the group and eventually overlapping into Round Spring Wood before making our slow ascent back to the cars – quite a slog for some of us! At first fungi were hard to find – much as we've been experiencing elsewhere recently – and we were further hampered by the leaf fall, early this year and doing its best to camouflage what few specimens were lurking beneath. However, as Mick predicted, things improved as we progressed and we even found good numbers of a few species which was something of a treat this season.

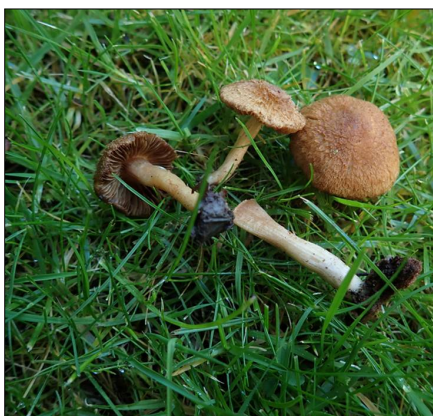
Notable by their complete absence today were the mycorrhizal genera *Russula*, *Lactarius* and *Amanita*, with just a single rather small *Xerocomellus* representing the boletes – this surely extraordinary for mid-October at this reserve usually rich in such species. As we're on the subject of mycorrhizal genera I'll continue that theme because we did find nice representatives of both *Inocybe* and *Tricholoma*, also one or two *Cortinarius*, as we moved under the more mature deciduous trees. First up was *Inocybe fraudans* (Pear Fibrecap) which has a combination of two features which make it nameable in the field. It tends to redden where damaged and has a remarkable fruity smell often likened to pear drops. The poor light and the soggy conditions

made for tricky photography today, especially early on, so I'm including here a library image (taken at Kingswood Tylers Green) together with Sarah's snap of one of today's specimens. Note the Beech leaves in both photos – this species is most frequent under Beech though there are a couple of other Beech associating Fibrecaps which also have this distinctive smell but they do not redden and have a different 'jizz'.



Above: *Inocybe fraudans* (PC with inset SJE)

Under the Hazel I was handed two separate collections of a smaller yellowish brown capped LBJ which had a rough slightly scaly surface. They were quite similar to *Inocybe hirtella* (Bitter Almond Fibrecap) - which I'd previously just added to the list - but lacked the marzipan smell of that species though I knew they rang a bell. As soon as I got one under the scope all became clear! *Inocybe muricellata* (no English name), with just 35 records on FRDBI, is not at all common but has remarkable cystidia with elegant narrow elongated necks and prominent thick walls which are bright yellow if viewed in ammonia. (See FM 11(4) for more details). No photo was taken in situ so my photo here was taken the following morning on my lawn with insert showing the said cystidia.



Left: *Inocybe muricellata* (PC)

A third Fibrecap collection was made which had a really dark red-brown cap and stem which at home matched the microscopy of the quite common *Inosperma maculatum* (Frosty Fibrecap), but that was where the similarity ended. This has been dried for sequencing – often a necessity with the Fibrecap genera which, far from becoming easier since the DNA era, are in many cases utterly impossible to identify to species with any safety!

Next up, two species of *Tricholoma* (Knight) which we found in abundance here under mixed Beech, Birch and Hazel. I was first shown a rather soggy and dilapidated mushroom well past its sell-by date and collapsing as we looked at it! I'd no idea of its identity but noted that it was yellowing strongly. This was soon followed by nice fresh specimens of ***Tricholoma scalpturatum*** (Yellowing Knight) with pale grey-brown slightly scaly cap and growing in almost complete rings. A characteristic of this species is the fact that it tends to turn yellow where damaged, a feature which helps to separate it from the many other grey-capped Knights. No doubt our dilapidated mushroom was also this species which also has a mealy smell, though smells today – with many mushrooms being pretty waterlogged – were not of that much use for identification purposes. I find this species very commonly under Birch.



Above: *Tricholoma scalpturatum* (SJE)

Nearby a much darker capped *Tricholoma* was found, also in good numbers and in good condition. With its almost black cap centre and scaly surface, also distinct blackening visible on some gill edges, this was ***Tricholoma atosquamosum*** (Dark Scaled Knight). I kept an eye on a couple of specimens at home to check whether the stem base showed any sign of either reddening or blueing the next morning – indicating either *T. orirubens* (identical but which turns blue and we found at the adjacent Round Spring Wood in 2022) or *T. basirubens* (also identical but turns red). However, the stem bases remained unchanged.



Above: *Tricholoma atosquamosum* (SJE)

One more mycorrhizal: ***Cortinarius pilatii*** (Lemonbalm Webcap) was found at the base of a Beech. This is a species which has turned up several times in the last few weeks and though with few records is probably very common. Only since the 2021 publication of the Kibby & Tortelli monograph have we started seriously looking at this genus and Section *Telamonia* in particular – before that it was not feasible to think of attempting a name but gradually our skills are hopefully improving with the excellent key provided therein. *C. pilatii* is an example of this – a typical LBJ, at first glance much like a Fibrecap, but amongst its characteristics a sweet scent, not detectable today till it started to dry out at home.



Right: *Cortinarius pilatii* (MJ)

Early on we found a white and very slimy *Hygrophorus* (Woodwax). Out came the KOH which is the easiest way to separate the two common white Beech associates in the field. A drop on the cap quickly stains ***H. discoxanthus*** (Yellowing Woodwax) yellow then brown but there's no change of colour to the cap of *H. eburneus* (Ivory Woodwax) which we didn't see today. The stem base of that species turns orange with KOH.



Left: *Hygrophorus discoxanthus* before testing with KOH (BS), and after (SJE)

Dancersend often abounds with the genus *Mycena* (Bonnet) though today our list includes only a modest 12 species. A couple of nice clusters were photogenic – both very common species but distinct and usually nameable in the field with experience. Sandwiched in between the images below is the tiny and unusual *Mycena pseudocorticola* (Steely Bonnet), quite common recently and new to the Reserve in 2022.



Left to right: three species of *Mycena*, *M. arcangeliana*, *M. pseudocorticola* and *M. haematopus*. (NF)



Another notable tiny mycenoid type was the delectable *Marasmius bulliardii* (no English name) – a species we’ve found here quite often in the past. Like a mini *Marasmius rotula* though beige rather than white and with a tiny dark central dot, it grows on old deciduous leaves – particularly Beech – and sometimes sports tiny side branches on the stem, each tipped with an undeveloped cap. We found this species in several spots today but this first example shows the branched stem really well. Note the size comparison with the leaf used as backdrop here.

Left: *Marasmius bulliardii* complete with side branches. (SJE)

When Sarah zoomed up on her photo to check it at the time she noticed a tiny discomycete on the leaf petiole just beside the stem base. Stephen worked on this at home and was able to identify it as *Rutstroemia petiolarum* (no English name), new to the county and rarely recorded though what records there are are predominantly on Beech petioles. Note the tiny diagnostic ‘teeth’ around the rim, also the stem base of the *Marasmius* which gives an idea of scale.

Right: *Rutstroemia petiolarum* (SP)



Another species new to the county was found by Stephen and identified later by Claudi. This was a dark red-brown corticioid found on rotten bare wood which I described in my notebook as ‘dark rust-brown dust’! None of us thought of the genus *Tomentella* at the time and Claudi tentatively suggested it might be the anomorph stage of a *Hypoxylon* which sounded very plausible. However, once under the scope it was clear to him that it was a basidiomycete having clamps, furthermore the spores were small, round and spiky – pointing to genus *Tomentella*. This is a large and notoriously tricky genus which few attempt and now with a complicated and technical key which Claudi bravely waded through. There are only around 30 UK records of *T. umbrinospora* and this sample is one of several things found today to be sequenced.



Above: *Tomentella umbrinospora* with micrograph x 1000 showing the spores and clamped hyphae. (cvs)

One collection which is eluding determination was found in the path amongst the Beech litter as we walked back. Its pink decurrent gills and white cap strongly suggested a species of *Clitopilus* (Miller) but it was almost stemless and rather misshapen and Sarah and I, who not only found it separately but also both made a stab of examining it at home, came up with conflicting results! So this is another collection now dried for sequencing together with a collection of *Hebeloma* which also confused me later.



Right: an unidentified mystery, possibly *Clitopilus scyphoides*? (pc)



Just one more pair of photos to share: a species I noted on my trudge back uphill and was glad of the stop for a breather! *Auricularia mesenterica* (Tripe Fungus) was liberally covering a mossy Beech stump though masquerading - at a brief glance - as *Trametes versicolor* (Turkeytail). One look at the underside reveals its similarity to *Auricularia auricula-judae* (Jelly Ear) with its gelatinous rubbery texture and wrinkled veinlike surface. It's not at all rare but not one we see regularly or often feature in these reports.



Left: *Auricularia mesenterica* (pc)

So our final list topped 90 which, considering today's poor light together with the disappointing season we're having, was not too bad! We found some interesting things and there was some good detective work from those who spent time later on identifying specimens, for which many thanks. Thanks also to the photographers.

For more details of what we found see the separate complete list which will be updated once we have some sequencing results (but don't hold your breath for those!)

Photographers

BS = Bob Simpson; CVS = Claudi Soler; MJ = Mick Jones ; NF = Neil Fletcher;
PC = Penny Cullington ; SJE = Sarah Ebdon ; SP = Stephen Plummer