FUNGI WALK at HOCKERIDGE WOOD on Wednesday October 9th 2023

Penny Cullington

Our select group of 10 met up on a damp and dismal morning, fairly resigned to the fact that we might not find much if the recent trend of poor fruiting was anything to go by, also the ground was likely to be well waterlogged after some torrential downpours. This proved to be the case and though it was drizzly at times and the trees were somewhat drippy, at least we didn't get soaked! We've not visited this site in autumn for 10 years (though several times in spring) and there are some interesting comparisons to be made between that visit and today's. Just 5 not particularly experienced attendees (with no Derek and I'm sure those listed won't object to that description!) found 84 species with notably prolific fruiting reported. Today with a larger and more experienced group we found the identical number of species despite struggling at times to find much at all. The two lists coincide to a certain degree but according to our database we added 33 new to the site today thanks to the skills and specialism of the attendees. All were agreed that the site has great potential - especially considering that we covered only the southern end of the wood; we also noted that now parking appears to be easier than in the past along the roadside verge a weekend visit next autumn would be feasible.

Heading south and then round the perimeter from the main gate we soon realised our work was going to be cut out and the list got going pretty slowly. A pure white Amanita was of interest but had lost most of its volva and failed dismally to smell of potato peelings. Out came the KOH just to eliminate the possibility of this being *A. virosa* (Destroying Angel) and a very rare find in the south – a drop on the white cap turns bright yellow but was predictably negative today. At home by the next morning as the specimen dried out a bit a faint potato smell could be detected, and the spores confirmed it to be the common *A. citrina* var. *alba* (False Deathcap). We suspect that many southern records of *A. virosa* are more than likely this species unless proven with KOH to be otherwise, but it *does* occur in the county so you never know.

As usual we were handed a good number of varied *Mycena* specimens during the morning, many of them miniscule and unnameable in the field and even a cluster of ***M. galopus*** (Milking Bonnet) adorning a stump confused us by refusing to produce latex when damaged. I still suspected it would prove to be that species and at home was saved having to work on it when a nick with a razor blade on a stem produced a nice convincing white droplet!

We've now found the beautiful ***Mycena pseudocorticola*** (Steely Bonnet) on four separate occasions this autumn and it was one of the many species new to the site today though just a singleton and clearly a bit damp! The accompanying tiny yellow discs – not collected in the heat of the moment so unfortunately not named - make the perfect backdrop. What a photogenic set-up!

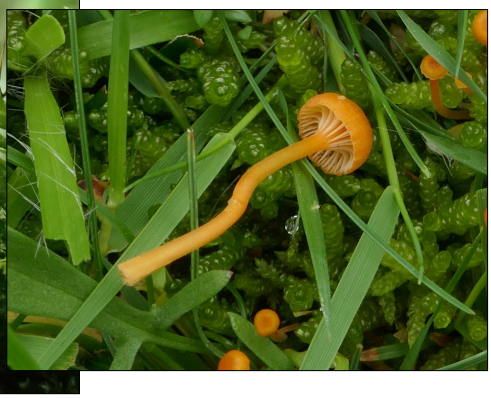
Left: the unmistakable *Mycena pseudocorticola* – one of many tiny Bonnet species but alone in being this stunning blue. (SJE)

Several of today's group delight in finding tiny species and I suspect also delight in challenging my microscopic skills to its limit and beyond! One such minute species was spotted by Gill on a dead Bracket stem but luckily for me was one which could be named in the field. ***Typhula quisquiliaris*** (Bracken Club) is possibly 5mm tall, no more, and though similar to some ascomycetes is actually a basidiomycete. It is host specific to Bracken forming lines along dead stems and is probably quite common though easily overlooked. The sharp-eyed will spot that in Stephen's central photo there are some simply tiny yellow discs also on this stem which he later identified as ***Phialina flaveola***, also host specific and with only around 60 UK records – new to the county. Stephen comments that the discs were no more than 0.3 mm across! Sarah's selfie gives scale and Barry's precision shows the *Typhula*'s finely hairy surface all over. (Incidentally he must have set up the sample the opposite way round from Stephen!)

Left to right: *Typhula quisquiliaris* found on a Bracken stem (SJE, SP, BW) and below: *Phialina flaveola* – a lab photo taken once the ID had been made. (SP)

As we've noticed at other sites recently, we found a few examples of two species often quoted as indicators of the latter part of the season – not good news! Both ***Rhodocollybia butyracea*** (Buttercap) and ***Clitocybe nebularis*** (Clouded Funnel) also appeared on our 2015 list here which was even earlier, late September, so perhaps we should refrain from quoting that idea which it seems no longer rings true.

Back to tiny things again. In thickish moss we found both species of Mosscap fruiting together, possibly not a common occurrence. ***Rickenella fibula*** (Orange Mosscap) is very common but ***R. swartzii*** (Collared Mosscap) is far less frequent. Both can be mistaken for Bonnets but their distinctive decurrent gills together with the moss substrate help to separate them, though often *R. fibula* can be very faded with the orange colour almost absent which sometimes misleads. The inset, included here because it shows the gills really well, was taken by Jackie Ewan at Stampwell Farm.



Left: *Rickenella fibula* found with *R. swartzii* today. (SJE with inset JE)

The woodland gradually became more varied with some conifer in the mix which soon threw up some different species. Under Birch our first ***Amanita muscaria*** (Fly Agaric) of the season made an appearance though the material was not photogenic (this was also on the 2015 list); here also was ***Tricholoma fulvum*** (Birch Knight) another species host specific to Birch and new to the site, confirmed by its yellow stem flesh when revealed.

A couple of specimens of a large brown *Pluteus* were collected from conifer, the host wood suggesting to us that it was worth checking at home in case this was not *P. cervinus* but the much less common ***P. pouzarianus*** (Conifer Shield). *P. cervinus* favours deciduous wood but can often be found on fallen conifer whereas *P. pouzarianus* only occurs on conifers, but the two are macroscopically almost identical. The only sure way to separate them is to examine the cap cuticle for clamps on the hyphal septa – see the photo caption for explanation. Clamps are present in Conifer Shield but absent in Deer Shield. Bob and I both took bits of cap home and independently found clamps, in fact both specimens were *P. pouzarianus* and new to the site today.

Right: bang in the middle of Bob's great microphoto (magnified x 1000) is a distinct clamp (the extended swelling like the thumb of a hand looking as if the fingers have been inserted inside!) beneath a septum (the straight division between the cylindrical hyphal cells). A few other septa are also visible though without clamps showing. (BS)

We found only three examples of bolete today, and one – found under mixed deciduous trees and Spruce - remains unnamed. It was small with cap only 3cm across but with firm flesh in cap and stem; the large pores were a slightly orange-tinged yellow (especially when it dried off a bit later) and there was no sign of blueing at all either in pores when damaged - my thumbnail marks can be seen on the pores - or flesh which was notably solid and entirely white within. Later when I noticed that *Xerocomus ferrugineus* (Rusty Bolete) was on our 2015 list it crossed my mind that this species was a possibility here but the lack of any blueing or of any stem network raises doubts. The specimen is dried for sequencing along with several other things found today.

Left: an unnamed bolete, possibly *Xerocomus* cf. *ferrugineus*? (BW)

Even more of a mystery was a small cluster of a tiny but distinctive bright orange fungus found by Gill on a thin deciduous fallen branch with smooth bark, possibly Birch. Examining with a handlens revealed a cap and stem but no gills, pointing to this being an ascomycete but not one any of us recognised. A second cluster was found a little later on similar substrate. On closer inspection at home it reminded me of the white *Cudoniella acicularis* (Oak Pin) in both shape and size but of course was entirely the wrong colour! A squash revealed it was indeed an asco and both Sarah and I found spores shaped like a canoe, ie pointed both ends – also found in *Cudoniella* as it happens. She and Stephen spent some time poring over books etc, as did I, in an attempt to find something similar but drew a

blank. The photo has been placed on a Facebook page in the hope that someone might be able to name it for us, also several other asco experts will be consulted. The collection will be sequenced.

Left: our unnamed mystery tiny little asco, each fruiting body less than 1`cm high. (BW)

Emerging from the mossy Spruce area and walking back along the main central ride, we found several interesting species. A group of little white immature mushrooms with extraordinarily pointed caps caused some interest and it was Sarah, not me, who thought she could detect a slight '*Inocybe*' spermatic smell! It was not until I checked one the next day when the cap had expanded enough to reveal beige gills together with the spermatic smell now more obvious that I realised she was spot on! ***Inocybe geophylla*** (White Fibrecap) now has many lookalike species revealed since the DNA era and can no longer be named with any reliability either in the field or in the lab as far as I'm concerned. This collection was certainly remarkably shaped, almost reminiscent of *Psilocybe semilanceata* (Magic Mushroom), so a sample will sent for sequencing.

Right: *Inocybe* cf. *geophylla* which fooled me today! (SJE)

Two sizeable collections of *Cortinarius* Section *Telamonia* were found and later keyed out fairly satisfactorily. One of these, ***C. pilatii*** (Lemonbalm Webcap) was in amazing numbers under Oak – a few were even spreading up the mossy trunk base. A typical small brown *Telamonia* - of which there are many! – it tends to retain a rim of white veil around the cap and as it dries it develops a sweet smell which to me was more of *Pelargonium* than Lemonbalm! A third Cortinarius, found by Barry, was large, yellow and so glutinous that he could only get hold of it using tweezers! From his description at the time I guessed it might well be ***C. delibutus*** (Yellow Webcap) which belongs in Section *Myxacium*, having species with slimy cap and stem - especially after rain! I took home a tiny immature specimen to work on later which confirmed this ID. This is the only *Myxacium* with a combination of yellow cap together with violaceous gills when young (the reason why when attempting to determine this genus one needs both immature and mature specimens to have a chance of getting to a name). It is considered quite common and favours Birch or less often Beech (as here) but we don't find it that often. Note the telltale sign of the genus on the upper stem: the rusty spore colour where some dropped spores have adhered to the remnants of cortina.

Left: *Cortinarius pilatii* (SJE), and far left: *Cortinarius delibutus* (BW). Both were new to the site today, and *C. pilatii* is new to the county.

This area also produced a couple of nice *Russula* species, one with bright red cap but a negative reaction to a drop of Guaiac on the stem proved to be ***R. silvestris*** (Woodland Brittlegill). Virtually identical to the much more common and host specific *R. nobilis* (Beechwood Sickener) which has a positive Guaiac reaction, *R. silvestris* favours Oak - as today - though is not host specific.

Also under the same Oak another *Russula* was spotted though it was somewhat soft and waterlogged putting even the genus in doubt. Sarah took it home suspecting it was possibly a species of *Hygrophorus* (Woodwax), but on finding typical *Russula* spores (ornamented and amyloid) she transferred the now somewhat dried specimen to me. From the cap cuticle cells I was able to confirm my original thoughts that this was *R. odorata* (no English name), considered uncommon but one I find reasonably often in the Chilterns, always under Oak and when in good condition with a sweet flowery smell.

Far left: *Russula silvestris*, and near left: *Russula odorata*, both found under the same Oak. (SJE)

Finally to a nice fresh but immature clump of ***Kuehneromyces mutabilis*** (Sheathed Woodtuft), found on a deciduous stump and displaying its typical two-tone cap colours though still rather pale – it's usually a stronger tan brown than shown here. The previous English name – Two-tone Pholiota – was replaced owing to its inclusion of the incorrect genus name, but it was a shame the 'Two-tone' element of that name was not retained - in my opinion!

Right: *Kuehneromyces mutabilis* (CW)

We had a thoroughly enjoyable morning despite the poor light and sporadic fungal fruiting and we very much hope to return here next year when we should aim to explore more of the site which has an unusual range of tree species. Thank you all for coming and to the photographers, of course. I'll try and update the report if we manage to get results from sequencing in a few months time. For more detail of what we found see the separate complete species list. For your enjoyment, some of Barry's exceptional slime mould photos are below as is becoming the norm this season.

Photographers
BS = Bob Simpson; BW = Barry Webb; CW = Claire Williams; JE = Jackie Ewan;
SJE = Sarah Ebon; SP – Stephen Plummer

Above: *Cribraria argillacea* just developing the delicate surface network that typifies this beautiful genus
Below: the remarkable plasmodium of *Dictydiaethalium plumbeum* found on a fallen trunk, possibly conifer

Above and below: *Physarum album* with typical nodding heads - immature above and mature below

Above and below: *Tubifera ferruginosa* found on bare conifer, plasmodium above, further developed below