

## FUNGI WALK at OAKLEY WOOD, Bernwood Forest September 25<sup>th</sup> 2024

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This was the first of our new midweek walks introduced this autumn, with 16 attendees – a few more than originally planned but luckily parking was no problem though local flooding and a nasty accident caused complicated journeys for some. It was a drizzly dull morning but no-one was complaining as we were grateful for the much needed rain in recent days to get the fungi season properly underway, though in our area it seems still reluctant to do so. For those of us who've experienced this site in full fungal flow it was instantly apparent that it was going to be hard going today; the often very fruitful grassy patch adjacent to the car park produced virtually nothing. But what we did find there was nice!

A tight clump of brown mushrooms was fruiting on a stump which looked suspiciously like Honey Fungus but for the lack of ring on the stems and also the rather pinkish gills. Unlike other members of genus *Armillaria*, ***Desarmillaria tabescens*** (Ringless Honey Fungus, now moved to a separate genus) is not at all common and though I've found young collections at Rushbeds Wood several times I'd not seen a large mature clump like this before that I could remember. It was not until reading through my reports for our last two visits here (in 2014 and 2021) afterwards that I found photos of it taken in probably exactly the same grassy area! The pinkish gill colour made me slightly doubtful at the time but this colour is mentioned in some literature and differs from the gills of the commoner species. We saw a second even larger and mature clump later in the morning so it is clearly a regular fruiter here.

Right: *Desarmillaria tabescens* (PC)



We moved on into the beautifully mossy rather Scottish-feeling area dominated by Spruce but with some Oak and Birch. This is an unusual habitat for the county and can be rich in species we tend not to find in our typical Chiltern woodlands. Today diligent searching produced a range of 'mycenoid' types collected on fallen wood, mossy soil or litter, most of which were unidentifiable in the field. Consequently it was not long before my containers



suitable for these tiny to small specimens were full to brimming. Sarah kindly took a few of them to check at home for me and between us we identified 12 different species of which 8 appear to be new to the site. One of these, ***Mycena abramsii*** (no English name) is in fact probably not that unusual but just under-recorded as it appears somewhat similar to many others, though with a microscope the cells on the gill edge are distinctive with long extending points which mark it out as different. Today it was found several times – I checked at least two different collections – and we have a photo to share (not that this helps much with recognising this particular species in future, but for those just getting to grips with what genus *Mycena* (Bonnet) looks like it is at least typical.

Left: *Mycena abramsii* – a typical member of this genus. (NF)

We were handed many collections of a tiny white *Mycena* found on wood which Sarah and I checked independently later, and nearly all of them turned out to be the same quite common species: *Mycena tenerrima* (Frosty Bonnet). This can sometimes be recognised in the field with a handlens by its small disc at the stem base and the fact that when fresh it has a fine coating as if sprinkled with icing sugar over both the cap and stem. After rain, however, this can be much less apparent, also the disc is not always that obvious, but the microscopic features on the gill edge are diagnostic. Most of you will have seen examples of this in situ today and will recall just how tiny these delicate little mushrooms are.

Right: *Mycena tenerrima* (BW)



Whilst discussing tiny mycenoid species, several people found collections of another tiny mushroom growing in groups or loose clusters on various different fallen woods but mainly on Spruce twigs. I suspected this was *Marasmiellus ramealis* (Twig Parachute) but was familiar with it on deciduous twigs, also bramble stems but was not sure that it occurred on fallen Spruce. However, checking the microscopy at home it was a perfect match and I found there exist many UK records on a range of different woods including various conifers so I'm confident this is correct.



Left: *Marasmiellus ramealis* on a Spruce twig. (LD)

On to something very different now. At one point Jim alerted me to the presence of an impressive tiered bracket fruiting on the base of a fallen Spruce. Though it took me some time to recall the full name I got there in the end! *Ischnoderma benzoinum* (Benzoin Bracket) is a conifer associate and not considered a rarity but is not at all common – one of two similar species, the other which fruits on Beech. This was quite young fresh material which was still surprisingly soft for a bracket, almost spongy, though it hardens as it becomes mature. We have records from 8 county sites, one of them being Oakley Wood almost exactly 10 years ago.



Left: *Ischnoderma benzoinum* (NF) with insert showing the pale soft pores underneath (JW)

Not long after this our only bolete of the day was found, a nice example of *Leccinum aurantiacum* (Orange Bolete) though immature and not yet showing its pale pores underneath.

The foxy red scabers (scale-like structures) on the stem, similar to the cap colour in this species, were clearly visible, separating it from the otherwise identical but much rarer *L. albotipitatum* which occurs only under Poplar and has almost white scabers. There was both Oak and Birch in the vicinity here, Oak being the associate tree with today's species.

Right: *Leccinum aurantiacum* – our only bolete of the day. (BW)

Soon after this we decided to move from the Spruce area into a predominantly Oak area, usually prolific in fungi at this time. Mistake! It didn't take us long to decide to retrace our tracks and after giving one other similar area a try which produced equally little we decided to return to the Spruce area spending the rest of the morning here.

Before this just one typical oak species was found and is worth a mention as it is common but often is not recognised. *Gymnopus fusipes* (Spindle Toughshank) likes to



fruit at the base of mature deciduous trees, most commonly Oak. It is brown like so many mushrooms, usually grows in tight clumps near to the trunk (ie on its near-surface roots), and if you pick one the tapering stem - much darker towards the base - is often fused to its neighbour. (The single upturned example in the photo here shows the colour and tapering.) Like many in this genus it is flexible and can be twisted without breaking, hence the English name for the genus.

Left: *Gymnopus fusipes*, virtually the only fungus found in the Oak area today. (NF)

When our only clump of the very common *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphur Tuft) was found on a conifer stump, Sarah got out her UV torch to demonstrate the unusual fluorescent property of this species – something I'd never seen before! Obviously this is best viewed at night but even in daylight the difference was quite remarkable.

Right and far right: Sarah demonstrating the amazing fluorescence of *Hypholoma fasciculare* with her UV torch! (RB)



I was handed a specimen of *Lepiota cristata* (Stinking Dapperling) at one point, then on finding a few more decided to set up a photo. Surprisingly this common species appears from our records not to have been found here before. However, as we collected one or two more it became clear that they were not all the same species despite growing close together. This was confirmed with the nose! *L. cristata* has an unmistakable smell but this was entirely missing from three we found which looked different. I've noticed before that often several species of this genus will appear together so if you find one it's worth checking around for any others. One look at the spores of the second collection was enough to confirm my thoughts that the second species was *Lepiota magnispora* (Yellowfoot Dapperling) despite the fact that there was no sign of yellow at the stem base here.



Above left: *Lepiota cristata*, and right: *Lepiota magnispora*, both fruiting more or less together. (PC)

Finally to a species of *Agaricus* (Mushroom) found by Claire in a mossy clump under Spruce. This was a species I recognised as one of the *Minores* group which are small and quite delicate and now known to be a species complex not yet satisfactorily sorted out. The darker cap centre with a slightly violaceous brown tinge pointed to *A. dulcidulus* (Rosy Wood Mushroom) and at home the small spores matched this well, but knowing from the confusing DNA results on a similar collection made at Bittam's Wood Dancersend two years ago that this species is not fully understood I've dried today's samples to be sequenced. Descriptions state that this species stains quickly yellow when bruised (as do many of this genus as we saw earlier with *A. silvicola* also found today) but the cap failed to do so when I scratched it later though the stem showed signs of yellowing.

Right: *Agaricus* cf. *dulcidulus*, a pretty delicate species of Mushroom to be sequenced. (CW)

So despite the disappointing conditions we ended up with a list of over 60 species, adding quite a few new to the site list though nothing very startling. Thanks to all for attending and particularly to our photographers who struggled with poor light today. I've added one of Barry's beautiful slime mould photos as a finale, of *Ceratiomyxa fruticulosa* found on quite a few fallen Spruce branches here.



Photographers

BW = Barry Webb, CW = Claire Williams; JW = Jim Wills; LD = Lynn Day; NF = Neil Fletcher; PC = Penny Cullington; RB = Rick Behl.



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