

## FUNGI WALK at PULLINGSHILL WOOD, October 2nd 2024

Penny Cullington

This midweek walk, with 13 attendees, was only our third visit here – the last in 2021 – though a few of us visit privately on a fairly regular basis owing to its growing reputation for impressive numbers of interesting mycorrhizal species. We were a little hampered today, however, by the dismal light and more seriously by the lack of permission from Natural England to collect from the SSSI part of the site despite repeated requests from the Woodland Trust who manage much of this area (though we weren't informed of this till late afternoon yesterday!). We therefore had to restrict any collecting to the peripheral area which had not been surveyed much previously. I now find myself needing to repeat comments on conditions made in the few earlier reports this season: poor fruiting, specimens not in great condition but excellent surveying and diligence from attendees showing increasing experience and skills resulting in a surprisingly long species list – our longest yet! It is most encouraging when so many specimens I'm shown are tentatively but correctly named by the collector and this is now reflected in the detailed list where previously only Derek's or my initials used to appear in the Identifier column!

We couldn't resist starting off with a quick check of the roadside bank and ditch now renowned for a range of special species including two stipitate hydroids found here last year and some stunning *Phlegmacium* members of genus *Cortinarius*. The ditch was disappointing but we did find one of the two hydroids under Beech which was just appearing in the same spot as last year. ***Hydnellum concrescens*** (Zoned Tooth) is not common anywhere except in the Caledonian Forest area in Scotland and apart from now two finds in Pullingshill Wood we have a few records from Burnham Beeches and one from nearby Marlow Common. On consulting with Kew expert Martyn Ainsworth last year he confirmed my ID from the photos but informed me that (like so many areas in fungi) this is a species complex still awaiting sorting out and that it's likely the species we find in the south is separate but as yet unnamed. Thus the additional 'cf' qualification (meaning similar to but not identical) has been included in our list. Last year's sample is being sequenced at the moment.



Above right: *Hydnellum cf. concrescens* just emerging today, at the top is a small section of the underside showing the typical spines or teeth of the genus. (SP)



We made our way back to the 'triangle' near the parking area, finding there one surprise. ***Clitocybe nebularis*** (Clouded Funnel) is a large mushroom and considered a late season fruiter, often found in rings in woodland litter. As the autumn season proper has apparently hardly started in our area this was a bit of a shock! Though still immature and therefore not yet expanded, the distinctive sweet slightly fruity smell was enough to confirm the ID.

Left: an early fruiting of *Clitocybe nebularis* (SP)

We had similar shocks later on when both *Rhodocollybia butyracea* (Buttercap) and *Hygrophorus eburneus* (Ivory Woodwax) were found – two more species considered late season fruiters. Fingers crossed that this is not an indication that things are already slowing down before they've even got properly going!



We now started to explore the area east of the road and were soon finding a good variety of *Mycena* (Bonnet) species beginning to pop up, on fallen wood, in leaf litter, on mossy bark and so on. Of the 13 species on our list a few were nameable in the field but most were shared out between Sarah and myself to work on later. One nice little cluster on woody debris was photogenic and a typical example of the genus, but it was not until after the photo was taken and one was picked to take home that we instantly knew which species it was. The telltale white latex unique to *Mycena galopus* (Milking Bonnet) was instantly apparent, thankfully making one less sample to have to examine later!

Left: *Mycena galopus* with inset showing its white latex. (BW)

Another typical example of the genus which turned up in several places was *Mycena haematopus* (Burgundydrop Bonnet) – another with latex in the stem but this time dark reddish wine. The cap and stem also tend to be tinted this colour giving a clue to its identity in the field before testing for the latex. Unlike the *Mycena* above, this one is always on fallen wood and almost always in clusters. (The word 'always' is used with some hesitation when referring to anything mycological!)



Right: *Mycena haematopus* (BW)



Above: *Chlorophyllum rhacodes* (PC)

In contrast to genus *Mycena*, nearby amongst some bracken a group of large scaly capped mushrooms were noticed and recognised as Parasols. The fibrous stem which lacked any snakeskin markings pointed to this being *Chlorophyllum rhacodes* (Shaggy Parasol) and a scratch on the stem turning quickly orange confirmed this – visible in the immature prostrate specimen in the photo.

At one point I was handed a rather odd-looking greyish 'button' with white veil remnants on the still unexpanded cap. Suspecting this was *Coprinopsis picacea* (Magpie Inkcap) I had a quick sniff! Once smelt never forgotten! Even at this immature stage the unpleasant stink of this mushroom was unmistakable, and as we continued further more developed examples were found.

Right: *Coprinopsis picacea* semi-developed complete with approaching slug! (SJE)





Above: *Amanita phalloides* (SJE)

We saw extremely few species or specimens of *Amanita* but one I was particularly pleased to see did turn up and is a regular at this site. *Amanita phalloides* (Deathcap) literally does what it says on the tin: its cap is full of death! My reason for pleasure when finding this deadly poisonous mushroom is not just its natural beauty but that it gives the opportunity to explain how to recognise it to anyone unfamiliar with it. Catastrophic accidents do happen though thankfully rarely in this country, so learning to distinguish this species from others is important and might well be a matter of life or death to someone.

A fallen Birch trunk we came across had three different species of bracket adorning it – all now common species in this area. *Fomitopsis betulina* (Birch Bracket) is one of our commonest species, as also is *Ganoderma australe* (Southern Bracket), but *Fomes fomentarius* (Hoof Bracket) was a rarity until the last few years and considered common only in Scotland and the north of England. Both Birch and Hoof brackets only occur on Birch but this is not such a common host for Southern Bracket (usually on Beech or Oak) though we saw several other examples of it on this host here today.



Above: the exquisite *Mycena pseudocorticola* complete with raindrop on the cap today. (BW)

Close by was a large fallen Beech with a somewhat mossy trunk. The sharp-eyed Stephen – always on the lookout for tiny fungi - spotted a miniscule *Mycena* in the moss and one glance told me this was the beautiful *Mycena pseudocorticola* (Steely Bonnet). It is not that common though we now have a growing number of sites where it's been seen, always on mossy bark of fallen deciduous wood. A quick search of other mossy patches on this same trunk soon produced several other caps just emerging. Its stunning steely blue colour is unique amongst the genus though sometimes it can be just grey, and when later at home I checked a grey specimen I'd been handed earlier it proved to be the same. Barry mentioned it is also now fruiting at Burnham Beeches, furthermore I received a photo of it from Stampwell Farm today as well. No coincidence! This happens regularly - a fact that is born out time and time again as I often receive photos of the same species appearing in different parts of the county when sent in for Members' Finds.

Disappointingly few species of *Russula* (Brittle Gill) were found today, in fact the genus - together with the many Bolete genera - has been remarkably poorly represented so far especially when chalk Beechwoods usually abound with them through September and early October. However, amongst our approaching 100 species total there are many new additions for the site

though I suspect this is due to the fact that the lack of many of the showier large species which occur here meant we spent more time searching for other less conspicuous things.

Worth a mention here is a cluster of yellow mushrooms found on bare wood which at first glance could have been *Gymnopilus penetrans* (Common Rustgill) which was already on our species list. They just didn't quite have the right jizz to Sarah and me, however, and checking at home we independently determined this as the quite unusual *Pholiota tuberculosa* (no English name) and which I'd had my suspicions at the time that it just might be. The smaller bright yellow specimen (inset) put me onto the species but I was not familiar with the considerably darker rustier older examples. This genus (Scalycap) is often large and showy, very obviously scaly and growing in tight clusters on wood, so today's smallish species is atypical and as such may well get misidentified though the gill edge cells are distinctive and plentiful.



Right: *Pholiota tuberculosa* – not often recorded. (SJE)

With a long list there are bound to be species of interest I've omitted here – my apologies – but I have to include one which puzzled several of us this morning and was not resolved until a gill was examined under the scope. Barry handed me a stick with three small mycenoid mushrooms which from their rather flat caps and general jizz I instantly suspected might be something very different. It went in a box for later. Then Claudi found what he thought was a small pale greyish brown *Pluteus* though not obviously on wood and with white gills which could have been free though it was difficult to tell. (*Pluteus* can often have white gills when immature, not becoming pink till later on.) This went in a box as well but luckily for us had its photo taken first! A bit later a group of about 6 – too large for a *Mycena* – were found in deep woody litter in a dark corner and again we puzzled over it but still the penny didn't drop (excuse the pun!). In fact I incorrectly

thought it might well be *Bolbitius reticulatus* (Netted Fieldcap) which it strongly resembled. This was the first mushroom I checked at home and as soon as I saw the spores I knew what it was. *Hydropodia subalpina* (no English name and previously *Hydropus subalpinus*) is considered a rarity though I suspect that this is purely because it is dismissed as yet another *Mycena* because we now find it quite regularly locally. A scope quickly reveals allantoid spores (cylindrical but slightly curved like a sausage) together with very large cystidia all over the gills – totally different from the microscopy of any *Mycena* or *Pluteus*. Barry's small specimens on the stick were also this

species as I had in fact suspected. Though the larger specimens were not obviously on wood today, when we probed further we found they were indeed on submerged sticks which fits correctly with the species description. Though I've now seen it many times, I've only ever found singletons, so today's collection was pretty special!



Left: *Hydropodia subalpina* which kept us guessing all morning! The insert shows one of the cystidia. (cvs)

As always, thanks to all for coming, searching and getting cameras out and a special thank you to Claudi for helping me lead today. It was a dingy sort of morning but a worthwhile one. For more detail for what we found see the separate species list. I'll do my usual and add a few more photos below.

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; CS = Claudi Soler; PC = Penny Cullington; SJE = Sarah Ebdon; SP = Stephen Plummer



What a stunning photo! Two jelly fungi for the price of one on a Beech trunk: above is the larger *Neobulgaria pura* (Beech Jelly Disc) and below it *Ascocoryne sarcoides* (Purple Jelly Disc). They are sometimes confused but when close together as here the differences become obvious. (BW)



Left: *Cortinarius croceocaeruleus* (Handsome Webcap), a speciality of calcareous Beech woodland and a regular at this site, though sadly only just beginning to fruit today. It is a small member of Section *Phlegmacium* and the specimen here was only about 5 cm tall. (CVS)



Left: a pair of *Pluteus cervinus* (Deer Shield) deep in conversation. (SJE)

Above: a large clump of *Meripilus giganteus* (Giant Polypore) typically surrounding a Beech trunk. (SP)



To conclude, three slime moulds found today (BW).

Above right: *Lycogala* cf. *terrestre*, now known to be a species complex.

Left and above: *Trichia varia* – white when immature but bright yellow later before drying off when the spores are mature.

Below: *Ceratiomyxa porioides* though still at an early stage.

