

FUNGI WALK at STOKE COMMON, November 17th 2024

Penny Cullington

We were 20 strong this morning, sadly meeting up for our last walk of the autumn season. It was fine and sunny – in fact as good as it gets for mid-November (and it seems almost unbelievable that two days later as I write this there's two inches of snow in the garden!). Expectations were not high that we'd find that much to celebrate today as we've become pretty well resigned to the fact that over the last few months autumn woodland fungi-hunting has been possibly the worst for years – certainly the most disappointing that I can recall. This site, however, has perhaps the most varied mix of habitats of all our regular county sites so fingers were crossed that at least the open areas would prove reasonably productive. They did! These were the areas we focussed on and it paid dividends with even some mycorrhizal genera being reasonably well represented. Our list – lengthy for this late in the season - includes four species of *Amanita* (albeit singletons), six different boletes, two species of *Tricholoma*, one *Cortinarius*, two species of *Inocybe*, four of *Lactarius* and amazingly nine of *Russula* – easily a record for the season and boosted today by the presence of *Russula* specialist Mario Tortelli!

Derek and I were assisted not only by Mario but also by Jesper Launder, Claudi Soler, Barry Webb and Sarah Ebdon, all of whom added their expertise and various specialisms which has resulted in our list of 110 species of which over 20 appear to be new to the site with some rarities amongst them. It's been quite a task to know how to go about tackling this lot but here goes!

We hoped to see a few of the special things which tend to be on show here but are rare elsewhere in the county, mostly on account of the site's acid sandy soil and preponderance of Pine. I mentioned as we set out to keep an eye out for the three species of *Suillus* which occur only under Pine, and all three are on the list though only one was seen in any numbers. *Suillus luteus* (Slippery Jack) is one of the easiest boletes to name in the field; not only does it have a cocoa brown slimy cap but the pores are tiny, pale yellow and do not stain blue when pressed, and when young (as most examples were today) the pores are protected by a thick white membrane which eventually forms a ring on the stem as the cap expands – an unusual feature amongst boletes. (I'm including a photo of Claudi's taken here in 2022 to illustrate the mature species which we didn't see examples of today.)

Right: above *Suillus luteus* with several buttons found today (PC), and below showing mature fruitbodies with pores and ring clearly visible (CVS 2022)



Another bolete worth a mention is an unusual species of *Leccinum* which we've found here a couple of times before. *L. cyaneobasileucum* (Greyshank Bolete) is one of the many Birch associates in this genus and is recognised by its dull greyish brown colours and very pale 'scabers' on the stem which give a woolly appearance. The stem flesh hardly discolours when exposed to air but does tend to stain blue-green at the base as can just be seen in the RH specimen in today's photo.

Left: *Leccinum cyaneobasileucum* (MT)



On to the genus *Lactarius* now because there's a species – *Lactarius helvus* (Fenugreek Milkcap) - which is a regular under Pine and Birch at this site which tends to confuse because its milk, when the gills are damaged, is colourless therefore

appearing like dew or rain droplets and easily missed. Its other distinctive feature is its clear smell of curry powder (fenugreek to be exact), so this was another species I'd asked people to be on the look out for. We found plenty of examples but there was a problem! Not one specimen could be persuaded to produce a droplet of any sort, nor was the smell detectable! This was a typical example of the joys of fungi-hunting late in the season when nothing behaves quite as it should and smells are entirely unpredictable. No photo to share today but see my 2023 report for Stoke Common on the website for a photo showing those droplets.

One *Lactarius* which was behaving as it should today was *L. hepaticus* (Liver Milkcap) which is another exclusively Pine associate. It has a dark liver-brown cap and stem, produces white milk which turns pale yellow on a hanky (as in the much more common Birch associate *L. tabidus*). It has an oily smell reminiscent of *Lactarius quietus* (Oakbug Milkcap). I have to include Claudi's amazing photo of the spores of this species which, when viewed in Melzer's reagent, reveal their ornamentation of warts and reticulate ridges.

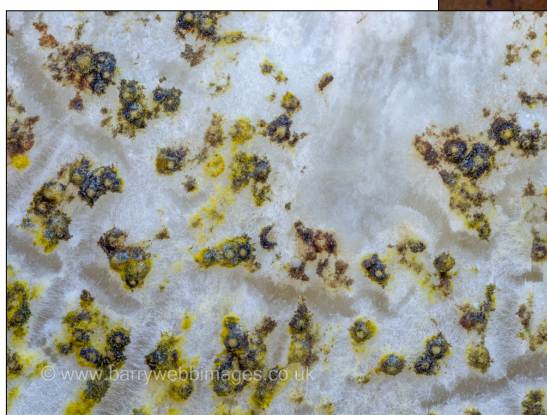
Right: *Lactarius hepaticus* with insert of the spores x 1000 (cvs)



Of the genus *Russula* found today the most common was *R. emetica* (Sickener) – yet another exclusively Pine associate and a regular here. Its warm pink-red cap contrasting with white gills and stem make it an easy one to recognise given this tree association. If in doubt, taste it! It's burning hot!

Left: *Russula emetica* (MT)

atropurpurea (Purple Brittlegill) is one of our commonest Brittlegills (in a normal year, that is!), but none of us had seen this strange spotty green, yellow and white formation on the underside which was clearly invading it. This Hypomycete fungus is mystifying us so far and is still to be identified and is one of several collections made today which we hope to get sequenced.



Above and left: an unidentified Hypomycete found on *Russula atropurpurea* (MT with insert BW)



Cortinarius semisanguineus (Surprise Webcap) was found by several people and seems to be having a late flush as we've found it several times under Pine recently. The surprise element – ie the blood red gills which one would expect to be rusty brown in this genus – was not showing to its best today but still left no doubt that they were suitable red! The species occurs under both Pine and Birch and, though quite recently split into two separate species on account of the tree association, is now contrary to the modern trend apparently reunited as one species again!

Left: *Cortinarius semisanguineus* (MT)

Moving now to some smaller species, many people showed me specimens of the LBJ ***Baeospora myosura*** (Conifer Conecap) - a common species under the Pines but confusing to identify when not obviously fruiting on a fallen cone as seen in this photo. Often the cone will have disintegrated thus the most obvious clue to its identity is missing, in which case the pale buff cap and stem together with very crowded gills should be sufficient. Beware, however, of another LBJ which grows on fallen cones! The genus *Strobilurus* (not seen today) also grows on cones – both Pine and Spruce according to species – but is much less common, has a more mycenoid appearance, a smoother darker cap and often a longer less stocky stem which discolours yellow towards the base. Microscopic features are also very different.



Right: *Baeospora myosura* (JL)



I was expecting to see more waxcaps here today as they've been having a bit of a bonanza recently. We did find a few but not many, and one on our list I discovered later was surprisingly new to the site though only these very small examples were found. ***Gliophorus psittacinus*** (Parrot Waxcap) is often one of the commonest in lawns and grassy places and also one of the easiest to name if one notes the slimy over-all coating together with green colours. The green can be fickle and sometimes missing on the cap but if in doubt check for the telltale green at the stem apex.

Left: *Gliophorus psittacinus* (JL)

On a fallen leaf a tiny whitish *Mycena* (Bonnet) was found and when examined closely it clearly had a pinkish tinge. There are many small whitish species of *Mycena* but only one – ***M. smithiana*** (Pink Oakleaf Bonnet) which sports this colour and it only occurs on Oak leaves! The leaf in this case was easily identifiable confirming its ID in the field, and the specimen was later checked by Claudi who found the small hedgehog-like cystidia on the gill edge. This was another species new to the site today. (The sharp-eyed amongst you will notice the leaf in Claudi's photos is not Oak! I suspect it was placed there later for background to the photo and I can confirm the host leaf was indeed Oak!)



Right: *Mycena smithiana* (cvs)



Stoke Common is often grazed by cattle, consequently there is plenty of dung on site to provide yet another useful substrate, adding to the variety of species we come across. The genus *Panaeolus* (Mottlegill) is often well represented here, particularly *P. papilionaceus* (Petticoat Mottlegill) which thrives on dung of all kinds, especially the mooring sort! It happens to be one of the easier members of the genus to name because apart from its dung host it has a campanulate cap which sports a trim frilly white edge (hence its English name). Today several oldish examples were found which had all but lost their petticoats but a few were in perfect condition. The larger example seen here is showing the typical cracking cap surface which often develops.

Left: *Panaeolus papilionaceus* (PC)

Also found on the cow dung were several miniscule species of Inkcap. One of these (showing nice young examples) was identified later by Derek as *Tulosesus pellucidus* (Transparent Inkcap) – an unusual species he'd found and had sequenced from here in 2021, and had also recorded from Burnham Beeches on pony dung.

Right: *Tulosesus pellucidus* (MT)



Still on the dung theme, the tiny orange discs seen in Mario's Inkcap photo were the subject of much discussion, and careful examination with a handlens revealed a delicate circle of eyelash-like



hairs around the rim and also on the underside. Despite the apparent appearance of the genus *Scutellinia* (Eyelash) we were fairly sure this would prove to belong to the genus *Cheilymenia* which unlike *Scutellinia* occurs on dung and can also have said 'eyelashes'. In fact five of us took samples home to work on and the general consensus was that this was *Cheilymenia coprinaria* (no English name) and possibly new to the county. In the past there's been some confusion with synonymy between this species and *C. fimicola* but the latest thinking and keys now separate them. Because of this it is impossible to tell which of the 100 or so FRDBI records refer to *C. coprinaria* s.s., but there's no doubt that it is a very pretty little fungus!

Left: *Cheilymenia coprinaria* with insert of the 'eyelashes' magnified x 1000 (DJS)



As I now seem to be running into page 5(!) I'll sign off here but add some more photos worthy of inclusion below. Today's walk was a fitting end to what has been a busy, well supported and interesting season if not flushed with quantities of fungi! I'd like to thank everyone for coming - we had a fun morning with lots of camaraderie and the growing competence and knowledge within the group is a real pleasure to see. The enthusiasm now apparent in BFG is most gratifying to behold and lets hope for a corker of a season in 2025 – I think we deserve one, don't you?!

Many thanks to our leaders today and as always to our brilliant band of photographers. For full details of what we found see the separate species list.

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; CVS = Claudi Soler; DJS =Derek Schafer; JL = Jesper Launder;
 MT = Mario Tortelli; PC = Penny Cullington; SJE = Sarah Ebdon; SP = Stephen Plummer.



Above left: *Ascocoryne cf. inflata* nom. prov. on bare wood, and above right: *Byssonectria terrestris* on dung, both species keyed out by Sarah, the first possibly new to the UK and the second also found here in 2023 when new to the county. (SJE)



Above left: *Leotia lubrica* (Jellybaby) (BW)

right: *Didymium clavus* (a slime mould) (BW)

centre: *Gymnopus androsaceus* (Horsehair Parachute) (cvs)



Left : *Didymium squamulosum* (a slime mould) (BW)



Above left: *Cylindrium aeruginosum* on an Oak leaf (SP), and right: *Lachnum apalum* on a Juncus stem (BW)



Above: two views of the unusual *Leucogyrophana mollusca* (no English name), also found here in 2022 (SJE & CVS)

Below: a beautiful view of Stoke Common this morning (SJE)

