



BFG

Buckinghamshire Fungus Group

Newsletter September 2004 No5

Secretary and Recorded
Newsletter Editor

Derek Schafer
Penny Cullington

Yes, the autumn season is already upon us, with the promise of much fruiting in the forest (as opposed to much binding in the marsh - sorry, that really dates me, but if you recognise the quote then it dates you as well!!)

Firstly, welcome to any members for whom this is the first newsletter, our hope is that you will find this informative and tempt you to attend the forays – programme attached. As with our neighbours, the Herts Fungi Group, we've found our numbers somewhat thin on the ground at forays over the last two years, no doubt following the fungi's lead – also increasingly thin on the ground due to the hot summers and dry autumns early on. However, this year things have started moving much earlier and in much more profusion; so fingers crossed for some really good foraging, and let's hope we don't get stymied by early frosts!

FORAY PROGRAMME

You will have already received our foray programme in April, so the attached 2004 programme is mainly a prompt but we have updated some of the information about the Herts Fungi Group's foray programme and added a short foray this Friday (25th September) at Pulpit Hill, followed by an identification session at Duck End House. If you can't get to the foray, feel free to collect specimens in your local area and bring them along to the identification session. Hopefully this will provide some material for our first event on Sat Sept 25th at Aylesbury County Museum, am and pm. This is the third year we've co-operated with the Museum to put on a display (fungi, photos, books, etc) and it has been most rewarding and very popular with the public, especially children. Do please collect good material of anything, however common and especially eye-catchers that people will have noticed in passing, and bring it along. Aim to arrive around 10.00, as it takes quite a time to set out and label all the material, and we open to the Public at 11.00.

MEMBERS' ADDRESS LIST

Also included is a new address list. Please note that we have only included those who ticked the box on the Membership Renewal Form saying they were happy to have their details included, so if you are not on the list and would like to be, or if any of your details need correcting or updating, please let Derek know. May we stress that this information is circulated solely for the purpose of enabling members to contact one another, and is therefore *not* to be handed out further afield without a member's consent. We are not intending to send out record lists to everyone this year, but these will be available (when ready!) to anyone on request. Emailing would certainly be more economical on paper and postage, but we are happy to snailmail to anyone not online.

NEW INSURANCE & CONSTITUTION

We've been insured as a group with Zurich Insurance through our affiliation with the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers – at a sharply higher rate for the last two years – last year's premium very nearly equalled the total membership subs! As Derek set out in his circular at the end of June, we hoping to benefit from new group insurance provided by the British Mycological Society, costing us merely an annual affiliation fee of £25 with no other charge. We now have in place a BFG Constitution – approved on July 22nd - to enable us to qualify for this, but unfortunately there has been a delay on the part of the BMS, so we will carry on as before for another year.

I apologise for the fact that most of the short articles that follow seem by accident to have a "common" theme. We are also pleased to include two pieces sent in by members, for which many thanks. It would be nice to think they are setting a trend and that others will be encouraged to follow suit for future newsletters. Do try your hand – it's quite fun once you start! Anything of interest on a fungal theme would be most welcome.

COMMON WOOD

When Common Wood, near Tylers Green, was put up for sale, Penn and Tylers Green Residents Society managed to raise sufficient funds through donations from the public and interested bodies to get a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to purchase the majority of the wood. Unfortunately by this time some small sections had already been purchased; however, most of Common Wood has now been saved for on-going public access and will be used as an educational resource by local schools. Wycombe Wildlife Group has been asked to undertake an ecological study of the wood and the results will be used in determining its future management.

On 11th November '03 I led a well-attended fungus spotting walk around part of Common Wood to assess its potential value as a habitat for fungi, and with Penny's help nearly 50 species were identified. Adding on a few more species found the day before, and on subsequent visits to the wood, the total number of species recorded in the wood to date (*Feb '04*) comes to 68. As 2003 was not a good year for fungi, the number of species found so far in Common Wood is encouraging and perhaps indicates that the wood might even prove to be as good as the adjacent Penn Wood. Perhaps this location could be added to the BFG survey programme for 2004.

Roger Wilding

The number of species recorded here has increased somewhat since Feb, including one of very special interest – see article below on new British record. We hope to include Common Wood in our foray at Penn Wood on Sun., Nov 14th PC

IF NOT S.O.D. THEN WHAT?

Last December, I happened upon the end of a TV news report about Sudden Oak Death broadcast from Burnham Beeches. My heart sank as I put two and two together and made five (an unfortunate habit of mine) assuming this dreaded pathogen had just been found there. It started me looking very carefully at the beeches in my area, as I live only ten miles from this site.

Imagine my horror when walking in Common Wood in April I came across a beech with the tell-tale red oozing sores on the lower trunk, looking for all the world like the photo shown in Field Mycology Volume 5(1) in Shelley Evans's Conservation Corner – my copy had fallen on the mat only a few weeks earlier. This photo is of southern red oak, but I knew that beech was a very likely victim for this disease in Britain, and I feared the worst.

I returned armed with a camera and then emailed the resulting photos to Helen Read, conservation officer at Burnham Beeches, who immediately corrected my mistake over S.O.D. being found there - it just happened to be a convenient location from which to

make the report, although apparently many others had also jumped to my same incorrect conclusion. However, my photos alarmed her also, and she recommended I send them off to the Forestry Commission.

This resulted in a visit in early June from David Rose (from their pathology department) who had confirmed my photos *looked just like* *Phytophthora ramorum* but thought it much more likely to be one of two other phytophtheras, as *ramorum* has so far only been found on beech within three metres of infected shrubs such as rhododendron or viburnum, and I'd already noted these weren't present at the site. Nevertheless, he felt the tree should be checked.

We met up, my feeling much relief that S.O.D. was so unlikely and anticipating at least a new county record for the site when he identified the correct pathogen, but we were both in for a surprise!

First he sliced off the bark around one of the sores, revealing the typical red staining underneath – just as shown in the FM picture. This he stored in a sealed bag for further examination, but he then had a look at the wounded area with my x10 lens and noticed a suspicious puncture hole in its centre. He kept very quiet at this point but was smiling while he dug a bit deeper to remove another sliver of wood; the smile then turned to a gasp and a laugh when he examined this piece with the lens, and then handed it to me for inspection. There lay the culprit, the cause of the bleeding sores, lodged in the fragment of wood: a pellet from an airgun!

My initial reaction was amazement, I had no idea these symptoms could be caused by airgun damage. He also was surprised because the tell-tale circular spray of damage normally found much higher up the trunk (where squirrels or pigeons might be the target) was missing - this tree's damage was all near the bottom of the trunk, with five or six bleeding areas fairly randomly placed, so he'd been convinced it was fungal damage – at the least maybe a *nectria* if not a *phytophthora*.

My second reaction was embarrassment that I'd brought him all this way on a wild goose chase, but he assured me that he'd also learnt from the experience and the tree was well worth photoing as an atypical example for future reference. He still couldn't work out how that pattern of pellets could have been formed, but the evidence was indisputable.

So if you should come across similar symptoms on a trunk, be comforted that S.O.D. has yet to be found in this country on any tree more than three metres away from infected shrubs. It has so far been discovered on rhododendron, camellia, pieris, kalmia, viburnum, syringa and pot-grown yew trees, always emanating from garden centres, and has so far only been known to spread once in Sussex to southern red oak (the one pictured in FM), and also in Cornwall to four holm

oaks, two beeches, one sweet chestnut and one horse chestnut.

However, as *Phytophthora ramorum* is a notifiable disease, if you do find a tree showing these symptoms near to any of these shrubs, then contact the Forestry Commission Plant Health: 01420-22255,

Email: ddas@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

Better safe than soddy! (Apologies!) PC

NEW BRITISH RECORD FOR COMMON WOOD

In early July Paul and I were dog-walking / fungi-hunting in Common Wood and collected this small button *Russula* pushing through the beech litter (not the same beech as in the article above!). I thought possibly very young *R. vesca* from the pink colour mixed with cream, but a crystal (FE) on the stem and gills soon dismissed this theory. Then I wondered about *R. luteotacta* – very similar colours and with a cuticle reluctant to peel - so it was duly bruised to see if the tell-tale bright yellow staining would appear. It didn't. So it got properly looked at two days later, and using G. Kibby's key led me past *R. luteotacta* to *R. lepidicolor*.

Two reactions: excitement because this species had an asterisk beside it, indicating it's not yet British but is considered possibly likely, and doubt because I'd probably made a mistake somewhere along the line.

As it's not British there was no mention of this species in Phillips or Rayner, so I turned to Galli and Romagnesi for assistance. I now learnt that there are not one but three species which have the give-away bright carmine pink reaction to sulphovanillin placed on the stipe: *R. aurora* = *rosea* is the fairly common one, but the other two are *lepidicolor* and *minitula* – easily split because *minitula* is fragile and peels almost completely whereas *lepidicolor* is firm and hardly peels at all – this fitted my specimen perfectly (*R. aurora* falls between the two, peeling half way).

Time for the (literally) acid test! Bingo! It went instantly bright pink – I could hardly believe my eyes! I carefully photoed and dried the one fruitbody, and a week later we found a further specimen at Burnham Beeches. Both the dried and fresh material plus a spore print went to Geoffrey Kibby who has now confirmed the identification, and we have since found it in Hodgemoor Woods, in Common Wood again (Sept), also Jacqui Derby collected it from Rannoch in Perthshire (Aug) and Antony Burnham from Great Wood in Herts (Sept).

So it's obviously not a rarity but yet another *russula* which is not easy to identify in the field but all is revealed in the lab!

TWO COMMON AND CONFUSEABLE FUNGI

Have you ever found a middle sized brown mushroom on a fallen beech branch and said "*Pluteus cervinus*" without so much as a glance underneath to check? If so, are you aware that there is an equally common lookalike in the form of *Megacollybia platyphylla* which also often occurs on wood? (It has been abundant in the Chilterns during August.) Compare Phillips p 119 with p 44 (under it's older genus name of *Tricholomopsis*) and have a read of the descriptions – see what I mean?

Macroscopic similarities:-

- ◆ Rough size, shape and colour of cap
- ◆ Radial streaking on cap
- ◆ White gill colour before maturity
- ◆ Lack of distinctive smell
- ◆ Habitat and tree association (particularly beech)
- ◆ Common occurrence in spring, summer and autumn

The obvious differences:-

- | <u><i>Pluteus c.</i></u> | <u><i>Megacollybia p.</i></u> |
|------------------------------|--|
| ◆ Gills free | Gills adnate/subdecurrent |
| ◆ Gills pink when mature | Gills cream when mature |
| ◆ Gills fairly crowded | Gills widely spaced |
| ◆ Stipe base with no strands | Stipe base with white mycelial strands |
| ◆ Only on wood | On wood or soil near trunks |

Under the microscope these two are unmistakable: the spores are not unlike but the cystidia on the gill face are very distinctive and easily found in *Pluteus cervinus* - large with cats' ears / antlers on top (is this where it's common names of Deer Stalker or Deer Shield come from?). However, *Megacollybia platyphylla*'s cystidia are only on the gill edge, much smaller and balloon shaped. This fungus has a chequered history with regard to its genus name, having been placed in *Collybia*, *Tricholomopsis* and even *Oudemansiella* at one time. It seems settled at present in a genus created just for this one species, but maybe DNA testing will come up with a further solution to its nomenclature in the future, who knows!

Conclusion:-

- ◆ Collect it carefully and look for the presence of the white strands (rhizomes) – a real giveaway although not always present / obvious
- ◆ Check the gill attachment and colour
- ◆ If still undecided, look for the cystidia with a microscope. It's always satisfying to find the "antlers"; but be warned: there are *many* other *pluteus* species, all grow on wood, and the majority don't have "antlers" – so maybe you've collected one of those. Then the fun really starts!

(If you are mystified by any of the words we use, do come along to an i.d. session. They will be explained!)

Visite le Musée du Champignon! by Justin Long - June 2004



It could be compared to trekking for days through a barren desert and happening across a lush, verdant oasis. In this case, though, the desert was the dry French countryside in June and the oasis was the largest mushroom museum in Europe.

Imagine my delight when arriving at our Saumur campsite we discovered we were very near to the Musée du Champignon. Apparently I let out an exclamation of joy - the kind Penny might make on finding a large Boletus (as anyone who has forayed with Penny will know, her enthusiasm is infectious!). We were soon on our way there, my three small boys in tow, although they were a little disappointed to find not dragons in the caves, but mushrooms - thousands of them!

We donned fleeces at the entrance to protect against the temperature which the limestone rock maintains at a fairly steady 15°C, although this gets cooler still in the deeper parts of the cave. The site is divided into two sections: the mushroom farm where fungi is cultivated for sale to market, and the wild fungi museum - a permanent display. The routes are clearly marked with excellent informative boards in French and English.

The Cultivated Fungi

Legend has it that a lazy stable hand chose to dispose of some horse manure by throwing it into a shallow cave and covering it with some soil. The manure, presumably containing spores, matured and mushrooms sprouted up. Whether strictly true or not, cultivation in caves has been recorded for well over 100 years – originally under some areas of Paris. Thus the name ‘Champignons de Paris’. Nowadays, the Loire valley is responsible for some 80% of France’s mushroom production.

For these fungi, the growing cycle from incubation in the laboratory to harvesting takes about three months, with the development of the mycelium taking five weeks. Harvesting occurs in a series of flushes with the first flush producing the greatest yield and the returns diminishing until the fifth flush is harvested. The whole operation is completed with great regard to cleanliness, from the point when the fermented compost is pasteurised, to the final cleaning of the empty mushroom beds to avoid contamination by parasites before the next growing cycle begins. Their output is around 10 tons per year of either the white or blonde varieties of *Agaricus bisporus*.

Other species being cultivated include oyster (*Pleurotus ostreatus*) of which there are three varieties, grey, pink and yellow, and the Shiitake mushroom. In Asia the wild shiitake grows on the shiitake tree, a kind of oak. Growers however have developed another substrate for

the cultivated variety, involving hanging an inoculated block of straw and wood shavings from the cave roof. This species requires a high level of humidity and temperatures of between 18 and 20°C, and also around eight hours of light per day to grow successfully, although how this benefits the fungus is not explained.

Perhaps the most surprising species being cultivated here was *Lepista nuda*, (Pied Bleu / Field Blewit) first cultivated in 1990 and becoming increasingly popular. This needs a temperature of around 8 to 12°C – lower than *Agaricus bisporus* - and has a longer growing cycle of 4 months. Interestingly, the mushrooms produced this way appeared to have a colour and smell which is slightly less intense than those growing in the wild.

In addition to these commercial varieties, there is also experimenting with the cultivation of other more exotic fungi, notably the Nameko mushroom, popular in Japan, and also *Hericium erinaceus* which the French call Hedgehog Mushroom. *Coprinus comatus* (Lawyer’s Wig) also has a steadily growing market and is apparently highly prized, although not to my taste!

At this stage my one-year-old son, up to this point being carried in a papoose on my back, discovered that the cave had a wonderful echo! For fear of disrupting the other visitors’ day, the family retreated to the café above ground and left me to continue my subterranean wander.

As I continued on, every step I took deeper into the cave seemed to disturb the air and amplify the fantastic musty smell of decades of mushroom production. The cave workings were originally developed around 1750 for tufa extraction – the soft rock then used to build the many impressive local chateaux and churches. The museum, on site since 1978, also houses huge ammonite fossils from 90 million years ago, unearthed during rock extraction. There is also an exceptionally frightening-looking chainsaw, used in more modern times to slice through the soft rock. As a mechanical engineer I can just imagine what conditions must have been like working in the dimly lit cave with that monstrous chainsaw for company.

The Wild Fungi

This display has been collated with the help of the mycologists Philippe Joly and Bart Buyck of the French Natural History Museum in Paris, and the high levels of professionalism are evident here also.

The informative boards continue into the museum area with details and photos of common, edible or otherwise interesting species (eg *Boletus satanas* and *Amanita phalloides*). Scientific and common names were used, albeit sometimes with European scientific names looking a little unfamiliar. Naturally, there were notes on gastronomic value and cooking methods, together with habitat, season and collecting information.

The display caves were often tucked away in nooks and crannies making the exploration of the museum that much more interesting – not knowing whether the next bend in the path would lead onwards through a winding trail or into one of the many culs-de-sac. The exhibits were tastefully displayed in well illuminated glass cabinets set into the cave walls, or raised on plinths. The specimens were grouped in generic order and preserved in resin blocks, and there were also scale models which helped to highlight detail and add colour to the collection.

However, in some cabinets many of the specimens were not individually identified making it hard for the amateur to differentiate between the less obvious species, especially with the more complex genera such as *Russula* or *Clitocybe*. There was one large eclectic mix of species that appeared to be waiting for someone to spend a few days sorting them out, but would no doubt make a valuable addition to the existing displays once classified. All of the main genera of Ascomycetes and Basidiomycetes were represented, with many hundreds of specimens, and there were many examples from the less common genera such as *Clathrus*, *Geastrum* and of course *Tuber* to name only a few.

Just at the adit of the mineshaft, there was a small display with some stunning photographs of fungi from around the world. Exotic species such as the pagoda fungus and the giant termite fungus, together with blurb regarding the habits and use of these fungi from various countries which someone had clearly spent an interesting time researching.

On leaving the caves, after being blinded by the bright sunshine and hit by the sudden increase in temperature, there is a shop where you can get the kind of knick-knacks that a well meaning elderly relative might buy you for Christmas when they hear that you like 'looking at toadstools'. More usefully perhaps you can also get a selection of the freshest mushrooms you are ever likely to buy at a very reasonable 3 Euros per KG, and you can enjoy a long-awaited lunch!

So in conclusion, as a keen but very amateur mycologist, what I had discovered at the unique Musée du Champignon more than quenched my thirst for knowledge on what had otherwise been, in mushroom terms at least, a very arid holiday indeed.

For anyone finding themselves in the Saumur region and keen to visit the museum, look for the flyer with a picture of a cheesy kid admiring his pile of mushrooms, or visit: www.musée-du-champignon.com

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE FUNGUS GROUP PROGRAMME FOR 2004

This is the autumn programme for 2004, subject to permissions etc. Unless indicated otherwise, forays are led by Derek Schafer, start at 10.00 am and finish at lunchtime unless there is an afternoon location.

Fri 24 Sep Pulpit Hill (NT) Meet in the large lay-by car park at SP 827049. Pulpit Hill is Beech Woodland with Whitebeams and Yew, leading down to Grangelands chalk grassland with scrub, including Juniper. Identification session at Duck End House at 4 pm onwards (phone to let us know if you are attending and for directions if needed).

Sat 25 Sep County Museum Church Street, Aylesbury. Starts at 11.00 am. "Mushroom Magic – Mysteries of the Fifth Kingdom" A public display of fungi, including photographs and books, held in co-operation with the Museum. BFG members are encouraged to collect material before the event and bring it at around 10.00 am. for naming and display.

Sun 3 Oct a.m. College Wood (Woodland Trust). Meet at 10.00 am, parking in carpark just off A421 on minor road leading to Nash at SP 786327.

p.m. Howe Park Wood Milton Keynes. The afternoon is a public foray jointly with the Milton Keynes Parks Trust. Howe Park Wood is another remnant of ancient broadleaved woodland with a growing list of fungi. Turn off H7 opposite the supermarket into the Car Park at SP830345. The afternoon meeting starts at 2.00 pm.

Sun 17 Oct Bradenham Estate (NT, SSSI) and Naphill Common (SSSI). Meet in Bradenham Wood Lane, off the A4010 Princes Risborough - West Wycombe road. Turn off N. East after the Red Lion, follow for 1/2 mile and park on the right in a longish lay-by half way up the hill SP834975. Mature Chiltern beechwoods whose fungi have only recently been studied intensively. A long list of agaric and bolete species includes *Amanita eliae*, *Strobilomyces floccopus* and *Phylloporus rhodoxanthus*. Leader Penny Cullington.

Wed 20 Oct a.m. Rushbeds Wood (BBOWT/SSSI). Meet at the triangular verge at T-junction, SP 673154 (Park carefully on the verge to avoid blocking the railway access). Ancient broadleaved woodland bordered by unimproved meadows on heavy clay soils. This wood has produced unusual fungi and has a large and diverse list, helped by numerous visits from Nick Legon. Meet at 10.00 am.

p.m. Whitecross Green Wood (BBOWT, SSSI). The reserve straddles the Oxfordshire/Buckinghamshire boundary (but is all VC24) and is ancient woodland with a rich plant community. It was part-felled and planted with Scots Pine in the 1960's and, following its acquisition by BBOWT, is now being actively managed to restore it to native woodland including felling the pines. Changes to the fungi in response to such major changes are well worth studying. Turn off the minor road between Murcott and Boarstall opposite a small cottage at SP600151. The car park is through two gates to the south of the road (please close the gates!). Meet at 2.00 pm.

Sun 31 Oct a.m. Hodgemoor Woods (Forest Enterprise). Meet at 10.00 am. in the car park off Botterells Lane, SU 967939. One of the larger remaining areas of broadleaved Chiltern woodland, with ancient oak, beech and hornbeam coppice, a diverse mix of other trees and some conifer plantation. A very rich site for fungi. Leader Penny Cullington.

p.m. Burnham Beeches (Corp. of London). Meet at 2.00 pm. in Victory Cross car park in the wood, SU 953850. (West off the A355, 4km south of the M40 junction into Beeches Road. Cross into the Beeches and park near the Glade Cafe on the left). Burnham Beeches comprises 220 hectares of woodland, including 400-500 year old pollarded beeches with more open heath and grassland. A long list of fungi includes a number of "Red Data List" species.

Sun 7 Nov Stowe Landscape Gardens (National Trust) Public Foray with the National Trust. 250 acres of landscape gardens with lakes, pasture, wooded valleys and open grassland. Starts at 11.00am, meet in the NT car park; entrance 3 miles NW of Buckingham via Stowe Avenue off A422 Buckingham – Banbury Road.

Sun 14 Nov Penn Wood (Woodland Trust) & Common Wood (Tylers Green Residents Society). In Penn Street village, turn off through the vicarage and park in the Church car park at SU 924963. Buckinghamshire's largest self-contained area of broadleaved woodland, Penn Wood was purchased recently by the Woodland Trust. Now has a long list of fungi, including a number usually only found much further north in Britain. The adjacent Common Wood has recently been acquired by the Penn & Tylers Green Residents Association to conserve it in perpetuity. Efforts to record its so far largely unexplored fungi would be valuable.

OTHER FORAYS

(HFG = Herts. Fungi Group; BMS = British Mycological Society) The HFG will be holding the following forays in September and October – contact Alan Outen Tel. 01462 811374. Information on BMS forays can be obtained from Derek Schafer Tel. 01296 640923 or from the Society's web site (britmycolsoc.org.uk).

Sun 19 Sep HFG Foray Whippendell Wood, near Watford.

Sun 26 Sep HFG Foray Northaw Great Wood, near Cuffley.

Sat 2 Oct HFG Foray Sherrards Park Woods, near Welwyn Garden City.

Sun 10 Oct HFG Foray The Lodge, Sandy (RSPB Reserve).

Sat 16 Oct HFG Foray Stockgrove Park, Beds.

Sun 24 Oct HFG Foray Ashridge, Herts (Margaret Holden Memorial Foray).

Sat 30 Oct HFG Foray Odell Great Wood, Beds.

Sun 7 Nov HFG Foray Batch Wood, near St. Albans.

Sat 13 Nov HFG Foray Chipperfield Common.

Sun 21 Nov HFG Foray Berkhamsted Common.

Sun 28 Nov HFG Foray Gobions Wood, near Brookmans Park.

Sun 5 Dec HFG Foray Monks Wood/Whomerley Wood, Stevenage.

Sun 19 Dec HFG Foray Carpenters Wood, Chorleywood.

8-15 Oct BMS Autumn Foray Ashburnham Place, East Sussex. Contact Derek Schafer.

23-30 Oct BMS Upland Foray Youlgrave, High Peak District. Contact Derek Schafer.

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