

## Foray at Finemere Woods on Feb 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014

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Ten of us met up on a mild but damp and windy morning. The going under foot was not too muddy considering the flood conditions experienced in much of the South recently, and there was much evidence of recent conifer clearance on site. Despite what one might consider ideal fungi conditions (i.e. no recent frost and plenty of rain) we struggled to find much in the way of gilled fungi – even common things such as *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphurtuft) and *Tubaria furfuracea* (Scurfy twiglet) were few and far between: perhaps it had been just too wet?

This BBOWT site, part of the ancient Bernwood Forest, originally a large area of which sadly only a few pockets now remain, is very different from the typical Chiltern woodland which we frequently foray. Policy here is to return the wood to its native trees: mainly Oak, Willow and Hazel with some Birch, Aspen, Hawthorn and Blackthorn, thus Beech is missing and also there is now very little Pine. Today's list reflects this habitat with some interesting species occurring particularly on the Willow. Thanks to Neil Fletcher who took some photos, I can illustrate some of our finds.

Two species which we predicted might turn up today did so: one – always a favourite and common at this time of year - was *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet elfcup), though surprisingly only this one fruitbody was found, and it was new to the site also. This species can be found on damp rotting mossy branches in contact with the ground in wet places, and occurs mainly on Willow though also on other deciduous wood including Hazel. It occurs any time from the end of December through till Spring.



*Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet elfcup) on a stick (probably Hazel) today.

Finemere contains quantities of Hazel coppice, and this suggested to me that we were likely to find another interesting species – one which was brought to our attention on a fungi course in the Forest of Dean last Spring: *Hymenochaete corrugata* (Glue fungus, also Glue crust). The intriguing common English name refers to the fact that this fungus, which when fruiting forms brown felty patches on Hazel branches not unlike a species of *Phellinus*, actually spreads from one branch/twig to another by forming a brown growth where the twigs touch. This then hardens acting like a glue fixing them firmly together whether alive or dead. It is thought that the purpose of this unique behaviour is to prevent dead or dying wood from falling to the ground where other fungi could invade, thus preserving the nutrients from the wood for the sole use of the Glue fungus – clever! We found several examples of coppiced Hazel where this fungus was apparent in large quantities – another species new to the site today and one with only a few county records. I've included a photo of mine overleaf which was taken last year.



Two species of *Hymenochaete* found at Finemere today: left is *H. corrugata* (Glue fungus) on Hazel (photo from Forest of Dean 2013 by PC); right is *H. rubiginosa* (Oak curtain crust) on Oak (photo today by NF)

Another species of *Hymenochaete* was also much in evidence on the fallen branches of Oak – its preferred host. This species, *H. rubiginosa* (Oak curtain crust) is very different in appearance, forming shallow brackets not unlike those of the very common *Stereum hirsutum* (Hairy curtain crust) in shape, but the distinctive rich fuscous brown on both its upper and lower surfaces distinguishes it from the *Stereum* which is considerably paler above and also orange underneath.

Four species of the jelly fungus were collected, two of them on fallen Oak branches and quite common: the bright holk yellow *Tremella mesenterica* (Yellow brain) and *Exidia glandulosa* (Witches' butter) – though I previously and incorrectly thought that this second common name was also used for the *Tremella*. The third species, *Exidia recisa*, is of particular interest and not often recorded. It occurs exclusively on Willow and though it has no common name Amber brain would be apt. A few weeks ago John Tyler sent me the photo below for confirmation of his identification from Finemere when on a private visit. Identifying from a photo is never very satisfactory, so I was hoping that we could refind it today, and sure enough John went off to the same spot and returned with a specimen though not looking much like his beautiful photo but rather shrivelled and dark brown. Nevertheless both Derek and I checked the microscopic characters and are happy that this is *Exidia recisa* as John thought. So a good find *and* identification by John, new to the site and a fourth county record.



*Exidia recisa* found growing on a Willow stick today and on Jan 19<sup>th</sup> at Finemere Wood – photo by John Tyler



The fourth jelly fungus we found also has very few county records and was new to the site, this was *Dacrymyces capitata* found by Toni Standing on a piece of bare wood. Much paler and less obvious in the field than the common *D. stillatus* (Common jellyspot) it may well also be common but overlooked. It was new to me and not photographed as I doubted if I'd be able to identify it, but the microscopic features were clear and conclusive

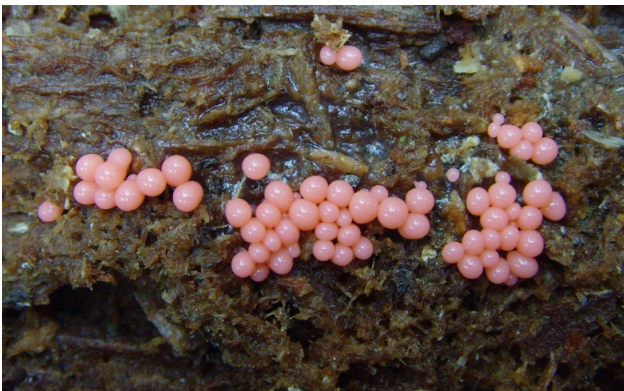
Joanna found a nice colony of the attractive but tiny *Lachnum virgineum* (Snowy Disco) growing on the underside of a log, probably Birch. These cups are less than 1mm across and are one of several white species of this very large genus of very small fungi! Another found today was the bright blue-green *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* (Green elfcup) on a bare deciduous post.



Above is *Lachnum virgineum* (Snowy disco), the cups being under 1 mm across; left is *Diatrype bullata* (Willow barkspot), these black blisters erupting through the surface and also under 1mm across are covered with minute openings (ostioles) just visible to the naked eye through which the spores are shot out when mature. There are several very similar species, and care is needed to separate them, taking into account the host wood as well as microscopic characters. (Both photos by NF)

The cup fungi form part of the enormous and very diverse family of ascomycetes, the spore shooters. We found several other ascomycetes today which were of interest, including some which come loosely under the category known affectionately as 'black dots on sticks'. One such was *Diatrypella quercina*, another *D. favacea*, both new for the site, and a third was *Diatrype bullata* (Willow barkspot) shown above, and one which we've found here before.

Several slime moulds were found, no doubt reflecting the recent damp conditions in which they thrive. Though studied and recorded by mycologists, slime moulds (officially Myxomycetes) are not fungi at all but form their own kingdom which is in fact closer to the animal kingdom in some respects. We found two today which were not mature but at the plasmodium stage when they do indeed appear to be made of slime. Most species have white plasmodium and are not identifiable at this stage, but a few have distinctly coloured plasmodium which eliminates the majority and makes identifying much easier. One which has bright pink/peach plasmodium and is found on bare soggy conifer is *Tubifera ferruginosa*, and another which is bright shiny orange and grows on bare soggy deciduous wood is *Trichia decipiens*, and both these we found today together with a large colony of another slime mould: *Metatrachia floriformis*. This, however, showed the sporangia (the name for slime mould fruitbodies) almost fully mature with a few actually mature when there is no sign of slime but just a dry puff of spore mass on top ready to be blown away.



Three slime moulds found today: above left is the distinctive plasmodium of *Tubifera ferruginosa* which is found on conifer wood; above right is the equally distinctive plasmodium of *Trichia decipiens* found on deciduous wood; below is *Metatrachia floriformis* just coming to maturity when the black blobs which are full of ripening spores break open a bit like the petals of a flower to reveal the fluffy spore mass within (seen on the left here). (Photos NF again)



To sum up, we listed a modest 46 species of which 12 were new to the site, the most interesting growing in association with the many Willows – obviously an important feature of this piece of woodland. We hope to include a foray here later in the season which might well produce a further list of notable Willow specialist species.

Just one more of note to mention to finish with, this the best collection of a gilled mushroom-type to turn up today, also the most interesting but sadly with no name as yet. We came across what initially looked like a good cluster of fresh *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphur tuft)

growing on deciduous wood, until it was realised that the gills were exceptionally yellow – more yolk yellow than sulphur with no hint of green, and there was no sign of the gills darkening to grey-black as the spores matured as in that species. This rang a bell with me and I immediately suggested a species of *Pholiota*, possibly *P. tuberculosa* which I knew to be atypical for that genus and much more like a *Hypholoma* in appearance. On taking it home to work on, a somewhat sceptical Derek confirmed that it was indeed a *Pholiota* but the cells on the gill edge put it into a different section of the genus from the species I'd suggested. He narrowed it down to a possible but rare *Pholiota* known to grow on Willow though needed a sporeprint to check this, but unfortunately the fruitbodies didn't oblige and refused to drop any – this can happen particularly when fruiting happens out of the species' normal season as could well be the case here. So the material is being dried for future examination and Derek may contact expert Jan Holec – author of the *Pholiota* monograph – to ask his opinion. Hopefully we shall re-find it later in the year to enable us to get to a definite identification. [Now see the conclusion of this at the bottom of the report!](#)



***Pholiota* sp., somewhat similar to *Hypholoma fasciculare* in appearance, found fruiting on a fallen Willow branch today at Finemere Wood. (Photo NF)**

Over the year BBOWT are carrying out survey work here, also at Whitecross Green and Rushbeds Wood – all three sites belonging to the ancient Bernwood Forest; our three Spring forays, of which today was the first, will contribute to this work. We may well include them in our Autumn programme as well in order to help provide as full a picture of the fungal flora as one can, though in reality one is likely only to touch the surface of what is there when tackling such a vast kingdom of natural history.

Many thanks to all who attended – everyone made valuable contributions to our list, and a particular thank you to Neil and also John for the excellent photos.

See the complete list for details.

The identity of the possible *Pholiota* / *Hypholoma* above has now been solved by Derek. It suddenly came to him that sometimes sterile forms of *Hypholoma fasciculare* occur, and he then realised that the microscopic character which typifies the genus *Pholiota* (i.e. special cystidia called chrysocystidia which were indeed present in this collection) also occur in *Hypholoma*, though he was unfamiliar with *H. fasciculare* under the microscope because one doesn't normally have to refer to the scope due to its familiarity in the field. He then checked the characters other than spores

– which were of course absent because what we'd found was a sterile collection - and then everything fitted into place. The surprisingly bright yellow gills are of course explained by the fact that there were no darker spores developing to turn the gills the normal dirty greyish colour. So problem solved: it was just a sterile form of the extremely common *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphurtuft)! In a way disappointing that it was not something rare or even unusual, and we already had this species on the list anyway, but a lesson learned, and I daresay if I hadn't been so insistent that I thought it was *Pholiota* in the first place, Derek would have put two and two together much quicker and realised what it was straight away.