

FUNGI WALK at BICESTER GARRISON Training Area South on April 14th 2018

Penny Cullington

At the suggestion of member Tony Hardware we planned a visit to this MOD site never previously surveyed for fungi though there clearly exists a keen interest in natural history and conservation here. Twelve of us met up nearby on the first really nice spring morning for ages and formed a convoy passing the sentry gate and duly signing in with ID at the Guardroom. We were then met by Conservation Officer Paul Watts who escorted our convoy of cars through the depot of this large site to the southern part which lies within the Bucks VC24 border, the remainder being in Oxfordshire. This was an area made up of scrub, consisting of plenty of Willow and Blackthorn with the occasional Oak, Hornbeam and Birch, and open rather wet grassland with the odd pond. As we suspected, neither the habitat nor the time of year was ideal for finding plentiful fungi here, but the fine warm sunny day with bursts of song from several recently arrived migrant warblers kept our spirits up.

On the edge of the car park there was a generous patch of nettles, last year's dead stems of which duly provided the first fungal interest. Two species were what are best described as 'Bums on seats' ie though small and insignificant they can virtually be guaranteed (given the correct substrate) to provide names for ones sometimes meagre list at this time of year (indeed, one can almost write them down as a matter of course before even looking for them!). These were *Calloria neglecta* (Nettle POX – photo at the end) and *Leptosphaerea acuta* (Nettle Rash). Derek then delved deeper into the nettle patch and was rewarded with two much more interesting species of Ascomycetes (the spore-shooters) on the dead stems. The first he's still working on and

is proving a challenge; the second, tiny flat discs which were fringed with bright yellow, was easier to sort out and was *Belonidium sulphureum* (no common name). Not a rarity by any means but with very few county records, one of which our database informed me was found by Derek from around the pond in his garden ten years ago!

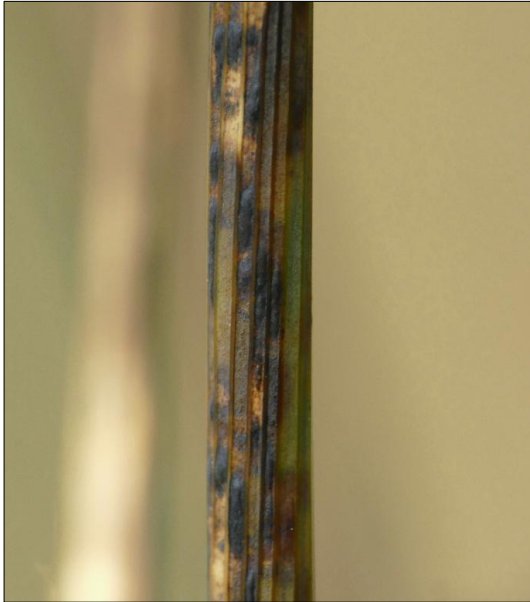
The tiny and attractive discs of *Belonidium sulphureum*, at most 2mm across, found on a dead nettle stem today.(LL)



Joanna identified another Ascomycete, this one being tiny white hairy discs which she found on a rotting piece of timber: this was *Lachnum virginium* (Snowy Disco). As is often the case after wet weather, tiny water droplets tend to become trapped in the hairs of this common and attractive little species, as can be seen in Neil's photo.

Lachnum virginium covered in water droplets. (NF)

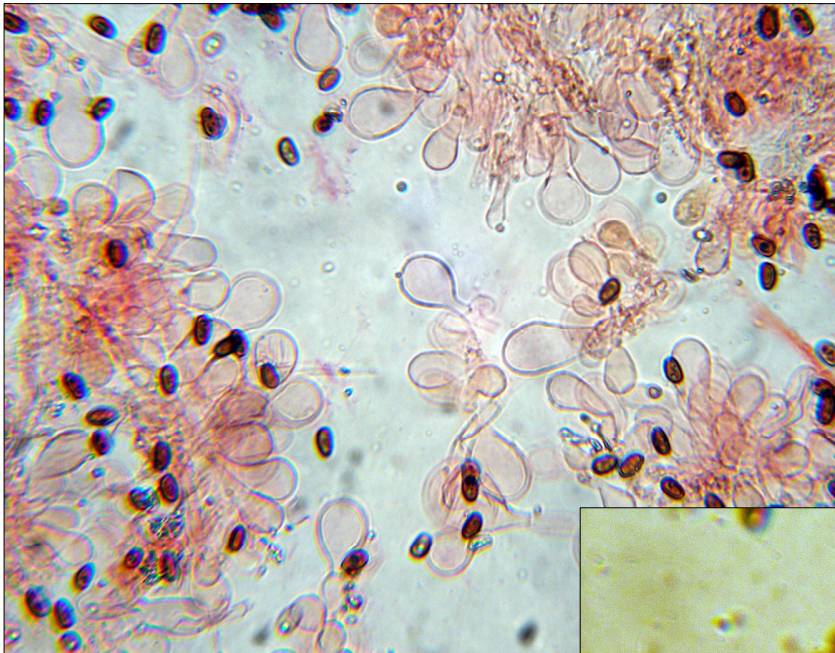




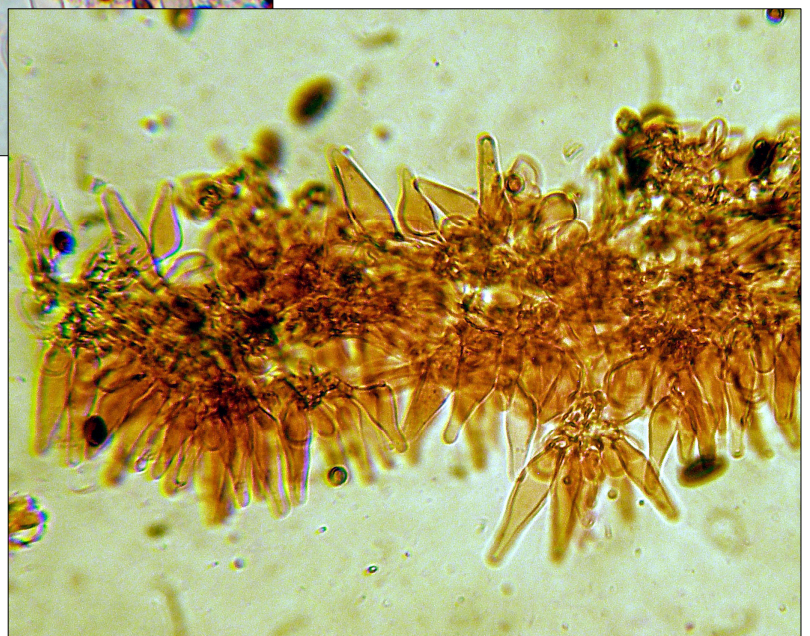
Another Ascomycete but very different from the discs above was *Phyllachora junci* (no common name) which I found on some dead *Juncus* stems. This was new to me and when I located it in the literature I found it was very common though we have only two previous county records, from the well-known authorities Kerry Robinson and Martyn Ainsworth. No doubt this is yet another example of a species belonging to an area of mycology for which our group has limited expertise. There must be so many similar species in the county waiting for someone to take up the challenge and start to specialise in their study – could this be you?!

The tiny black blisters of *Phyllachora junci* found on *Juncus* stems today (NF)

We were soon pleased to see at least some evidence of gilled ‘mushroom’ types when two specimens of *Psathyrella* were found, one large one by Derek, one smaller one by Toni. We assumed that both were probably the same quite common Springtime fruiting species: *Psathyrella spadiceogrisea* (Spring Brittlestem), but not so. At home I checked their microscopic characters, and it quickly became obvious that despite both sharing the same basic appearance of dark gills, palish caps and white stems, we had two different species. The larger specimen conformed to *P. spadiceogrisea* with spores up to 8 microns long and balloon-shaped cells along the gill edge, but the smaller one had much larger spores and gill edge cells of a completely different shape, being

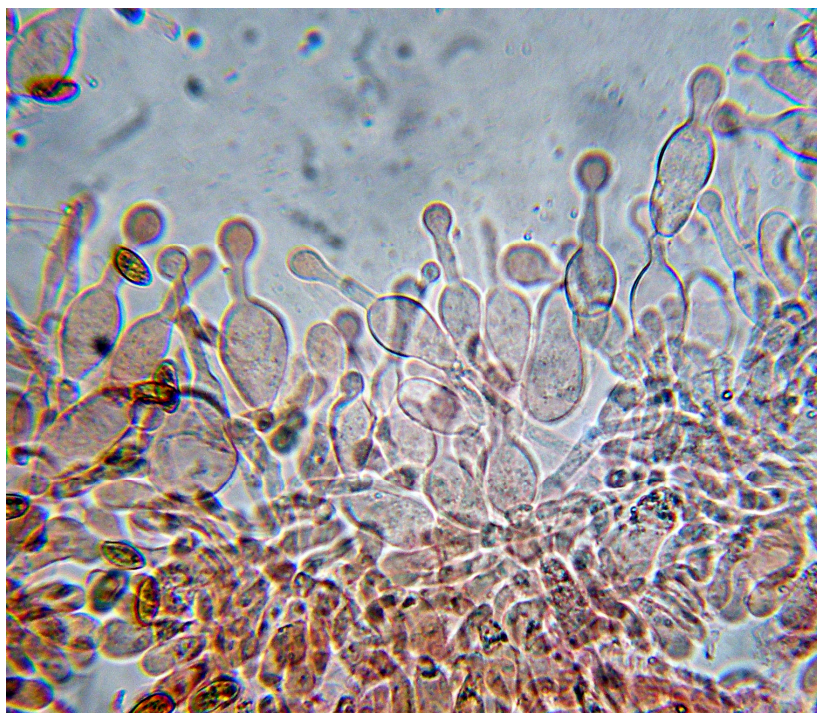


longer, wider at the base and narrowing to the tip (fusiform). Looking more closely at the gills with a handlens I then noticed their red-pink edge, a feature which occurs in several of the genus; this together with the microscopic information I now had led me to *Psathyrella corrugis* (Red-edge Brittlestem) – a common autumn species but not that often recorded at this time.



Above left, the balloon-shaped cells (cheilocystidia) found on the gill edge of *Psathyrella spadiceogrisea*, and above right the fusiform-shaped cells of *Psathyrella corrugis*; both species were found today. (PC)

The grassy areas not surprisingly produced very few species, but Claudi found a couple of collections of a little rusty orange-coloured Mycenoid mushroom which we recognised as belonging to the genus *Galerina*.



Like *Psathyrella* very few of this genus can be named to species without recourse to a microscope (and also like *Psathyrella* quite a few collections tend to defy identification even then!). However, this one turned out to be quite obliging and keyed out to ***Galerina clavata*** (Ribbed Bell), one of the more common species in the genus with amongst other key features quite big spores, 4-spored basidia and very distinctive skittle-shaped cystidia on the gill edge which I just couldn't resist taking a photo of.

The skittle-shaped cystidia on the gill edge of *Galerina clavata* looking as if the worse for wear having been knocked flying in the bowling alley! (PC)

Towards the end of our walk Toni found fresh clusters of ***Auricularia auricula-judae*** (Jelly Ear) on a dead trunk. The identity of the fungus was not in question but the trunk they were growing on kept us guessing for a while. Nine times out of ten one finds this fungus on Elder, and in the Chilterns it's not uncommon on Beech as well. However, the trunk here looked too thick for Elder and the only other trees nearby were Oak and Willow, both of which would have been somewhat unusual hosts for this species. A few minutes later we noticed another cluster on an equally thick trunk which still had bark in place though this was fissured as in Oak or Willow. However, there were typical Elder leaves just emerging from some of its thinner branches and Justin checked that when bruised they had the tell-tale smell of catpee. Problem solved!



Auricularia auricula-judae fruiting on an unusually thick dead Elder trunk. (DS)

We ended up with a somewhat disappointing list of just under 30 species for the morning and as is often the way we were not able to identify everything we found. One gilled fungus found by Joanna in a mossy area is proving particularly interesting and giving Derek quite a challenge.

Those he showed it to in the field will recall that he thought it might possibly be a species of *Entoloma*, though the stem blackening at the base was unusual. Having worked on it he now thinks it is very possibly *Naucoria amarescens* – a rare species with only 44 British records. It may possibly take DNA analysis to confirm, but if correct this would be a really nice find and new to the county also.

My thanks to everyone for coming, to the photographers listed below, and to Paul Watts and Gary Beckett for giving us permission and setting up the visit. We had an interesting and enjoyable morning. A couple photos came in as I finished this , so are added below.

CVS = Claudi soler; DS = Derryn Snowdon; JL = Justin Long; NF = Neil Fletcher; PC = Penny Cullington



Left, the tiny orange discs of *Calloria neglecta* found on a nettle stem; above, *Annulohyphoxylon cohaerens* (no common name but a species closely related to the much more common *Hypoxylon fragiforme* - Beech Woodwart) and identified by Claudi today. (cvs)



Members of the group about to negotiate a ditch at Bicester today (JL)

