Foray at Brill Common, December 13th 2015

Penny Cullington

Nine of us met up at the Brill Windmill for our traditional Christmas foray on a rather dank and drizzly morning (as can be seen from Justin's photo below), but at least it wasn't too cold and windy and in fact the rain cleared off after a bit. Due no doubt to the relatively mild and damp recent conditions we found a surprising number of specimens, ending up with a list of 65 comprising the usual mix of fairly mundane grassland species and a smattering of more interesting things.

The start of today's foray (JW)

It was inevitable this late in the season that quite a few things didn't get recognised or named - just too drab and waterlogged; others normally quite easy to name in the field also needed a check at home to be sure: at this time of year distinctive smells can often be atypical or even missing, let alone cap and stem colour (one collection of *Lepista saeva* (Field blewit) lacked entirely any of the blue stem colour which gave rise to its original common name of Blueleg). Several *Clitocybe*-like collections were discarded as too difficult to name with certainty – this is a genus which often depends upon good field characters for species identity owing to its lack of distinctive or useful microcharacters. However, we were pleased to find good numbers of *Hygrocybe* (Waxcaps) – 7 species were identified of which 3 were new to the site, one boasting a particularly beautiful specimen: this was *H. quieta* (Oily waxcap) – so named because of its smell which is very similar to that of the common *Lactarius quietus* (Oakbug milkcap).

Above: Two views of our specimen of *Hygrocybe quieta* (JW)

Reports fairly often include photos of *Hygrocybe coccinea* (Scarlet waxcap), with good reason: there is a definite 'wow' factor involved here (especially at Christmas-time!). Today's specimens, one in particular with its frilly margin, were no exception.

Above: We all enjoyed this collection of *Hygrocybe coccinea* today (JW)

Another species we found in quite good numbers in the grassland was *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis* (The Goblet) – often occurring late in the season, this species can be found regularly here near the windmill. Today the caps were literally overflowing with rain water demonstrating the aptness of its common name.

The friendly Dexter cows had certainly done their bit to help provide us with fungi, and quite a few species connected with their dung were collected: several species of *Coprinellus* (Inkcap) and *Paneolus* (Mottlegill) together with the very common little orange discoid ascomycete *Coprobia granulata*. We weren't surprised to find Derek collecting not only fungi samples but dung samples as well, particularly that from the distinctive and quite possibly rare black and white goats grazing on the common. Who knows what his incubation of these samples will turn up in due course? Watch this space!

Left: *Pseudoclitocybe cyathiformis* (JW)

Our list of finds was considerably boosted towards the end of the morning, firstly under the clump of Horse Chestnut trees, then under the clump of Limes. There are both living and standing dead trunks of Chestnut here together with piles of their fallen branches, and fungi abounded on the dead wood. We found here several species more commonly associated with other deciduous trees: both *Ascocoryne sarcoides* (Purple jellydisc) and *A. cylichnium* - usually found on Beech, and also immature specimens of *Auricularia auricula-judae* (Jelly ear) - common on Elder, much less common on Beech and I suspect rare on this host. (I'm ashamed to admit that when we found this I was convinced it was *Neobulgaria pura* (Beech jellydisc) though Nick suggested that it was Jelly ear and at home the spores I found proved him correct.) We also found *Daldinia concentrica* (King

Alfred's cakes), usually to be found on Ash, occasionally on Beech, but I suspect yet another quite rare species to find on Horse Chestnut.

***Bjerkandera fumosa* growing on Horse Chestnut (JW)**

Several common brackets occurred on the Horse Chestnut, but one with which I was not familiar was *Bjerkandera fumosa* (Big smoky bracket). Derek, however, suggested this species though the specimen Justin had collected seemed to lack its typical smell of aniseed. However, another specimen broken off from the tier provided the proof of identity. It was good to have the opportunity become better acquainted with this relatively uncommon bracket, one which looks (and smells) very different from the closely related and much more familiar *Bjerkandera adusta* (Smoky bracket). *B. adusta* is very common on many deciduous woods, also is easy to recognise with its grey-pored underside which has a white rim. The underside of *B. fumosa* is entirely whitish cream and the aniseed smell is also diagnostic.

Of the agarics found on or under the Horse Chestnut, notable was a fresh cluster of *Pleurotus ostreatus* (Oyster mushroom), a common species which I suspect I've not featured in foray reports. Known as a good edible species, its cap colour can vary considerably from almost white to dark grey brown and it is commonly found on fallen Beech. It appears to be one of the few fungi which can be grown commercially, often in bright yellow or even pink forms!

***Pleurotus ostreatus* growing on fallen Horse Chestnut today. (JW)**

***Hymenoscyphus caudatus*, the cap just 3mm across (JD)**

Joanna worked on an ascomycete growing on a leaf petiole (the petiole was unidentified but could well have been Chestnut). This tiny cream cup with a stem was *Hymenoscyphus caudatus* – not rare but also not often recorded by us for Bucks since we tend not to spend enough time on such species.

Two species we recorded were, however, new to the County. One was a relatively common myxomycete (slime mould) which John Tyler found on a leaf and later identified: *Didymium deforme.* (Egg on my face again here because in the field I didn't recognise it and suggested it might not even be a slime mould but insect eggs!) The other was a rare *Conocybe* handed to me I think by John, growing in litter under the Lime. At home I found remarkably large spores for the genus, also 2-spored basidia (in fact sometimes 1-spored), and this together with other microscopic features led me in two different keys to the aptly named *Conocybe macrospora.* Though with under 30 national records, this species may not be that rare but just overlooked as not that many mycologists collect and identify them. Often time spent on this genus at home can be frustrating and inconclusive; luckily this particular species was distinctive enough to leave me in little doubt and suitably rewarded! The cap is only 1 cm across.

***Conocybe macrospora*, new to Bucks (JW)**

One of our more regular forayers was sadly notable by his absence today: Nick White who joined BFG in 2014 died suddenly and unexpectedly a week ago. We are all going to miss him and also his wonderful photos (photography was his profession), and this dreadful news cast a shadow over proceedings today.

Very many thanks to Justin and Joanna for their photos. Thanks also to Joanna and Martin for hosting the lunch afterwards – delicious soups, salads and cheeses accompanied by their own home-made bread. No more reports this year! We'll be in touch with plans for the AGM and our 2016 programme in the New Year. Have a good Festive Season and thank you for your valued support over the past year.

For more details of what we found see the complete list.

Photos: JD = Joanna Dodsworth, JW = Justin Warhurst