

FUNGI WALK at BURNHAM BEECHES on Sunday Oct 8th 2017

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We were just eight strong today – a small group compared to previous outings, also two left us half way round, but we still managed a list of over 100 species, just one short of our best total this season. As fungal fruiting in typical Chiltern woodland is seriously slowing down at present, we decided that a visit to the mire – an acid area of damp moss and sphagnum with a surround of Birch, Pine and Oak – might be a better bet. This proved to be a good move and we spent most of our time here, finding an interesting range of things not often on our species lists. It left only a short time to explore the grassland area beyond and we never made it to the lakes where I'd intended to finish up. Nevertheless it was a most enjoyable and rewarding morning.

The numbers of *Russula* (Brittlegill) and *Lactarius* (Milkcap) have been rapidly dwindling over the last month, so it was a surprise and also a pleasure to find so many today: 11 species of *Russula* and 8 of *Lactarius*, two of which were new to this well recorded site. This was the perfect habitat for *Russula claroflava* (Yellow Swamp Brittlegill), a species host specific with Birch and one which behaves rather surprisingly like *R. nigricans* (Blackening Brittlegill): any damaged part turns

slowly pink then red and eventually black. The trick is therefore to scratch the stem on collection, put it in a pot and keep an eye on it for the next 30 minutes when the colour change will occur where scratched – a sure way of separating this species from other yellow Brittlegills of which there are several. We found two specimens today with which to demonstrate this character.



Russula claroflava showing the typical pink developing on the central stem and blackening on the top right stem. This photo was taken at nearby Stoke Common in similar habitat in 2009. (PC)

Another *Russula* which caused much discussion today was the very variable *R. fragilis* (Fragile Brittlegill). This is often found under Oak, as it was here growing in good numbers, though it varies in cap colour considerably as can be seen in Claudi's photo. The fragility of the species occurs in its gills – in fact the fruitbody itself is much less fragile than other delicate species such as *R. betularum* (Birch Brittlegill). Caps often have a hint of green and the pink tends to have a purple tinge, but its give-away and unique feature is the very fine gill edge which with a hand lens can be seen to be finely serrated. It takes practice to see it clearly and it's best to examine mature specimens when the sawlike edge is at its most obvious. Even the online range of photos don't really show this feature convincingly: it needs some magnification to see it.



Russula fragilis found in good numbers today (CS)



One more *Russula* which we don't often meet is ***R. gracillima*** (Slender Brittlelegill), another delicate species like *R. betularum*, being host specific to Birch. Like *R. fragilis* it also has green tints in the cap but its pink colour lacks purple tints and is much creamier. When you collect it the stem feels soft and likely to break.

***Russula gracillima* growing in damp moss today (CS)**

Moving on now to the closely related mycorrhizal genus *Lactarius*: Growing near to the *R. gracillima* specimen above were a couple of pale-capped Milkcaps which I instantly thought might be *L. glyciosmus* (Coconut Milkcap) – one of several species which are host specific to Birch. The distinctive smell of that species was missing, however, and Derek correctly suggested that it was ***L. vietus*** (Grey Milkcap). This is a fairly nondescript Milkcap, also host specific with Birch but lacking a distinctive smell and with milk which after time turns grey on the gills where damaged. (Claudi's photo was taken on collection thus the milk is still white here.)



***Lactarius vietus* enjoying the damp habitat of the mire today (cs)**



Not surprisingly in this habitat we did come across a large patch of ***Lactarius glyciosmus*** showing nicely shortly afterwards and having its unmistakable smell of coconut. This species seems to have been quite common this year. The similar cap colour to *L. vietus* above is clear, so the difference in smell and in the milk colour after time (unchanging in *L. glyciosmus*) are the key features to note in the field to separate them.

***Lactarius glyciosmus* growing in the same habitat (cs)**

Two Milkcaps we found today were new to the site: one from the mire and one from the drier grassy area under Pine. Having studied the fungi at nearby Stoke Common (also acid with an area of mire) I was on the lookout in the mire here for ***Lactarius lacunarum*** (no English name), a species which favours damp boggy areas usually under Birch but also sometimes with other deciduous trees. The bright reddish brown cap and stem together with the habitat preference and milk which turns slightly yellow on a hanky after time (not such a marked reaction as in *L. tabidus*) are the features to note. (Photo on the following page.)

The new species here from under Pine was ***Lactarius semisanguifluus*** (no English name), one which is extremely similar to the better known *L. deliciosus* (Saffron Milkcap) and no doubt

often recorded as such. It shares the same distinctive cap colours and orange milk as that species but careful observation of the colour change in the milk and flesh (often needed with this genus) will separate them. I cut one specimen in half lengthwise on collection whereupon the orange colour was clearly showing down both sides of the stem flesh. By the time I looked at it again later that afternoon it had clearly changed to wine red, and this together with the fact that the marks of pitting on the stem which occur in *L. deliciosus* were missing, gave me two vital features to separate it from that species. Kibby's book on *Lactarius* states that the much commoner *L. deliciosus* favours calcareous soils - maybe *L. semisanguifluus*, (apparently a southern species in the UK) favours acidic soils?

Two *Lactarius* species new to the site today: above is *Lactarius lacunarum* and below is *Lactarius semisanguifluus*. (CS)



Time to move on to other general! Under Birch is also the habitat in which to look for species of *Leccinum*, another mycorrhizal genus. We found several specimens, most notably a couple with very pale caps and stems which we hoped might be the quite rare *L. holopus* (Ghost Bolete). However, microscopic characters matched with much more common *L. versipelle* (Orange Birch Bolete) which on occasion can throw up these almost white rather than orange caps.

Two examples of the white form of *Leccinum versipelle* (CS)

We also found good numbers of *Suillus bovinus* (Bovine Bolete), a species host specific to Pine and often accompanied by the curious *Gomphidius roseus* (Rosy Spike). It took time to locate one of these but Paul eventually found a somewhat battered specimen.

Far right: *Suillus bovinus* (CS), and the insert, near right: *Gomphidius roseus*, a species only found near to this particular *Suillus*. (The photo taken at Stoke Common in 2010 PC)





In the mire were many small Mycenoid species, two of which I was able to put a name to having learnt them either from this site or from Stoke Common, though both needed to be checked at home to be sure. The most prolific was *Hypholoma elongatum* (Sphagnum Brownie), a species which in the field bears little resemblance to the much bigger and very common *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphurtuft). Nevertheless the microscopic features show the close relationship which puts them into the same genus.

Hypholoma elongatum, common in the mire today (cs)

We also found several clusters of a small dark grey Mycenoid fungus in the moss; these were familiar to me as I remember struggling to identify them from this same area several years back: *Tephrocybe palustris* (Sphagnum Greyling). In fact this species now goes by the name of *Sphagnurus paluster*, the only member of a genus recently created especially for it, though previously it has resided somewhat unsatisfactorily in several different genera including *Collybia*, *Lyophyllum* and even at one point *Hebeloma*! It has nothing very distinctive about it, either in the field or microscopically.

Sphagnurus paluster, an unremarkable LBJ which occurs only in sphagnum areas. (cs)



This report seems to be getting rather lengthy, so I shall now conclude with more of Claudi's excellent photos of what we found with the odd accompanying comment. Thanks for coming – we had a really good morning, and see you all again soon.



Left: the delectable and miniscule *Mycena bulbosa* (Rush Bonnet) found by Derek. The caps are no more than 5mm across at most but if you search amongst damp *Juncus* stems it can sometimes be quite common and is readily identified by the distinct basal disc to the stem, clearly visible on both specimens in Claudi's photo.

Below: another somewhat small *Mycena* found in the mire which microscopically matched *M. olivaceomarginata* (Browndge Bonnet) but as can be seen in the photo it lacks the brown gill edge and also the olive tinted cap of that grassland species. It appears that *M. olivaceomarginata* is in fact a complex of species and I suspect that this rather delicate and pale one which grows in mires may well turn out to be distinct.





Cortinarius flexipes (Pelargonium Webcap), one of few members of this group of Webcaps which can be safely named in the field. The distinctive pointed and finely fibrous to scaly cap together with the smell of crushed Pelargonium leaves and violaceous tints at the stem apex and base make it recognisable. It grows often with Birch as it was today but can occur under conifers and other deciduous trees.



We were foxed by this specimen found growing on rotting damp wood and wondered in the field if it was a species of *Lepiota*. In fact when I studied it at home the spores were clearly not white (thus eliminating *Lepiota*) but it took me along time to realise that this was the somewhat common *Psathyrella candolleana* (Pale Brittlestem). Normally found growing in clusters along grassy path edges, its occurrence on wood kept me guessing till I eventually recognised the small brown spores and cells on the gill edge which characterise this species.



One of several waxcaps we found in the grassland towards the end of the morning, this was *Hygrocybe laeta* (Heath Waxcap). It bears a similarity to the Parrot Waxcap having a somewhat slimy cap in damp weather though it lacks the green colours of that species. However, with a pair of tweezers you can peel off a glutinous layer from the gill edge – a unique feature of this species.

I cannot bear to leave out this last photo below because it was such a perfect collection of fruitbodies and is worthy of inclusion. *Lycoperdon nigrescens* (Dusky Puffball) is far less common than the other two woodland species, *L. perlatum* and *L. pyriforme*, and can occur both in woodland litter and in open grassland as here where there are trees dotted about. The darker colour with ornaments on the surface with do not rub off as in *L. perlatum* should be sufficient to distinguish it from other puffballs.

