

Foray at Penn Wood on Sunday Oct 11th

Penny Cullington

This public foray was rather hastily arranged as part of our contribution to National Fungus Day. It was, however, rather poorly supported with only 10 of us in all. We started by taking a look at the vicarage lawn, a small but well known piece of unimproved grassland with an interesting list of fungi, and were rewarded with some beautiful specimens of *Hygrocybe calyptriformis* (Pink waxcap – photo later) – a speciality of this site. Another unusual species turned up here: *Tephroclybe rancida* (Rancid Greyling) – not anything much to look at and probably often overlooked or misidentified, but with a strong mealy smell and one which neither Derek nor I had seen for quite a few years. As we continued on to the cricket pitch more waxcaps were forthcoming, fruiting earlier than usual this year, and I decided to collect samples of each species to set up a mixed waxcap photo which you can find at the end of the report.



Tephroclybe rancida on the Vicarage lawn (DJS)



We now entered the woodland area and although we covered only a relatively small part of this extensive site the list grew to over 80 species though no particular rarities were found. An area of woodchips provided a wow factor and was liberally covered with a good spread of specimens. *Coprinopsis lagopus* (Hare'sfoot inkcap) was showing the different stages of development and decay typical of the species.

Left *Coprinopsis lagopus* on a wood chip pile. (DJS)

On the same patch of woodchips were many clusters of *Peziza* (Cup fungus) – some cups yellowish-brown and some considerably darker. On examining these at home I came to the conclusion that they were all the same species (as I had at first suspected): *P. arvernensis*. Microscopic features were identical in both the paler and darker collections, the variation in colour probably due to the fact that the darker older ones were soaked in the rain at the beginning of the previous week whereas those coming up later had avoided the drenching.



Peziza arvernensis on woodchip, the right hand collection probably having emerged after the heavy rain earlier last week and looking more typical for the species. (PC)

This being a well recorded area, in part due to the fact that I cut my mycological teeth here and in nearby Hodgemoor Woods, living only a few minutes away for many years, we added only a couple of species new to the over-all site list. A quite unusual bracket was collected from fallen conifer wood, this was *Ischnoderma benzoinum* (Benzoin bracket – so named after its smell). Its slightly furry surface and softish rubbery feel are also field clues to its identity.



Right *Ischnoderma benzoinum* found on a conifer log (PC)



Postia caesia and *Calocera pallidospathulata* together on a log (PC)

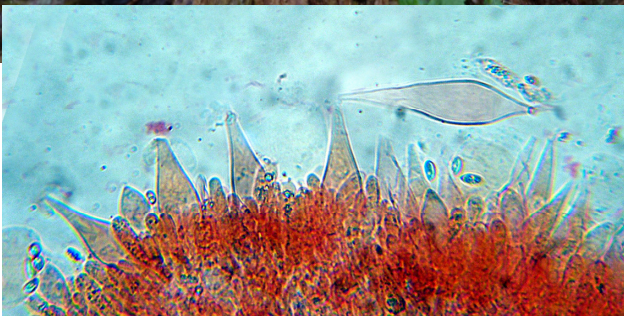
We also came across a beautiful collection of fruitbodies of *Postia caesia* (aptly named Conifer blueing bracket) on the sawn end of a conifer trunk. On the flat surface just above were a swarm of the tiny jellylike fingers of *Calocera pallidospathulata* (Pale stagshorn) –it's so often the way that if conditions are ripe for one species to be fruiting well on wood there'll be something else competing with it nearby. (Don't be confused by the beech leaves visible in the photo – they were incidental and this was definitely conifer!)

On returning to the car park at the end a few of us couldn't resist popping into the churchyard where I knew there were some special things likely to be found. I was delighted when we found an old friend coming up exactly where I remembered it under the conifer: *Spathularia flavida* (Yellow fan) an unusual ascomycete (spore shooter). This distinctive species is not that uncommon in Scotland and northern England, usually in conifer litter, but when I first found it in Penn Wood in 1999 it was pretty rare in the south, a first for the county, and is still apparently rated

as near threatened on the national red data list. Occurrence seems to be on the increase in the south with more records now, but it disappeared from the woodland part of this site in 2004, so I was delighted to discover it not far away in the churchyard the following year and we found it again here in 2010. It made me very happy, therefore, that it's obviously still thriving here. This site is unusual in the predominantly calcareous Chiltern area in that the soil is quite acidic and this could account for the fact that several species known to thrive in Scottish conifer areas have been recorded here.



Spathularia flavida in Penn Churchyard today (PC)



Not far away in the conifer litter was another interesting species, an LBJ with two distinctive features, one apparent in the field, the other only visible down the microscope: *Macrocystidia cucumis* (Cucumber cap). The field character is its remarkable smell reflected in its species name, though personally I find it smells strongly of cod liver oil rather than cucumber sandwiches and this was confirmed by others who smelt it today. The genus name refers to the huge cells found on the gill edge, these called cystidia – we are still not quite certain of the function of these sterile cells, found in many gilled fungi in an amazing array of different shapes and sizes, but they are extremely useful, often essential for mycologists as identification aids.

Macrocystidia cucumis, and below it the cells on the gill edge which give it its Latin genus name, x 400. (The colours are artificial to improve the visual effect.) (PC)

More grassland species turned up here, and we added both *H. pratensis* (Meadow waxcap) and the very sticky *Hygrocybe irrigata* (Slimy waxcap) to the waxcap collection. Just at the end some good specimens of *Stropharia inuncta* (Smoky roundhead) were found with their distinctive rings on the stem showing nicely.

Stropharia inuncta in the grass in the Penn Churchyard (PC)



I then made my way back to the specimens of *Hygrocybe calyptriformis* we'd left in place on the vicarage lawn to set up my photo of the eight waxcap species collected during the morning.

Many thanks to all who attended. It was disappointing that there wasn't more support (from both members of the group and the public) but they missed a treat which we much enjoyed – over 100 species in all. See also the complete list of species for the site for more information.



A feast for the eyes: above a collection of the eight species of waxcap we found today at Penn. Back row from left to right: *Hygrocybe pratensis*, *H. irrigata*, *H. coccinea*, *H. reidii*; in the centre and pride of place: *H. calyptriformis*; front row left to right: *H. chlorophana*, *H. psittacina*, *H. virginea*. (PC) Below the superb specimens of *Hygrocybe coccinea* found in long grass near the cricket pitch. (DJS)

