

BFG Foray at Stoke Common
September 13th, 2014

Report by Penny Cullington

Still no rain for several weeks, and another bright and warm morning welcomed our group of twelve (about half and half regulars and new or potentially new members). We started off as usual just across the road from the main common – an interesting area which due to the underlying clay here spends a good deal of time under water, so no doubt this year was utterly submerged through our extremely wet spring. Surprisingly the fungi are not deterred by this and it is often a very productive area, as proved the case today despite the dry spell we've been having. We started off with several clusters of the striking *Gymnopilus junonius* (Spectacular rustgill) in various stages of development, plus quite a few *Hebelomas*, *Russulas*, *Leccinums*, and I was particularly pleased to see the bracket *Ganoderma resinaceum* still fruiting on the same Oak trunk where I first found it several years ago, this quite a rare species in our county.



Gymnopilus junonius, above just emerging (photo NS), and left mature specimens (photo NF). Below *Leccinum variicolor* showing green staining at the stem base (photo NF), and *Ganoderma resinaceum* beside it (photo NS).

Moving across the road, the Pine woodchip piles which in the past have always been a source of fungal interest produced nothing at all, but we soon started picking up nice specimens of *Lactarius helvus* (Fenugreek milkcap). This can grow in abundance here with its liking for Pine and Birch, though can be a confusing one to identify due to its colourless 'milk' which is not always easy to see. However, its distinctive smell of curry is another helpful clue.



Left, *Lactarius helvus*. (Photo NF)

Another *Lactarius* species we found, this one under Oak, was the distinctive *L. chrysorrheus* (Yellowdrop milkcap) – one which both its Latin and common name give away its key character: the milk which exudes from the damaged gills turns bright brassy yellow within less than half a minute. This unique character together with its zoned pinkish cap and the fact that it only grows under Oak make it easy to identify.



Left, *Lactarius chrysorrheus* showing the yellow milk on the gills and zoned pinkish cap typical of the species. (photo NF)

Despite notices at all access points (in both Polish and English) that picking fungi is prohibited at this SSSI site, the Polish community from nearby Slough make regular incursions here and tend to strip the place of anything remotely edible. (I made sure to carry our permission to foray with me in case of problems.) Consequently many of the boletes (mushrooms with pores rather than gills) which can abound here were in very short supply, with just one specimen each of *Suillus luteus* (Slippery Jack) and *S. bovinus* (Bovine bolete) found under the Pines. We did manage good young material of the attractive *Leccinum aurantiacum* (Orange Oak bolete) under the Oak and Birch, a species often abundant here. No doubt all the bigger specimens had already been bagged.



Left, young material of the attractive foxy red *Leccinum aurantiacum*; like *L. variicolor* above the stem tends to green where damaged (this can just be seen on the left hand fruitbody) but unlike that species the scabers on the stem are rusty red to start with, not black, and gradually darken as it ages. (Photo PC)

Continuing the orange theme, we searched amongst the disturbed ground but failed to find the very rare colonies of tiny cups of *Aleuria congregex*, a species of Orange peel fungus found new to Britain here several years back and refound a few times since. However, Neil's sharp eyes spotted other orange discs on cow dung. These were identified later as two species of the genus *Cheilymenia*, the smooth one being *C. granulata* and the hairy-edged one *C. stercoria*. Both are very common and less than 3mm across, the smooth one previously and better known as *Coprobria granulata*, the hairy-edged one being similar to members of the Eyelash fungus genus *Scutellinia*, though that genus grows on soil or wood, not dung as here.



The hairless *Cheilymenia granulata* above left (photo NF) and the hairy-edged *Cheilymenia stercoria* above right (photo NS) both found on cowpats today, the discs no more than 3mm across.

Roger found another pair of Ascomycetes (cup fungi) which are easy to confuse with each other and both probably equally common: tiny black dots on dead Holly leaves. The species with smaller dots less than 1mm across, *Trochila ilicina* (Holly speckle), is regularly recorded, but with less than half the

number of national records is the slightly larger *Phacidium multivalve* – up to 2mm across and no doubt often assumed to be the former species.



Trochila ilicina above and the slightly larger black dots of *Phacidium multivalve* right found on dead Holly leaves today. (photos NF)

We found just a few specimens of *Russula claroflava* (Yellow swamp brittlegill), a species often confused with the extremely common *R. ochroleuca* (Ochre brittlegill). *R. claroflava* grows only with Birch whereas *R. ochroleuca* is far less fussy and will grow happily with many different trees including Birch. If you find a yellow *Russula* under Birch it could be either of these two but they are easy to tell apart if you know what to look for. Apart from being a brighter less ochre yellow, the gills of *R. claroflava* are pale cream rather than white, but the decisive difference is that if you scratch and damage the stem with your nail and keep an eye on it for 15 minutes or so, the damaged part will turn gradually reddish and then in more time turn grey then black (the same colour change as in the flesh of *R. nigricans*). In fact all parts of the fruitbody blacken, and *R. ochroleuca* never reacts in this way though if very old, wet and soggy the stem can at most take on a greyish hue.



Left *Russula claroflava* growing with Birch today. Note the scratched area on the stem of the larger specimen where the typical reddish grey stain which characterises this species is developing. An hour or so later this had turned black.

We listed just over 70 species for the day, a reasonable total considering the dry conditions. Of note is the fact that (unusually for a site so close to the Chilterns) no species associating with Beech are included, this due to its almost entire absence from

the site. Two species we found still have a question mark over them: one was another cup fungus, a *Peziza* Neil noticed growing on a brick in the first area we visited. There are several species of *Peziza* noted on this substrate but none of them seem to fit with the colour and spores of this specimen. I've sent it to expert Brian Spooner to see if he can help.



Left *Peziza* sp. found growing on a mossy brick today. This awaits identification by Brian Spooner and I will add the name at a later date.

The second unidentified species is potentially much the most exciting find of the foray: a white specimen collected early on with some other species of *Hebeloma* growing under Oak. This genus always need a microscope to identify, so I stuffed them in a pot to work on at home. Four years ago I collected from this same spot an unfamiliar white fruitbody which turned out to be a strange form of *Hebeloma* with white gills and white spores – it was a first for Britain and only about the third time it had been found in Europe. The expert on this genus, Henry Beker, to whom I sent it for confirmation at the time, was keen that I should look out for more. A bit like looking for a needle in a haystack, I was not hopeful this would be possible, but when I looked more closely at the specimen we found today I think it quite likely that it is same species again. It is at present winging its way to an excited Henry in Belgium, so fingers crossed and I'll report back when I hear from him.

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Possibly *Hebeloma* sp., an extremely unusual and rare species not yet with a definitive name, which was first collected herein 2010 under the Oaks in the area often submerged by water, and we may have refound today. (photo PC)

My thanks to all who attended and collected such an interesting range of species. Thanks also to Nick and Neil for their excellent photos.

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