

Foray at Burnham Beeches on Sunday Oct 18th

Penny Cullington

What an excellent foray! Our largest group so far this season – 19 attendees, and also our longest list (ever?): over 140 species. A dry dullish morning, also pretty dry underfoot with no recent rain here, but although things were not fruiting prolifically or perhaps looking their best, with that many people searching I was soon scribbling down names and we moved hardly any distance from the car park area in the first half hour. In fact we covered only half the route I'd planned despite not returning to the cars till well after 1.00, and then rather reluctantly.



This is often a good site for the cup fungus *Otidea* (Ears – distinguished from *Peziza* in the field by the fruitbody being an incomplete cup with a slit, often inrolled on one side). We made several separate collections of the clay coloured *Otidea alutacea* (Tan ear) and also found a large cluster of *O. onotica* (Hare's ears) showing its typical pink spotting.

Left *Otidea onotica* (NW)

Neither of these two species are rare, but a further similar cup fungus we came across was new to the site and proved to be an extremely interesting, indeed momentous find. The genus *Sowerbyella* looks basically like a *Peziza* (i.e. having an entire cup) but its combination of microscopic characters fits neither with *Peziza* nor the very similar *Otidea*. When Derek suggested that what we'd found was *Sowerbyella radiculata* I recalled finding it in Penn Street Churchyard a few years back when it had taken me a long time to identify due to my mistaken conviction that it had to belong either in *Peziza* or *Otidia*. Derek took a specimen home to check today and noticed that the spore size and ornamentation was a little different from those of *S. radiculata*, and with further research realised that what we had was var. *petaloidea*. This species was described by Ascomycete expert Brian Spooner in 2006 based on 4 collections held at Kew but all from the 19th century, and one of these from Dropmore, Bucks in 1867. There are no subsequent British records. Derek is sending the material to Brian, and if confirmed we will have rescued this taxon from extinction in both Buckinghamshire and Britain!

Right, the beautiful yellow cups of the extremely rare *Sowerbyella radiculata* var. *petaloidea*, not only new for the site but if confirmed this could be the first collection for well over 150 years. It was growing on a old well-rotted woodchip pile. (NW). **note added later: Brian Spooner suggests this collection should remain as cf. var. *petaloidea* as the spore size though a bit large for the type is not spot on for this rare variety.**



Still on the cup theme, it's always nice to find the miniscule bright green cups of *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* (Green elfcup). I thought one was safe identifying this in the field but learnt today that there is a further look-alike species, *C. aeruginosa* (Turquoise elfcup). (The wood stained by which of these two species was used in the manufacture of Tunbridgeware, I wonder?!) Now it seems that even this fairly common fungus will need careful examination at home to be sure of its identity. Our collection today was kindly checked and confirmed by Nicola Bacciu who was foraging with us today.



Left *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* (NW)

Head ranger Helen Read had asked us to look out for and if possible identify a large fungus she'd noticed emerging from a particular Beech trunk where a branch had broken off. We located it a good 10 feet off the ground and after debate the consensus was that it was probably a species of *Pholiota*. We managed to break off a bit of cap with a stick, which enabled Derek to identify it later as *P. adiposa*. This is now the third record in as many weeks where we've seen this uncommon species, clearly thriving in conditions this autumn.



Left and below, two views of *Pholiota adiposa* 10ft up a Beech tree (NW)



When the cry of "I've found some pink blobs" was heard, this signalled a nice collection of the common slime mould *Lycogala terrestre*, unmistakable when in this state but one that often confuses people when the blobs dry off becoming pale beige as the spores within mature.



Left, the Myxomycete *Lycogala terrestre* growing on rotting deciduous wood today. Each blob is less than 1cm across. (NW)

Very few specimens of *Mycena* (Bonnetts) were around: *Mycena crocata* (Saffron bonnet) was predictably one of the 6 species recorded, also a collection of *Mycena haematopus* (Burgundydrop bonnet) – another of the genus easily identified when one is picked to reveal the brightly coloured juice within, the colour in both species gives rise to their Latin and common names.

Right, *Mycena haematopus* growing on an Oak trunk (NW)



Another favourite and an easily recognised species we saw plenty of today was *Helvella crispa* (White saddle). This is another of the Ascomycetes (spore shooters) as are the cup fungi. In this case the spores are dispersed from its outer smooth surface whereas in the cup fungi it is the inner smooth surface which is fertile.

Left *Helvella crispa*, a delightful photo showing both a young and a mature specimen. (NW)

Nine species of *Lactarius* (Milkcaps) were identified, all fairly common species except for one which was new to the site, this was *L. rubrocinctus*, darker orange-brown than *L. tabidus* and *subdulcis* and similar to *L. lacunarum*, however that species has milk which turns yellow and grows with Birch in damp sites whereas in *L. rubrocincta* the milk remains white and it grows with Beech. Another good field character is the ring of darker colour at the stipe apex, this was clear in one of today's specimens though is not always present and not visible in the photo below. There are only 50 British records of this species, with two previously from Bucks.



Left the uncommon *Lactarius rubrocinctus* growing beneath a Beech tree today, and new to the site. (NW)

We came across a large patch of a palish grey *Tricholoma* (Knight) with Birch, Willow and Beech all nearby. On picking one it became instantly clear what the species was because there was a distinct ring on the stem –the only British *Tricholoma* with this feature. This was *T. cingulatum* (Girdled knight), a species which is host specific to Willow – not a rarity but always nice to find.



Above two views of *Tricholoma cingulatum* found under Willow today, and surprisingly new to the site. (NW)



Two small species of *Conocybe* (Conecap) both having a ring on the stem were identified. This is a genus with a large number of species, all needing determination with a microscope, and the few which have a ring have been moved into a separate genus *Pholiotina* (though not in our database yet). The specimen in the photo was just 4 cm tall with the cap less than 1 cm across, though the ring is clearly visible and coloured by the rusty spores typical of the genus.

Left *Pholiotina* (= *Conocybe*) *arrhenii* lurking in the moss today. (NW)

Next a species which is always greeted with delight and amazement, and another new for the site today: the delectable *Cyathus striatus* (Fluted birdsnest). We found a large patch, probably around 100 fruitbodies, though many (but not all) had already lost their ‘eggs’ from their nests. These are actually little parcels containing the spores which when mature are dispersed by a rain drop landing in their midst.

Each nest is only around 1cm across.



Right *Cyathus striatus* was new to the site today. (NW)

We were joined today by Mario Tortelli who particularly enjoys the genus *Cortinarius* (Webcap) – one which many shy away from. Thanks to his expertise we were able to record nine species of this challenging genus, two of which were new to the site. Mature Beech woodland is particularly favoured by *Cortinarius* and several which I knew and had previously recorded here were found, but it was especially pleasing to have the opportunity to learn a few new ones. A couple are included here.



Above, *Cortinarius ochroleucus* (Cream webcap), new to me, to the site and the first authenticated county record. (CS)



Left *Cortinarius croceus* (Saffron webcap) with beautiful yellow cap and gills to match – a species I’ve recorded here several times before. (CS)

Finally to a group of fungi special to Burnham Beeches: the stipitate hydroids or toothed fungi – all of which are considered rare and at some stage have been on the red data list. As far as I know this is the only site in the county where they’ve been found. These are bracket-like and grow on soil / mossy banks on the roots of trees, and as the name suggests they have short stems and have sharp spines underneath as in the familiar *Hydnum repandum* (Wood hedgehog) – a species which was very common today (one specimen must have been all of 6 inches across!). Our route today was planned to cover a particular bank where species of both the *Phellodon* and *Hydnullum* genera are known to grow. There was no sign of them there, however, but later during the foray a new site was found – a bank liberally covered with a species of *Phellodon* under Beech. It was great to find a new place for these rare fungi, especially fruiting in such profusion, and I know that Helen Read will be as delighted as we were at this discovery. As to naming the species, this is not something either Derek or I can do – even RBG Kew expert extraordinaire Martyn Ainsworth who has made a special study of stipitate hydroids suspects that often the only sure way is with DNA testing. I am therefore sending him a specimen from Sunday’s collection, thus the species is not as yet on our list. (See caption below)

Left and below, *Phellodon*
confluens growing in profusion
on a bank under Beech today -
the determination now kindly
supplied by Martyn Ainsworth
(NW)



What a morning we had – a treat! Many thanks to all who attended - everyone contributed to our satisfyingly long list: 144 species which included 15 new to this well recorded site and some real rarities. I'm indebted to Nick White and Claudi Soler who provided me with excellent photos and without which this report would not have been illustrated – I found myself too busy even to think about getting the camera out.