

## FUNGI WALK at RUSHBEDS WOOD on April 22nd 2018

Penny Cullington

A select group of seven enjoyed a beautiful spring morning at this delightful site, though those without wellies struggled a bit in places after the torrential overnight rain. As we went round the woodland floor was liberally dotted with a mosaic of yellow and blue from the impressive array of flowers and we were accompanied by a veritable concert of bird song, mainly from the recently arrived migrant warblers including Garden Warbler and Lesser Whitethroat. It was really nice to welcome two new members to the group, both of whom quickly involved and contributing.

Starting out on the old railway track along the south border we soon found just a few specimens of *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet Elfcup), it being late in the season for this very early fruiter. More seasonal, in fact pretty well spot on to the day, was a good group of *Calocybe gambosa* (St. George's Mushroom) – one of only 5 species of mushroom-types (with gills and stem) to be found today. We were on the lookout for Morels in this area, having found them here fairly regularly in the past when visiting in Spring, so it was particularly pleasing when Derek spotted a small brown conical cap on a white stem at the path edge. This was *Verpa conica* (Thimble Morel) and in fact new to the site, an unusual morel in that it lacks the typical pitted ridges and cavities one associates with this group of fungi, the cap being merely wrinkled. We have just five other sites in the county where this species has been found, with no records since 2012 where it was found at nearby Brill Ponds.

Further along the track Jenny found our first example of a much more typical Morel: *Mitrophora semilibera* (Semifree Morel), a species we've recorded here on six previous visits. In fact as we continued round we found quite a few more specimens, mostly singletons, the last of which Derek sliced lengthways to show us why this particular species is separated into a different genus with its epithet *semilibera*. In members of the genus *Morchella* the base of the ridged fertile surface (cap) attaches to the stem, whereas in our species today the fertile surface attaches to the stem only half way up, leaving the lower half of the cap unattached / free.



Left, *Mitrophora semilibera* found in several path edges today (PG), and above one of these sliced lengthways, the arrow showing where the cap is attaching not at the base but half way up, i.e. the cap is 'semifree' of the stem. (CVS)

Turning right at the end of this track we first located a species by the gate which we regularly look for and find at this point. This was *Phellinus pomaceus* (Cushion Bracket), one of a large genus but this particular species grows on *Prunus* and is commonest on *P. spinosa* (Blackthorn) which is abundant at Rushbeds. We then looked at a patch of dead nettle stems – always a good source of fungi for the list - and found not only the usual common culprits mentioned in last week’s report for Bicester Garrison, but also some more interesting things. The most notable was a species apparently new to the county though described in Ellis & Ellis as common from March to May. I noticed some tiny longitudinal patches of grey ‘dust’ along the grooves of a dead stem; Derek wondered if this might be a species of *Tomentella* but this was eliminated at home as it lacked the typical spiny spores of that genus. In fact the grey dust was a mass of long thin colourless cylindrical conidia (asexual spores) which were often septate (divided into segments). Turning to Ellis & Ellis I hoped that I might find it by looking up the host plant; there amongst the many species which grow on nettle stems I found one that fitted the bill. Amongst the Hyphomycetes (a group of Ascomycetes – the spore-shooters) was *Polyscytalum berkeleyi*, described as powdery pale grey, on dead nettle stems just above soil level. The conidia measurements were correct, so when I read that it was (apparently) common I had no qualms in naming it as this. I was then rather surprised when I could locate no images online - odd for a common species - but then realised why when I checked in the national database to see if maybe the

name had changed. Here I found no name change but just 44 records, the last 7 of which were made by Nick Legon (a well respected name in mycology who spent much time recording in Bucks but is sadly now no longer with us). Derek also checked his specimen and came to the same name – always reassuring! – so this was new to the county though presumably is not nearly as rare as records would suggest, just not often noticed or identified. The material is being dried.



Left, the grey *Polyscytalum berkeleyi* found on the base a dead nettle stem, and above the conidia, up to 3-septate, which are visible in mass when a tiny scraping the grey ‘dust’ is magnified x 1000. (DJS)

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As we took a left turn off the main ride into an area with more mature Oak (also a good deal of mud to negotiate) we found several collections of *Psathyrella spadicea* (Spring Brittlestem), a species which turned up last week as well. Most members of this genus look very similar and tend to be left by many mycologists without being named to species – they nearly always need microscopic work with recourse to specialist literature. Last week I identified two different species and my report (on Bicester Garrison) included micrographs showing the salient microscopic differences but no macro shots. Today we had more photogenic material worth including here to show this typical example of the genus.

Young fresh specimens of *Psathyrella spadicea* showing the typical pale cap and white stem of the genus, though the gills have yet to turn dark (almost black) as the spores mature and start to drop. (BS)



Today's list of 32 species is pretty well equally divided between Basidiomycetes (spore-droppers) and Ascomycetes (spore-shooters), this somewhat in contrast to our typical Autumn lists which are dominated by Basidiomycetes when the fruiting of gilled and pored mushroom-types is at its zenith. One of these which we found today was growing on a log pile towards the end of our morning and is worth including here. We regularly inspect this particular pile on our visits here because it always produces something of interest. This time it was a member of the genus *Crepidotus* (Oysterling), one which has gills but no stem, the cap growing directly out of the substrate – wood, sticks and twigs, even herbaceous stems, according to species. Nearly all



members of this genus need microscope work to name, but *Crepidotus mollis* (Peeling Oysterling) is the exception: it has a unique colourless gelatinous skin which enables the cap to be stretched like a concertina rather than just split apart as do other *Crepidotus* species when given this treatment. It also tends to grow bigger than the others, up to 50 mm across or more, so the large cap size of today's collection was what triggered me to try the 'stretching' test.

*Crepidotus mollis* growing on a deciduous wood pile today. (CVS)

Surprisingly few Myxomycetes (Slime moulds) were in evidence today, particularly as conditions seemed perfect: there was an abundance of rotting damp fallen wood everywhere. New member Bob noticed some silvery coated brown lumps about an inch or more across on a fallen trunk. This was the slime mould *Reticularia lycoperdon* - no slime moulds have common names





but the Latin species name will be familiar, stemming from this species' vague similarity to a puffball. Today's specimens were well past the 'slimy' stage when covered with a delicate smooth white 'skin'; as the skin dries out it splits open to allow the brown spore mass to be dispersed by air currents, raindrops, even slugs and snails etc.

Left, mature specimens of the slime mould *Reticularia lycoperdon* found today (BS), and below an example showing how it looks at an earlier 'slimy' stage (photo from Stoke Common 2011 PC)



For more details of what we found see the separate complete list. There are a few more photos of interest below. Many thanks to all who attended this informal celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of BFG (where has the time gone?!). Thank you also to the photographers as always – this makes my task so much easier. Our next event will be the AGM on June 23rd (details are on the website) and our next walk will be at the beginning of September when we hope things will be starting to pop up nicely. Our autumn programme is already taking shape and will be on the website after our AGM.

Photographers: BS = Bob Simpson; CVS = Claudi Soler; DJS = Derek Schafer; PC = Penny Cullington; PG = Paul Goby



Left, the jelly-like *Tremella mesenterica* (Yellow Brain) found on fallen Hazel; right, *Polyporus brumalis* (Winter Polypore) found on fallen deciduous wood. (CVS)



The miniscule hairy discs of *Lachnum niveum* found on rotting bare deciduous wood. The scale below shows millimetres, making them barely 1 mm across. This is one of three extremely similar species of white hairy discs, only safely separated with a microscope. For comparison I included a photo of *L. virginium* in last week's report for Bicester Garrison. (DJS)