

FUNGI WALK at STOWE LANDSCAPE GARDENS on Saturday November 11th 2017

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Today was our only sortie into the north of the county this season, thus the travel distance for many members together with the grey and drizzly start to the morning and the decided lack of fruiting around at present probably accounted for the lower turn-out than we've been experiencing recently. Just seven of us met up in the old car park and made our way to the Grecian Valley area where on previous visits (now over ten years ago) we had found impressive numbers of waxcaps with 15 different species recorded.

For the first 15 minutes or so we found extremely little: precisely one collection of *Mycena* (Bonnet) in the lawn under Oak which later turned out to be the very common *M. filipes* (Iodine Bonnet), this followed by the even more common *Rhizisma acerinum* (Tar Spot) on fallen leaves - a species always present if Sycamore trees are around. For a while it looked as if this might be the highlight of the morning but gradually as we explored the Pines along the western edge of the valley a few more species started turning up though mostly fairly mundane things and often not in the greatest of nicks. However, a few Inkcaps were found during the morning which kept Derek interested (more on these later) and at last Paul found some waxcaps struggling through the rather long grass in the valley: firstly *Hygrocybe reidii* (Honey Waxcap) - though as is often the case the distinctive smell of this species was not very convincing, followed by a huge specimen - with cap more than 10cm across - which could only be the uncommon *Hygrocybe punicea* (Crimson Waxcap). This was one of the special waxcaps we really wanted to find here, and searching around we were able to make an excellent collection to set up a photo - there must have been in excess of 30 fruitbodies in varying states of development, some the worse for wear and rather faded from recent frost and rain, but we were well satisfied and delighted that this species is clearly still doing really well here. This is one of just four county sites where we've recorded it before: here (in 2004 through to '07), also at Penn Cricket Pitch, Prestwood Churchyard and Stoke Poges Memorial Gardens. Our morning certainly started looking up from this point onwards though few other waxcaps were found, possibly because the grass was just too long for the smaller species to make their presence felt (either they weren't fruiting or we failed to notice them despite much searching).

Below, our impressive collection of *Hygrocybe punicea*, probably the highlight of the morning. (PC)



It was no surprise to find two of the common yellow species of *Clavulinopsis* (Clubs) in the grass, but much less commonly recorded is a similar but white species, found by Paul. This was *Clavaria fragilis* (formerly *vermicularis* – White Spindles). To the naked eye it looks much like the other clubs apart from its colour, the reason for the different genus name being microscopic: the joins (septa) along the long thin cells which make up the tissue of the fungus (hyphae) have clamps (a bit like rounded hinges) in *Clavulinopsis* but these are entirely lacking in *Clavaria*.



Left, a clump of *Clavaria fragilis* found today (CVS) and also recorded here on one of our previous visits, and above an example of a clamp, present in many genera of Basidiomycetes though lacking in the tissue of the genus *Clavaria*.

We found nice material of another species related to Clubs but one which occurs in woodland litter rather than in grassland: *Ramaria stricta* (Upright Coral). This genus together with *Clavulinopsis*, *Clavulina* and *Clavaria* form the group known as the Clavariaceae. Although they lack gills and have a very different appearance to gilled and stalked mushrooms they are still closely related, developing their spores on basidia and thus making them spore-droppers (Basidiomycetes) rather than spore-shooters (Ascomycetes).



Left, *Ramaria stricta*. (CVS)

Also in the grassland area we found several specimens of *Clitocybe fragrans* (Fragrant Funnel) - a fairly common nondescript mushroom species but with a smell that can pack a punch and leave you in no doubt as its identity when the smell of aniseed is as strong as it was today.

Right, *Clitocybe fragrans* (TH)

Moving on to things we found associated with the strips of woodland either side of the valley, Tony started us off with a Beech log with a brown resupinate fungus having a somewhat



roughened, almost toothed surface. Derek's suggestion of its name prompted me to check for a strong sweet fruity smell which I recalled was a characteristic of this species, *Mycoacia nothofagi* (no English name but a species known as an indicator of ancient Beech woodland). Its distinctive smell together with another useful character - the fact that it peels away from the wood very easily - confirmed the identification, one of over 20 species we recorded today which were new to the site.



Left, *Mycoacia nothofagi* growing on a Beech log today. (TH)

Probably the commonest genus we saw today was *Mycena* (Bonnet), and one of the eight species recorded was of particular note as it appears to be new to the county. This was a small rather yellow species in grass which Derek noticed also had a yellow edge to the gills: *Mycena citrinomarginata* (no English name but the Latin one

is self explanatory). In fact at home I found that I had two more specimens of this when I checked through my collections. Joanna found good numbers of what initially appeared to be another interesting *Mycena* fruiting in woodchip: it was certainly 'Mycenoid' in shape and the gills appeared to be suitably white though at the time Derek had his doubts and thought he could see darker spores developing. At home I confirmed that he was correct and that though the gills were still white the next morning the sporeprint it dropped was clearly black! So this was not a *Mycena* despite the initial appearance and was in fact a somewhat atypical collection of *Psathyrella corrugis* (Red Edge Brittlestem), confirmed by various distinctive microscopic features though the red gill edge usually present was completely missing. Making identifications late in the season after frost can often prove problematic as we found with other things as well today: macro-characters such as cap and gill colour and shape, also smells, can be affected and thus misleading.



Two different collections of *Psathyrella corrugis* made today, both on woodchip but in separate areas. On the right is typical material (pc) and on the left is the typical Mycenoid-like collection with persistently white gills despite the black sporeprint deposited overnight at home. (CVS)

The 24 species new to the site contributed a significant proportion of our list of just under 70 found today; it pushes up the total number of species we've recorded here (according to our database) to 272. One of the six different Inkcap species (the specimen of *Parasola* found by Paul) Derek has chosen to omit from the list for the moment: though close to *P. plicatilis* (Pleated Inkcap) the spores were in Derek's words: 'not quite right - it may be the newly described *Parasola plicatilis-similis* but I need more morphology & DNA before claiming it'. Other inkcaps of which we have photos were *Coprinellus impatiens* (no English name) and an amazing clump of *Coprinopsis atramentaria* (Common Inkcap) with the largest specimens Derek had ever come across!



Two species of Inkcaps we found: left, *Coprinellus impatiens* with a cap just 2 cm across at most, and right *Coprinopsis atramentaria* with caps in this collection 6cm across or more.(CVS)

It's worth including here two more things we found which we don't see very often – certainly it's the only time I've come across them this year. Firstly under a Pine I noticed a large dirty white funnel-shaped cap struggling through the debris and on closer inspection this had to be either one of the *Russula Compactae* group or from the very similar genus *Lactifluus* (a new genus containing several species previously in *Lactarius* but in appearance extremely like one of the large, chunky and solid-fleshed *Compactae*, the obvious difference being the presence of milk in damaged gills of *Lactifluus*). I dug down with difficulty to extricate the half submerged specimen and in doing so had to remove part of its completely submerged adjoining neighbour, but luckily these broken bits contained

the vital clue to its identity: no milk in the gills but with a pale blue-green line on the white stem flesh, a feature only found in *Russula chloroides* (Blueband Brittlegill). This is a species which reportedly grows under deciduous trees, particularly Oak, but was here less than a metre away from a large Pine though there was Beech nearby. Today the coloured band was easy to see but even so it only just shows up in my photo here – a situation I've sadly met with whenever I've tried to photo it before.



Russula chloroides today with its blue-green band just visible on the left hand broken piece (PC)



Lastly just as we finished Claudi noticed a large bracket just emerging from the base of a mature Cedar; this was *Phaeolus schweinitzii* (Dyer's Mazegill), not uncommon on conifer though usually on Pine but a species we don't often record. It can get to at least dinner-plate size when it is an impressive sight and, as the English name suggests, was in the past commonly used to produce a yellow, orange or brown dye depending upon the age of the specimen. I've added two photos here to show an example of more mature specimens as well as Claudi's photo of today's bracket with an insert showing the pore surface beneath.

Phaeolus schweinitzii, above is today's find on Cedar (cvs), and below is a more mature collection on the roots of Pine, the photo taken in the Forest of Dean in 2013 (PC).



To sum up, after a somewhat slow start to our morning and considering the late date (this was one of the group's latest November walks in our 19 years of recording) we certainly ended up with the feeling that the visit had been well worth our while. No doubt an earlier date another year would boost the list for the site especially as there's so much of the area we've never explored. My thanks to all those who came and contributed so much our morning, also to the National Trust for permitting our visit, and especially to Claudi and Tony for their photos. Our programme of events is now concluded (apart from the Christmas walk in December for which sadly I shall be away) so this is my final report till next year.