

FUNGI WALK at MOOREND COMMON on September 22nd 2019

Penny Cullington

We were a good sized group today with 12 members boosted to 18 by Frieth Natural History Society. Everyone was much needed to increase our chances of finding anything fungal which had managed to survive the recent and prolonged extremely warm and dry spell. Locals Margaret and Bill had done their homework and expertly lead us round a route which incorporated the dampest northfacing areas and this certainly paid off though many of the things we found were somewhat desiccated and not exactly looking their best. Few tempted one to get the camera out (in my case none!) especially once the light deteriorated and the rain started, but Barry managed to capture a couple which are below. Inevitably our species list is dominated by fungi growing on wood – often the way in such conditions, but of our 48 species it was pleasing to be able to add 9 new to the site according to our records and even more pleasing that one of these was not only new to the county but also a real rarity, having only about 20 national records. More on this later.



Perhaps the commonest Agaric we saw was *Amanita citrina* (False Deathcap) enabling us to note the key features of the genus and the species, though its distinctive smell of potato peelings – one of the ways to tell it apart from *A. phalloides* (Deathcap) was hard to detect owing to the dryness of the specimens. I thought it might be worth including here a photo taken elsewhere in the county to show what fresh specimens can look like.

Left, *Amanita citrina* from Common Wood in 2007 (PC)

Another Agaric we saw in reasonable numbers was *Laccaria laccata* (Deceiver) – one which lived up to its name particularly well today because it is in just such conditions as today's that it plays tricks on even the most experienced mycologists (until they notice the pink well-spaced gills which remain constant even when the caps are faded to almost white as can happen when they dry out). Barry's photo taken today shows fairly faded specimens, particularly the lowest one where the gills still reveal its identity. We did see the odd example having fresh moist unfaded caps which are a bright rusty brown as can be seen in the insert here - hardly recognisable as the same species!

Left, a threesome of *Laccaria laccata* seen today (BW), together with an insert taken elsewhere by Nick White (sadly no longer with us).



Much of our time was spent turning over or picking up fallen wood in the hopes of finding something of interest. One such piece of bare wood had various things growing on it, all of which needed a x10 lens to see in detail. Amongst them was a miniature forest of dark brown stems, (Derek likens them to tiny pipe-cleaners) instantly recognisable as a species of *Stemonitis* – not in fact a fungus at all but a Myxomycete (a slime mould). This strange and little known kingdom of natural history is now thought to be closer to the animal kingdom than to that of plants, though - in common with fungi - when mature (well past the slimy stage) it does produce masses of tiny spores to be spread by air currents. Because of this similarity they were at one stage thought to be

related to fungi and thus are traditionally observed and recorded by mycologists. Our species today was *Stemonitis fusca* – no common name but the Latin ‘fusca’ describes the typical dark fuscous brown fluffy tops where the spores develop; it also has a considerably longer stem than others in the genus – between a third and a half of its total height (which is 2cms at most). Barry’s beautiful photo of today’s collection shows rather pale greyish tops – this due to the fact that most of the brown spores had already blown away. As there was considerable interest in this today with questions about what it would look like at an earlier stage, I include here a photo to illustrate this. The first signs are just a slimy white mess (called plasmodium)



and from this the pale pink ‘pipe-cleaners’ start to emerge, these gradually turning to cocoa brown and drying off as the dark brown spores mature and eventually disperse, leaving the bare skeleton behind. These various stages take only about a day or two to develop, so if you find a slime mould at the slimy stage it’s fascinating to carefully collect it and watch it develop at home - hours of fun!

Left above, *Stemonitis fusca* found today (BW) and below an example of the same species at an earlier stage of development (PC)

Derek at one point showed me a bit of damp stick Jenny had picked up with two hardly visible fruitbodies growing on it. With a x10 lens there was a small off-white blob which Derek had noticed had gills and a hairy cap with tiny moisture droplets trapped amongst them. He took it home to work on and discovered that it was a rare species of *Crepidotus* (Oysterling). We are familiar with the common members of this genus, typically consisting of a small whitish cap with gills but no stem and kidney-shaped, reminiscent of a small sea shell, growing on fallen sticks or

plant stems – in fact several sticks with *Crepidotus cesatii* (Roundspored Oysterling) were collected today, a species we regularly record. Derek found that in his specimen the spores (always critical in identifying this genus to species) were darker than most, also bigger and with distinctive ornamentation. This together with other features lead him to *Crepidotus subverrucisporus*. Not only is this a first county record but the nearest collection amongst the 21 national records was a single record from Middlesex with none from the neighbouring counties.

Below, today's exciting find: *Crepidotus subverrucisporus* collected by Jenny on a deciduous stick, the cm scale on the right showing its miniscule size with magnified detail of the central specimen on the left. (DJS)



Many thanks to all attendees for searching so carefully to supply us with enough things to keep the interest despite the disappointing conditions today. For details of what we found see the separate list of species. Thanks also to Alan Gudge and to Margaret and Bill Bolton for shepherding us round so efficiently. A final thank you to Barry and Derek for their excellent photos.

Photographers: BW = Barry Webb; DJS = Derek Schafer; Nick White; PC = Penny Cullington.