

FUNGI WALK at STOKE COMMON on November 12th 2025

Penny Cullington

Our group of 17 met up just inside the main gate and it was clear from the off that we were in for a busy morning. The rain stayed away for the most part, and notebook and pen were put to immediate use whilst we waited for everyone to assemble. Angus Wilkinson (Conservation Officer both for the Common and nearby Burnham Beeches) then gave us a quick history of the site, its ecology unique within the county and therefore of considerable significance for flora, fauna and of course funga!

One of the finds made whilst we assembled was a species of *Pholiota* which both Jesper and I puzzled over – it's always trickier identifying fungi when handed to you rather than seeing them in situ,

so it took us some time but eventually *Pholiota alnicola* came to mind when we realised it was growing clustered at the base of a Birch trunk. Recently moved to a different genus, ***Flammula alnicola*** (Alder Scalycap) was presumably first described when growing with Alder but is not in fact restricted to that tree and is regularly found with Birch amongst other deciduous trees. The name Scalycap is suitably apt for many members of *Pholiota* but there are several which lack obvious cap scales, this being one, hence the genus move.

Left: ***Flammula alnicola*** (CVS)



Two more virtually smooth capped members of *Pholiota* were soon found, one common and one much less so. The quite common *P. gummosa* (Sticky Scalycap) is small for the genus, pale greenish yellow and grows on submerged roots well away from the trunk and this combination of features often confuses (no photo, sorry). Much rarer is ***Pholiota mixta*** (no English name), one I've found here before and today this one also caused us problems when handed in but eventually I twigged. However, we later discovered that there is a similar but even rarer species (*P. spumosa*) which develops a yellow tinge in maturity so there is a chance that today's collection might in fact be that. So we'll get a sample sequenced and for now record this as *P. cf. mixta*.

Right: ***Pholiota cf. mixta*** (SJE)



By this stage of the proceedings I was still standing only a few yards from our starting point and my entry for *P. mixta* is about no 30 in my notebook! We clearly weren't going to cover very much of this large site. It was not long before *Suillus bovinus* (Bovine Bolete), a Pine associate and a regular here, was on the list and we saw this continuously during the morning when under that tree. Also under the Pines were two other members of this particular bolete genus: ***Suillus luteus*** (Slippery Jack) – also common here - is one of the easiest to identify due to its slimy coating, yellow unchanging pores and skirtlike ring on the stem – unusual amongst boletes; ***Suillus variegatus*** (Velvet Bolete) – less common – lacks the slimy cap and ring, has pores clearly darker than

the cap colour with no yellow and the cap has a roughened texture. Today's magnificent single example was possibly 12 cm across, and much admired.



Above left: *Suillus variegatus* (SJE), and right: *Suillus luteus* (JW)

We have a surprising number of *Russulaceae* on the list - that's the genera *Lactarius* and *Russula*, both usually pretty well done and dusted by November. The bright red *Russula emetica* (Sickener) popped up regularly when we were under Pine, also a regular here is *Russula claroflava* (Yellow Swamp Brittle-gill) when under Birch – both these two are host specific with their respective trees. Most prolific, however, was *Russula fragilis* (Fragile Brittle-gill) which favours Oak but is very variable in colour (as in fact are many members of this huge and challenging genus). We eventually found good numbers of this species under a single Oak, one of which had the most obviously serrate gill edge - a unique and key field character - I've ever seen! (Claire's insert here shows this feature though in fact this wasn't the particular cap to which I was referring!) Note here the wide range of cap colours, all of which are not unusual for the species.



Left: *Russula fragilis* (cvs) with insert (CW)

Notable amongst our list of *Lactarius* species were two Pine associates. *Lactarius rufus* (Rufous Milkcap) is one of the

darker brown capped species and typically has a small dark pointed umbo (like a nipple). This was one of few members of this genus today which actually obliged by showing white 'milk' when the gills were damaged! (Just visible in the LH upturned specimen). *Lactarius helvus* (Fenugreek Milkcap) – an abundant fruiter here – is notorious for its obstinacy in this respect, but that's in part because its milk is entirely colourless (like tiny water droplets) and if you don't know to look for it you would certainly miss it! Its other redeeming feature is its spicy smell though as often happens when late in the season even this was not very convincing today. These droplets are just visible in the top left quarter of the upturned cap here, but nothing was produced from my penknife slice, also visible.

Below left: *Lactarius rufus* (PC), and right: *Lactarius helvus* (SJE)



The genus *Mycena* (Bonnet) was much in evidence with nine species identified either in the field or later at home. One which we saw several times growing in the heathland was *Mycena epipterygia* (Yellowleg Bonnet), a species which foray leaders like to find in order to demonstrate one of its distinctive characters (and I'm no exception!). Besides being remarkably sticky (making it quite hard to pick one up by the stem) it has a transparent removable pellicle coating the cap, and with care this whole layer can be peeled off! What's more, today we found several examples where this species had another fungus spoiling my fun, growing as it does all over the cap. *Spinellus fusiger* (Bonnet Mould) is a parasitic pin mould which is quite commonly found on the caps of various species of Bonnet and less frequently on the caps of some other genera.

Far right: a collection of *Mycena epipterygia* (JL), with top insert showing *Spinellus fusiger* growing on the cap of *M. epipterygia* (JW), and lower insert showing a demonstration of the removable pellicle! (cw),



Some of you may recall my naming some rather dark capped Bonnets in the field as *Mycena megaspora* (Rooting Bonnet) but this was not born out later with microscopy taken on by both Jesper and Sarah. In fact it defied identification and so the collection is dried for sequencing.

Below left: *Mycena* sp. awaiting sequencing (SJE)
Below right: *Baeospora myosura* (SJE)



Often mistaken for a species of Bonnet is the tiny *Baeospora myosura* (Conifercone Cap) which does what it says on the tin though sometimes the host Pine cones have disintegrated so the fungus appears to be in litter. When this happens the give-away feature is its very crowded



gills and usually, if one suspects one has this species, searching around usually reveals an example actually on a cone as was the case here. It is very common under Pine and often very plentiful.



A species of LBJ which was continually handed into us when in the heathland we were able to name to genus but not to species without recourse to a microscope. This was independently identified later by both Jesper and myself as ***Hypholoma ericaeum*** (Heath Brownie). Related to the familiar *H. fasciculare* (Sulphur Tuft) which grows very commonly on wood / woody debris, there are several lookalikes in this genus which inhabit peaty acidic areas such as this, but today only this species was found.

Left: *Hypholoma ericaeum* (PC)

Moving on to other things, a late season species which was new to the site today was found on fallen Birch. ***Sarcomyxa serotina*** (Olive Oysterling) is large for an Oysterling (an English name applied to many wood inhabiting small fungi from several different genera having an eccentric stem and decurrent gills), but the dirty olive greenish brown cap colour together with yellowish to cream gills and general chunky appearance separate this species at a glance.

Right: *Sarcomyxa serotina* (JW)



A very interesting jelly fungus was found on fallen Pine and in the heat of the moment this failed to ring any bells with me until Sarah worked on it at home and came up first with the name *Exidia saccharina* (Pine Jelly) but realised that though close it was not an exact match microscopically. She then



found some scant information online about a newly described species, ***Exidia subsaccharina***, which though identical in the field had slightly larger spores and basidia. Bingo! This fitted perfectly. As Sarah was telling me about all this I then recalled an exciting find made at Stoke Common by BFG member Jim Wills several years back when he'd been through this same process and arrived at the same name, *E. subsaccharina*, and consequent sequencing of his material had proven him correct, though unfortunately there was no material left to supply the fungarium at RBG Kew with a sample. So we are very hopeful that this situation can now be rectified as it would appear that Sarah has found and identified this same species again here and in good quantity this time. Fingers crossed that sequencing will confirm it as there are still no records for the species in FRDBI. This turned out to be our most significant find of the day.

Left: *Exidia subsaccharina* (SJE)

A quick race through a few more things we found today: ***Cordyceps militaris*** (Scarlet Caterpillarclub) was found and is new to the site. What's more, Claire knew to dig down and carefully extricate the poor unfortunate caterpillar still attached to the fungus which completely takes over its body for nutrients. Gruesome! On the cow dung many people spotted tiny orange discs thinking they were some species of *Scutellinia* (Eyelash Fungus). They do indeed look similar but that genus is not found on dung. This was the very common ***Cheilymenia fimicola*** (no English name though another in this genus is Cowpat Gem!). Another example of tiny discs was found growing

in a swarm on bare deciduous wood, this one lacking ‘eyelashes’: the smooth *Orbilia xanthostigma* (Common Glasscup).



Above right: *Cordyceps militaris* together with caterpillar insert (CW)

Above left: *Cheilymenia fimicola* (SJE)

Left: *Orbilia xanthostigma* (CVS)

Four more species new to the site today: *Arrhenia retiruga* (Small Moss Oysterling) was found on mossy debris. The simply tiny *Lachnellula subtilissima* (Conifer Disco) was spotted on a Pine stick by the sharp eyed Stephen Plummer (this is actually new to the county). Also – possibly on the same stick - *Ascocoryne albida* (a Jellydisc with no English name) a species with only 11

FRDBI records. And two more species of disco: *Rutstroemia firma* (Brown Cup) on a deciduous stick, and the much rarer *Rutstroemia sydowniana* (Oakleaf Cup) on an Oak leaf petiole, these last two found and identified by Sarah.



Above left: *Arrhenia retiruga* (JL)
Above: *Lachnellula subtilissima* (SJE)
Above right: *Rutstroemia sydowniana* (SJE)
Left: *Ascocoryne albida* (SJE)
Right: *Rutstroemia firma* (SJE)



Now running out of both space and energy to report more! With 121 species recorded, today's list was second in length only to Penn Wood this autumn and is remarkable for mid November. Furthermore we added over 20 species new to the over all site list. Thank you all for coming; thank you

especially to Claudi, Jesper, Sarah, and also Stephen for their invaluable help in identifying both in the field and afterwards; thank you to all the photographers and my apologies if I've not included your favourites but choices had to be made! There's no doubt that this is an exceptional site for fungi and we look forward to coming back next year to discover even more excitements! For more detail of what we found see the separate complete species list. I'll conclude with even more images to delight you: some slime moulds from the inimitable Barry.....

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; CVS = Claudi Soler; CW = Claire Williams; JL = Jesper Launder; JW = Justin Warhurst;
PC = Penny Cullington; SJE = Sarah Ebdon.



Above left: *Leocarpus fragilis*, and right *Enerthema papillatum* (BW)



Below left: *Didymium squamulosum*, and right: *Physarum album* (BW)

..... and finally (SJE)

