

Our group of 13, relatively small for a weekend walk, met up on yet another warm dry morning feeling fairly resigned to the inevitable session of scratching around for anything fungal amongst the parched undergrowth. However, conditions such as these tend to encourage everyone to turn their attention to searching diligently for tiny things which would probably otherwise go unnoticed, and so it proved today. Yes, mushrooms generally were extremely thin on the ground and many on our list were represented by just one rather shrivelled specimen rather than the usual numbers to be expected in late September, but our amazingly long final list does at least contain a few of the mycorrhizal genera this excellent woodland is known for. Turning logs and picking up promising-looking sticks was definitely the order of the day, and having Barry and Gill with us, who specialise in slime moulds therefore are focused on examining bare wood for anything and everything miniscule, has the advantageous spin-off of producing not only stunning photos for the reports but also many interesting fungi as well as slime moulds to boost the list.

First up today was an attractive gathering of delicate Inkcaps spotted in grassy soil near the car park. These turned up several times during the morning and were later checked by Jesper and I, agreeing that they were ***Parasola leiocephala*** (Bald Inkcap). This family of Inkcaps tend to be easier to identify later because unlike other Inkcaps they don't deliquesce (dissolve into a black mess in your pot by the time you get home!) thus giving you a fighting chance with a microscope.



Above: *Parasola leiocephala* (PC)

One of Barry and Gill's first finds of the morning was a species they regularly turn up here and which grows exclusively on dead Holly leaves. It's a prickly business searching for it but worth it because ***Marasmius hudsonii*** (Holly Parachute) is a real little beauty and very distinctive so easily recognised. It now seems to be quite common here. The bristly pinhead cap is well under 5mm across at most and a x10 lens is essential to appreciate the detail (unless photographed by an expert as here).

Left: *Marasmius hudsonii* (BW)

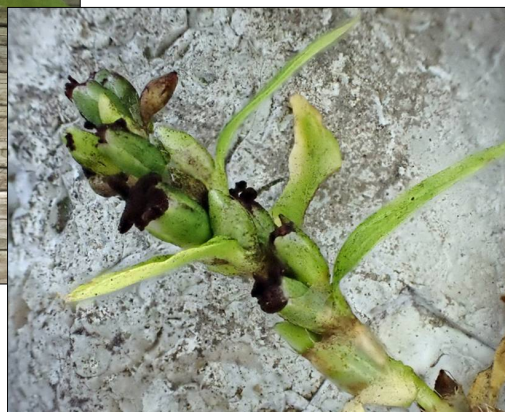


Early on Sarah's sharp eyes noticed a smut affecting the plant *Persicaria hydropiper* (Water Pepper) which she was able to name tentatively in the field and then confirm later at home. Such species can sometimes be easy to identify because often there is only one smut known to affect a particular plant (ie host specific) thus if you can name the plant you can also name the fungus found on it. Apparently there are two possibilities which occur on Water Pepper so a check was needed today to confirm this Smut as

Sphacelotheca hydropiperis – new to the site and with just one previous county record.

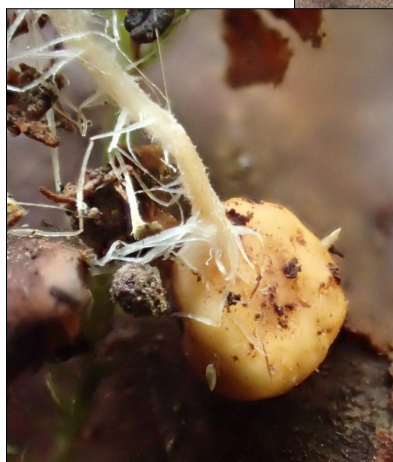


Left: *Sphacelotheca hydropiperis* (YH with insert NF)



Another find of note early on was a single small whitish mycenoid mushroom with a long stem having attached to its base a very significant diagnostic feature. The genus *Collybia* consists of three tiny species, all of which grow on rotting fungal remains and all virtually identical but which can be separated if their stem bases are carefully examined. Two of them have a sclerotium attached to the stem base (ie a small hard lump formed from mycelium serving as a food store when in short supply). Lacking this feature is *C. cirrhata*, the commonest of the three though probably the hardest to identify and easily confused with the many small white *Mycena* species (Bonnets). *C. cookei* (Split-pea Shanklet and new to the site today) has an ochre brown pea-like sclerotium clearly visible here and is not that common. *C. tuberosa*, the rarest of the three, also has a sclerotium but one which is cylindrical and dark brown. The trick in the field is to recognise that your find might be one of these three so to collect with great care otherwise the evidence you need is likely to be missing or overlooked!

Right: *Collybia cookei* (NF with insert SJE)



A further small mushroom new to the site today and found early on was the appropriately named *Mycetinis alliaceus* (Garlic Parachute), previously placed in genus *Marasmius*. This singleton was spotted in pathside Beech litter and though fairly nondescript in appearance its smell really packed a punch: it reeked of garlic! It was handed round with gasps of agreement and wonder at how such a small fungus could have such an amazingly pervasive smell.

Right: *Mycetinis alliaceus* (AS)

As we progressed I was kept remarkably busy scribbling and identifying what was nameable in the field with the help of Jesper, Claudi and Sarah. Our first mycorrhizals were handed in: a brown capped *Hebeloma* I identified later as *H. theobrominum* (Cocoa Poisonpie), new to the site, followed by a miniscule specimen which looked far too small to identify until Jesper realised it had 'milk' in the gills plus a grey cap, therefore had to be *Lactarius blennius* (Beech Milkcap). Two collections of Fibrecap came next, one with a golden yellow cap and a smell with honey component was thought to be *Inosperma cookei* (Straw Fibrecap) and was confirmed later. The second was not possible to name in the field – there are many lookalike Fibrecaps which are typical LBJs and need a scope to name to species (and even then often one cannot be sure). At home this checked out comfortably as *Inosperma maculatum* (Frosty Fibrecap), quite common and often with whitish veil covering the cap centre (ie looking frosty) though today's collection showed little sign of this character.



Above: *Inosperma maculatum* (PC)



Staying with the mycorrhizal theme: we have three different boletes on the list, the most notable being a surprisingly vivid collection of *Hortiboletus rubellus* (Ruby Bolete) which had somehow avoided being trodden on as it was right in the middle of the path. However, there was Oak nearby, its favoured host tree. It is unusual to find specimens with such a marked contrast between cap, gill and stem colour.

Left: *Hortiboletus rubellus* (NF)

Just a very few members of the genus *Russula* were also found though as often happens when they first appear at this time they tend to be pounced on by such as squirrels, mice and snails as a favourite snack thus the few we found were not suitably photogenic today.

Moving on to other things, the prize for finding the largest fungus of the day goes to Yen and Paul who discovered a fallen trunk, possibly Oak, with not just one but *eight* enormous Polypores estimated at up to 30 cms across each! *Polyporus squamosus* (Dryad's Saddle, for some authorities now moved to genus *Cerioporus*) is the largest Polypore by a long way though I've not seen such a splendid and impressive collection of saddles like this before.

Right: a display of *Polyporus squamosus* (PD)

Such is the versatility and growing experience of our group that a wide range of different groups of fungi are now found and recorded on our walks, as well as slime moulds, of course. Even in a well recorded wood such as this with a lengthy species list of 600 +, we still manage to add new



species every time we visit. Today's walk is a good example: despite what appeared to be unfavourable conditions we listed a staggering 91 species, adding 16 new to the site, several of which were also new county records. All credit to the diligent collecting skills of those present for this, and to the ID skills of our leaders and support team who give so generously of their time and expertise to the benefit of all of us. Thank you too to our growing team of photographers who make my job so much easier. Below are further photos demonstrating the amazing variety of what we saw today.

Photographers

AS = Akhil Seth; BW = Barry Webb; NF = Neil Fletcher; PC = Penny Cullington; PD = Paul Devine; SJE = Sarah Ebdon; YH = Yen Hoe.



Above : two unusual species found by Jesper, Sarah and Bob who explored a different area of the wood at the end of the morning: left: *Ganoderma lucidum* (Lacquered Bracket) and right: *Grifola frondosa* (Hen of the Woods) (SJE)

Right: *Calycina citrina* (Lemon Disco) just developing with each tiny disc well under 1 cm across (BW)

Right below: equally tiny, *Orbilbia leucostigma* though with some doubts. (BW)

Below: the powdery mildew *Erysiphe urticae* on a Nettle leaf (NF)





Above: *Entomophthora muscae* parasitizing an unfortunate fly and found by Jesper (BW)



Right: the miniscule mushroom *Flammulaster muricatus* (Scaly Spark) just emerging on a bare stick and only 1-2 mm high, found by Gill (BW). See last Wednesday's report (Oakley Wood) for a further developed example of this stunning species.

Below: two exquisite photos of slime moulds, *Arcyria incarnata* (left) and *Didymium nigripes* (right) (BW)

