FUNGI WALK at PITSTONE COMMON, ASHRIDGE on November 8th 2026

Penny Cullington

Our group of 20 met up in the Barrack's Square car park on Monument Road and set off to cross into the Bucks area of this large estate. It was a typical misty November morning but thankfully the rain held off for us. Once in VC24 we were relieved to find quite good numbers of fungi about and I spent the first 10 minutes or so scribbling frantically to keep up with names as specimens were handed in to both Jesper and me. We'd only visited this specific area once before – two years ago in a rather dry September – thus many on today's list are apparently new for Pitstone Common though no doubt not new for the general area of Ashridge Estate, much of which is in Herts and as such well recorded. We have a lengthy list though few rarities but with several new members out with us today it was useful to be able to spend time familiarising them with some of our commonest woodland species. We especially enjoyed having a youngster with us who proved a great little finder as is often the way – children's natural curiosity and sharp eyesight often turn up things we might well otherwise miss.

I'm going to start off featuring a really common species of deciduous litter which often seems to catch out even those with a fair amount of experience. ***Rhodocollybia butyracea*** (Butter Cap) tends to be a late season fruiter and is now showing well but when caps are faded (as they often are) it is a good plan to check the gill colour (white) and the stem (hollow, tapering upwards and with a purplish tinge), then finally give the cap a stroke to confirm its greasy buttery feel. This combination of characters should be enough to safely identify the species, and today we saw some particularly pristine examples as well as some typically faded ones. It's related to the Toughshanks and is pliable, not brittle, and caps can get to around 5 cm across with stems about equal in length to cap width as seen here.

Below: two views of *Rhodocollybia butyracea* showing all features well. Note the rich brown cap colour already fading around the rim and the centre, also the stem shape and colour - all useful clues. (JW)





Predictably today we saw plenty of examples of the genus *Mycena* (Bonnet), some of which were namable in the field, some not as is always the case. Caps ranged in size from the simply tiny to around 3-4 cms across depending on species, some species typically found in clusters on wood, others singly in litter – again according to species. We can share this size range here, thanks to Justin W. who was busy with his camera. Starting with the tiny: ***Mycena tenerrima*** (Frosty Bonnet) is on first glance pretty similar to many other tiny white Bonnets which also occur on fallen wood, but notice the subtly swollen stem base (like an extremely minature elephant's foot!), also the delicate 'frosting' (like icing sugar) coating both cap and stem. This combination of features if present should be sufficient to name the species in the field without recourse to microscopic features.

One of the mid-range sized Bonnets is ***Mycena haematopus*** (Burgundydrop Bonnet), another commonly found on fallen decidous wood but with mature caps between 1-2 cm across. This is one of the species with coloured 'juice' which exudes from the stem when damaged, in this case this juice is

dark brown-red as opposed to the bright orange found in *M. crocata* (Saffrondrop Bonnet). Its cap and stem also reflect this colour and it tends to be found in clusters, these features all visible here.

Lastly, one of our largest really common Bonnets is ***Mycena rosea*** (Rosy Bonnet), occurring in litter, not on wood, and with caps up to 4 cm across. Besides its distinctive rose-pink cap, it has a whitish stem which tapers upwards when fully mature and the cap tends to have striations (like fine transparant lines) around the margin. It also has a sharp smell like that of radish (as do a couple of other quite similar Bonnets but the cap colour and stem should be enough to make an identification.

Below from left to right: *Mycena tenerrima, Mycena haematopus* and *Mycena rosea* (JW)







Of our list of 14 Bonnets – not an exceptional number for a site such as this - the only unusual species was the tiny and delectable *M. pseudocorticola* (Steely Bonnet) found in its typical substrate of mossy living wood, in this case Beech though it favours Willow – another smooth barked tree. I can't resist including this stunning photo taken in Burnham Beeches (2021) by Barry of a particularly steely blue example.



Right: *Mycena pseudocorticola* (BW)
Left: *Roridomyces roridus* (JLo)



The sharp-eyed amongst you will notice that two of today's Bonnets are no longer included in genus *Mycena* though thankfully still retain the name Bonnet. One of these, ***Roridomyces roridus*** (Dripping Bonnet) we don't often find and it was nice to see today. It is white and small, with cap not above 1 cm across, and has two notable features which in combination make it unmistakable: the decurrent gills and a stem coated thickly in slime. It favours Bramble stems which is exactly where it was found today and this was the first clue to naming it when it was handed in.

On to something much bigger now. A nice example of a *Macrolepiota* (Parasol) was found, and Jesper and I were in complete agreement that this was ***M. konradii*** – not given an English name because it is generally synonymised with *M. mastoidea* (Slender Parasol), mistakenly in our view and also others including Kibby. That species is recognised by its distinct nipple-like central umbo (see a recent entry of mine in



Right: *Macrolepiota konradii* (HAF)

Members' Finds) which is completely missing here. Note also the lack of cap scales in the outer half which separates it from *M. procera* (Parasol) and the lookalike *Chlorophyllum rhacodes* (Shaggy Parasol). (All the Parasols share the movable stem ring - yes, it can be slid up or down! - also the snakeskin stem markings and lack of orange staining when damaged or scratched, seen in *Chlorophyllum*.) (Please note that though the photo here is not much bigger than those of the Bonnets above, the cap was in fact about 10 cm across with stem considerably more than that.)

A mushroom species regularly on our Chiltern lists is ***Mucidula mucida*** (Porcelain Fungus) and today we saw the best examples yet this autumn. Only occurring on Beech – both living and fallen – it abounds in our area and today we saw it several times, both near enough for good views and also way up on a Beech trunk. Note Justin Long's stunning close-up photo demonstrating why its English name is so apt with its almost translucent caps even with no sun to enhance this today. The stem ring with dark underside is showing nicely too.



Below: *Mucidula mucida*, and right: the same species just visible fruiting 3/5ths of the way up the trunk. (JLo)



Continuing the large mushroom theme, we were treated to more specimens of *Boletus edulis* (Penny Bun) than we've seen all season, and in good condition too! Also a single example of *Neoboletus praestigiator* (Scarletina Bolete) was found – better known as *N. luridiformis* – and though not worthy of a photo it was sufficient to demonstrate the instant colour change to the stem flesh from yellow to bright blue when exposed to air.



Right: *Boletus edulis* (JLo)

Now for something a bit different. On a bracken stem an enchanting row of tiny fungi were noticed and identified as ***Typhula quisquiliaris*** (Bracken Club). Only 7mms tall, these tiny white club-shaped fruitbodies have their spores on the outer surface of their flattened heads and though not host specific to Bracken they tend to occur in rows on old stems just like this but no doubt often go unnoticed. (Photos on next page)

Right: *Typhula quisquiliaris* (JW) with insert (BW)





We found a sizeable example of the cup fungus ***Otidea onotica*** (Hare's Ear), a species which favours deciduous litter. There are several species in the genus, all of which have a split down one side which separates them from the otherwise similar genus *Peziza* which has complete cups with no split. Today's species often develops pink patches (seen here) which help to distinguish it from other contenders. An attractive species.....



Right: *Otidea onotica* (PC)

We have 4 species of the mushroom *Psathyrella* (Brittlestem) on the list – not something which happens often, mainly because they can be tricky to identify (even with a scope) and tend to get left to the bottom of the pile at home when other more enticing things take preference. Today I decided to give them some time, particularly as we came across one unusual and atypical species which I recognised in the field and can recall being utterly confused by when I first encountered it. Most members of this genus have dark brown spores but this one has rather pale spores, similar in colour to those in genus *Inocybe* (Fibrecap), furthermore it shares with that genus rather thick walled cystidia (cells on the gill) which often have crystals on top (though not today). Not only are the microscopic characters of ***Psathyrella spadicea*** (Chestnut Brittlestem) similar to *Inocybe*, but also it has a thickish stem – unlike that of most Brittlestems and more like *Inocybe* – and just lacks the 'jizz' of a typical Brittlestem. Hence my confusion! (In fact for many authorities it is now moved to a different genus, *Homophron*, though this is not universally accepted as yet.) I include here a photo of the amazing gill cells.



Above right: *Psathyrella spadicea* with insert of the spores and gill cells x 400, which always remind me of Bottlenosed Dolphins! (PC)

We have an extensive and impressive list of slime moulds at the end of the list, and photos of some of these follow. We amassed 117 species in all, one of our largest totals this autumn surely pointing to the fact that in the UK our main fungal season is gradually moving later and later due to changes in weather patterns and climate change. Thank you all for coming; thank you, Jesper, for expertise both in the field and afterwards, thank you also to the photographers as always. For details of what we found see the separate species list.

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; HAF = Hasan Al-Farhan; JLo = Justin Long; JW = Justin Warhurst; PC = Penny Cullington


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Above left: *Diderma hemisphaerica,* and right: *Comatricha nigra*, both minuscule slime moulds (BW)
Below left: *Collaria elegans*, a new county record, ID by J. Mackenzie-Dodds, and right: *Didymium leucophaeum*, two more miniscule slime moulds (BW)


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Below left: *Didymium squamulosum*, and right: *Didymium clavus*, and below these: *Phleogena faginea* (this one in fact not a slime mould though in appearance very like one) all three being equally tiny (BW)


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To finish with: two views of Pitstone Common on our misty morning (JW)

