

FUNGI WALK at STOWE LANDSCAPE GARDENS on Saturday November 9th 2019

Penny Cullington

Our group today, 18 strong, had a profitable morning with just over 100 species recorded of which 26 were new to the site, bringing the total number of species for Stowe, according to our records, to well over 300. Considering the dubious weather forecast we were remarkably lucky: though it remained pretty cold for the duration the fog appeared to lift just as we arrived and the promised rain kept off until the last 15 minutes or so. The previous night's frost, however, made some identification trickier than usual and several things we found had lost their normally distinctive smells and a few *Lactarius* (Milkcaps) produced either much less milk than expected or none at all. The smaller *Hygrocybe* species (Waxcaps) had also suffered with (a) the lengthy grass and (b) the frost which had inevitably changed their colour and texture, resulting in a few collections going unnamed. It was a delight, therefore, when a pristine chunky specimen of *Hygrocybe punicea* (Crimson Waxcap) turned up to wow those for whom it was new. (See also the 2017 report for Stowe for an even more impressive collection of this species.) Disappointingly our November visit here last year produced not a single Waxcap when this area of the Gardens is arguably one of the best sites in the county for this grassland genus, so today went some way to make up for that.

Right, *Hygrocybe punicea* standing proud in the deep grass here today (bw) with gills insert (cs)



Of our 26 species not previously found here, one was of particular note - collected by Jenny and later identified by Derek. The genus *Melanoleuca* is normally not considered one of the most interesting or inspiring but *Melanoleuca turrita*, fruiting today in a cluster on woodchips in one of the shrub beds, happens to be new to the county with under 10 previous UK records. So a rarity indeed though this could possibly reflect not only Derek's considerably mycological skills but also other mycologists' reluctance to spend time on specimens of this genus when other 'more interesting things' take their fancy.

Below, two views of *Melanoleuca turrita* – new to the county and a rare find today. (DJS)



Today we found several different species of *Agaricus* (Mushroom) though in most autumn seasons this genus would possibly have finished fruiting by now. One of these, *Agaricus moelleri* (Inky Mushroom), was new to the site last year and therefore rang a bell with me when it turned up again today. Closely related to *A. xanthodermus* (Yellow Stainer and another we found today), the bright chrome yellow instantaneous staining at the stem base and on the cap when scratched was startlingly vivid. Its common name reflects the smell (think back to school days with bottles of ink!) which is notably different from the sweet 'mushroomy' smell of more familiar species such as *A. campestris* (Field Mushroom).

The large *Agaricus* found by Bob growing in the long grass I later identified as *Agaricus urinascens* (Macro Mushroom and in some books as *A. macrosporus*). This was another new to the site today, distinguished from the very similar *A. arvensis* by its larger spores (thus its earlier name), its tendency to turn rusty brown in the lower stem (obvious the next day) and to develop a smell suggesting urine (reflected in its Latin species name).



Above, *Agaricus urinascens*, the largest cap here being 15 cms across. New to the site today. (pc)

Several interesting species of *Russula* (Brittlegill) and *Lactarius* (Milkcap) were found today despite the fact that in most years both genera tend to have finished fruiting by November. (This has certainly not been a typical autumn season for fungi, many species delayed by the exceptionally dry and warm September.) Under the Pines several people collected an impressive large *Lactarius* with orange milk exuding from the gills and distinctive green staining developing. This had to be one of two extremely similar species which grow under Pines: either *L. deliciosus* (Saffron Milkcap) or *L. semisanguifluus* (Bloody Milkcap). (There is a third lookalike, *L. deterrimus* (False Saffron Milkcap) which grows under Spruce only.) To distinguish between the two Pine associates one needs to damage the gills or flesh on collection, retain the specimen and then wait for 30 minutes or so, watching for the telltale vinaceous pink flush which develops in *L. semisanguifluus* but which is absent from *L. deliciosus*. This we did but as luck would have it, just as the signs of possible colour change were appearing, Gill found a further specimen previously damaged (maybe kicked over) where the cap flesh had already clearly turned vinaceous. There was no doubt now that we had *Lactarius semisanguifluus* – probably at least as common as the much better known *L. deliciosus* but much under-recorded due to collectors lacking the knowledge to watch for the possible colour change (or maybe in a hurry to collect edibles for the pot!).

Below, *Lactarius semisanguifluus* 'before and after' shots: on the left having just been collected and appearing exactly as *L. deliciosus* with no signs of vinaceous staining; on the right a previously damaged specimen where the flesh (and also the gills) are showing the telltale distinct dark pink stains which do not occur in *L. deliciosus*. (cs)



Two species of *Russula* belonging to the *Xerampelina* group were found, both growing under Oak. This group is well known to be a tricky complex of species separated from the rest of the genus (a) by its typical smell of cooked crab when mature (today not very obvious thanks to the frost) and (b) by the stem staining quickly dirty green then almost black where rubbed with a crystal of Ferrous Sulphate. (Virtually all others in this large genus of over 150 species stain some shade of rust to orange/pink when so treated.) As I always carry a crystal with me when fungi hunting I was able to demonstrate this colour reaction today. One of our two species, *Russula graveolens*, has a cap with shades of rich reddish brown. The other, *Russula purpurata*, differs in having a cap lacking brown shades but is distinctly purple (not unlike the very common *Russula atropurpurea* which however lacks the crabby smell or green crystal reaction). As this complex is



still in need of clarification and more molecular testing, at present most authorities still include *R. purpurata* in synonymy with *R. graveolens*. I will be surprised if this proves to be correct, however, and would put money on *R. purpurata* being recognised as distinct, together with several others in this complex, in the fullness of time!

Left, *Russula purpurata* (at present treated in synonymy with *R. graveolens*) showing the typical dirty green stain on the stem where rubbed with a crystal. A species found under Oak (despite the Beech leaves visible in the shot which was taken in my garden later!) (PC)

One more *Russula* worth a mention: in the field I was pretty sure that several evenly pink-capped specimens brought to me had to be the Pine species *R. sanguinaria* (Bloody Brittle-gill) though they appeared decidedly pale and waterlogged after the frost and rain. Derek wasn't convinced, however, and rightly so as it turned out! At home I tried the ammonia test which should turn the gills of this particular species pink after a short time. It didn't! Was this due to its waterlogged state or was it a different species? Was it in fact collected from under Pine as we thought or had there maybe been Oak nearby? Next morning whilst having a proper look at it I noticed that in one or two places the gills were turning brassy yellow and this clue was enough to put me on the right track. I checked other details: the spores, the cells on the cap surface, whether the cap skin peeled or not (it didn't) and confidently concluded that this was *Russula luteotacta* (surprisingly with no common name when its Latin species name describes it perfectly: 'yellow when touched' though the colour often takes many hours or overnight to develop). This was another species new to the site though one which associates with deciduous trees, often Oak, so in fact probably not with the nearby Pines as it appeared. It's not a real rarity but is certainly uncommon.

This site nearly always produces a good number of *Mycena* species (Bonnetts) and today was no exception: with the quantities of fruitbodies of all sorts I was being handed it was soon clear that I'd have to start limiting *Mycena* collections as I was going to not only run out of suitable pots but also of time at home needed to check them all. Of the 11 species which made it onto the list, two were new to the site. *Mycena speirea* (Bark Bonnet) is common and it's therefore odd that we've missed it here in the past. *Mycena amicta* (Coldfoot Bonnet) is much less frequently recorded and today was found growing on a fallen Larch cone, it being a species of woody litter – more often of conifer as today. The common name refers to the tendency for the stem base (and

sometimes indeed the cap as well) to be blue and when this colour is apparent it makes identification easy. Often the blue colours are entirely missing rendering it extremely like many others in the genus (as was the case today), thus the need for microscopic examination of the gill edge which reveals a palisade of clavate to cylindrical cells which are very distinctive.

Right, two miniscule specimens of *Mycena amicta* found growing on a Larch cone today though sadly not displaying the characteristic blueing which distinguishes the species from other very similar Bonnets. (CS)



Exploring the area on the far side of the valley as we started to return, we found several somewhat old and large 'Puffball' types. Some of these we determined as just large forms of *Lycoperdon perlatum* (Common Puffball), but it became clear that some were too large and not the right shape for that species and were probably what had previously been known as *Lycoperdon utriforme* (Mosaic Puffball).

When we eventually found some younger complete specimens we were happy that this was correct, though later at home I discovered that the new name for the species is *Bovistella utriformis*, it having been placed previously in three different genera: *Handkea*, *Calvatia* as well as *Lycoperdon*. I wonder where it will end up next



Left, *Bovistella utriformis* found in good numbers in the grass. Yet another species new to the site today (BW)

Soon after this (as the rain started) we found several dark grey mushrooms which I couldn't place though they had a distinctive smell mealy rancid smell. Derek came up with the name: this was *Tephrocybe rancida* (Rancid Greyling), new to the site and one which we rarely record and I've only ever seen growing singly. This was therefore a notable collection.

Right, *Tephrocybe rancida* growing in grass and woody litter. (PC)



Two more photos below to share with you before signing off. Thank you all for coming and being such excellent and enthusiastic finders and photographers – conditions weren't easy especially with so many leaves now covering the woodland floor. What a strange autumn season for fungi it's been this year: such a

disappointing September but the late fruiting of the last few weeks has to some extent made up for it. The frosts will now probably signal the beginning of the end of this bonanza, however, but it's been good while it lasted. BFG has had remarkable support throughout the autumn with lots of new members and numbers attending our walks definitely on the increase. I now send out circulars to 85 addresses and a quick headcount on our members list comes to roughly 120.

Sadly today was the last event of our programme except for the traditional Christmas walk at Brill Common on December 8th. Both Derek and I have thoroughly enjoyed leading such a diverse and friendly group of people with common interests and a love of things wild - it's been rewarding for us and well worth the effort involved. So please come back fighting next year! We look forward to meeting up a few times in the spring – more on that in the New Year. Meantime if we don't see you at Brill, Happy Christmas to one and all!

Photographers: BW = Barry Webb; CS = Claudi Soler; DJS = Derek Schafer; PC = Penny Cullington



**Above: a stunning image of *Calocera viscosa* (Yellow Stagshorn) (BW);
Below : a impressive collection of *Ramaria stricta* (Upright Coral) (cs).**

