

FUNGI WALK at BITTAM'S WOOD, DANCERSEND on October 31st 2021

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Despite a horrendous weather forecast and torrential rain and wind as we arrived, our trusty band of 15 were in good spirits in anticipation of exploring this promising BBOWT site, especially as fruiting seems to be continuing apace even though we are now well into what is normally the back end of the season. We were led around by Head Ranger Mick Jones, but sadly Derek and Jenny had to leave soon after we'd started, Jenny having taken a nasty fall (and in fact had broken her arm).

Though the wind was relentless throughout the morning, bringing down quantities of leaves to make our job that little bit harder, the rain soon eased off and we amassed our longest species list of the season so far. It was good to see many attendees clearly gaining in confidence and able to identify common things for themselves or if not then at least to be suggesting possible names. There were some notable finds amongst our list of 117 with one species new to the county (though I've not included 'New to the Site' on our list - this is only our second visit to this part of Dancersend, consequently the vast majority of species would be new).



Our first interesting species was admired in the car park, collected and identified by Mick. This was ***Stropharia pseudocyanea*** (Peppery Roundhead), a species of grassy areas and considerably less common than the almost identical *S. caerulea* which fairly often appears on our lists. Today's find has a distinctive and unmistakable smell of freshly ground black pepper, thus separating it in the field from other blue *Stropharia* species which lack much smell. Neither Derek nor I had seen (or smelt) this species for quite a few years.

Left, ***Stropharia pseudocyanea***, a species with a unique smell of black pepper! (MJ)

Early on we found a couple of immature specimens of an *Amanita* clearly close to *A. fulva* (Tawny Grisette), ie having a loose membranous orange brown volva, a tapering stem with no ring and a cap lacking veil remnants and markedly striate at the margin. However, it was not tawny brown but duller greyer brown. Derek and I decided to take one each to work on later, but after Derek and Jenny had left I came across another specimen this time more mature and became quite convinced that this was something different. I knew several other similar species existed and that the colour of the volva was important, and at home discovered ***Amanita battarrea*** (Banded Amanita), a rare species found under Oak (the dominant tree where we found the specimens) and described as having a darker grey brown band around the cap adjacent to the markedly striate part. The spores fitted the description fine and the dark band of colour was also present, so Derek and I are agreed that this must be what we found – this being the second county record, the first in 2010 from Ashridge identified by G. Kibby. The material has gone to Kew together with several other species found today as part of their ongoing Darwin Tree of Life project to obtain genomes of as many different species as possible. We shall therefore no doubt find out if the determination was correct or not!

Right, the rare ***Amanita battarrea*** showing its orange volva and dark band just above the cap striations. (JL)





A species Derek and I both recognised when it was handed to us early on was the unusual *Ripartites tricholoma* (Bearded Seamine). This looks like a small *Clitocybe* (Funnel) with decurrent gills but they are slightly pink and also very crowded, but the give away feature is its spores which are not only very small and round but also covered in tiny spines, ie like maritime mines - hence it's rather strange common name. The 'bearded' bit refers to the cap margin which can be fringed with hairs (but not always!)

Left, *Ripartites tricholoma*, an uncommon species though probably often mistaken for a species of *Clitocybe*. (CS)

Mick led us to an area where he'd previously found nice material of *Otidia notica* (Hare's Ear) and we were not disappointed, especially as Robert then found the largest example I've ever seen!



Above left, *Otidia notica* (Hare's Ear) in the litter (JW), and right the same species measuring a remarkable 20 x 15 cms and found by Robert – Elephant's Ear would be a more suitable name! (MJ)

Another outside example followed when Sarah, recognising the common *Xerula radicata* (now in genus *Hymenopellis*), knew to delve deep for its characteristic root but was in for a surprise! The root in this case measured a good foot or more long!

Right, *Hymenopellis radicata* having been carefully extracted together with its incredibly long root. Everything below Sarah's fingers is root which would have been attached to a tree root far beneath the surface. I think she can be forgiven for the slightly smug facial expression! (MJ)

After the oohs and aahs of these two finds a log with a stunning collection of *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* was found and much admired, though the rather large cups raised the pertinent question of how one could tell the difference between this species and the apparently extremely similar but rare *C. aeruginosa*. My answer was that I wasn't sure one could, and feeling



rather guilty for naming today's cups so confidently in the field I promptly collected one to examine at home! I was relieved, therefore, to find that the spores did indeed match *C. aeruginascens*, the other species having much larger spores. Furthermore I learnt that the only visible difference in the field between the two species



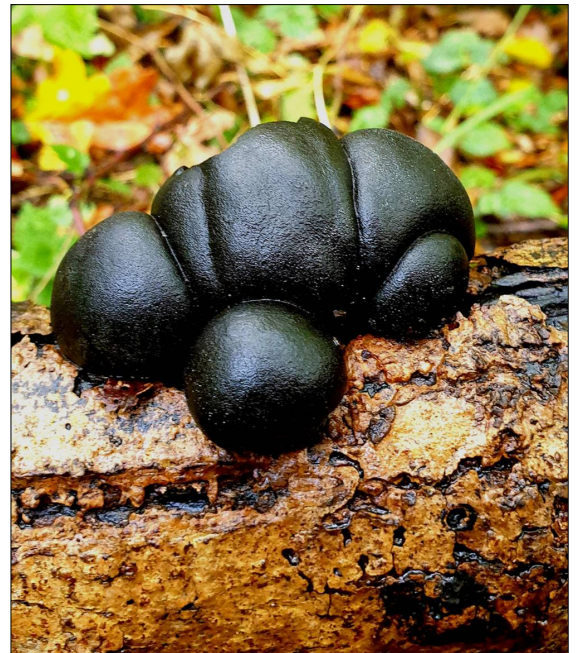
is that the rarer species is much smaller and that the only safe way to separate them is by measuring the spores. One can therefore presumably safely assume that good sized cups (as were today's) can be named in the field but that small cups should probably be checked at home.

Left, *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* looking its best today. (JL)

We have an image of a third common Ascomycete to share (after the Hare's Ear and Green Elf Cup) – a photogenic example of *Daldinia concentrica* (King Alfred's Cakes) was found on fallen Ash, its typical host.

Right, *Daldinia concentrica* posing as maybe a giant beetle or baby turtle balancing precariously on this Ash branch. (JW)

Below, a pale form of *Tremella foliacea* found today. (CS)



Several rather pale lumps of frilly jelly were found on fallen deciduous wood which confused me at the time, but

Claudi was able to identify at home. This was *Tremella foliacea* (Leafy Brain), quite a common species but usually much darker brown though I discovered it can often be pale as here.

Later on we moved into an area where Beech predominated and consequently started finding a different suite of species, adding two more Amanitas to our list including *A. pantherina* (Panthercap). This very poisonous species is much rarer than is often realised, the very common *A. excelsa* var. *spissa* probably being misidentified as *A. pantherina* by the casual observer. Both species have brown caps which are spotted with veil remnants, but these are pure white and regularly - almost symmetrically - placed in *A. pantherina* but are grey forming irregular patches in *A. excelsa*. Furthermore the volvas of the two species are differently shaped, also the upper ring surface is striate in *A. excelsa* but smooth in *A. pantherina* - this last observation I was reminded of by a member who recalled my explaining it to them last year!



Left, two images of *Amanita pantherina* looking remarkably similar. Far left was today's find (JL) and near left was taken by Claire Williams in Downley Wood the day before and sent to me. This is no coincidence and happens time and time again when species are triggered to fruit at the same time miles apart.

In the Beech litter the sharp-eyed found several little clusters of *Craterellus cornucopioides* (Horn of Plenty) – our first sighting of this strange-looking species this season. It seems to favour sloping sites, as here, and if you find one there's nearly always more around once you 'get your eye in'.

Right, *Craterellus cornucopioides* found in the Beech litter (JL)
Below, *Pholiota squarrosa* beneath a Beech tree (CS)



At the foot of a Beech we found fresh *Pholiota squarrosa* (Shaggy Scalycap) forming several clusters around the trunk. Though with Beech here, it is just as happy on other deciduous trees including fruit trees. Note the equally scaly stem visible on the upturned cluster in the centre.



At Dancersend we nearly always find good numbers of *Mycena* species and today was no exception with 11 different species being identified from the many examples I was handed. I'd come prepared with plenty of suitably small containers which were filled by the end of the morning. Right at the end when I was beginning to turn down further samples Stephen insisted I took one tiny specimen he'd found on conifer debris. I didn't recognise it so was happy to do so knowing that conifer often produces interesting and different Bonnets, and this proved to be the case. Though tiny and not yet expanded the cap had a violaceous purple tint, as did the stem, and to my delight when examined it in detail the white gills also had a beautiful violet edge. This was *Mycena purpleofusca* (Purple Edge Bonnet), a species of conifer wood and litter, rare in England and more often encountered in Scotland and a first for the county today. Sadly we have no photo and – as is often the case with tiny Bonnets - by the time I'd extracted a single gill there was not much of the specimen left!

We do, however, have a couple of beautiful *Mycena* images to share: *Mycena polygramma* (Grooved Bonnet) is much like many other greyish species which grow on fallen wood but has a tell tale grooved stem. *Mycena crocata* (Saffrondrop Bonnet) is one of our commonest Chiltern woodland mushrooms inhabiting fallen Beech and a good candidate for the Bucks county fungus – should such a thing exist – with the Porcelain Fungus running it a close second!



Far left, *Mycena crocata* (JW), recognisable by its vivid – almost lurid stem containing plentiful orange 'juice'; near left, *Mycena polygramma*, (CS) a much more understated species having a grey grooved cap but also a grooved stem, sometimes obviously so but often only subtly so as here.

Our very successful visit here was sadly clouded by Jenny's injury and we wish her as speedy a recovery as possible; I suspect Derek's domestic skills are in for a bit of a test over the next few weeks! Thanks to all for braving the elements and coming out when conditions looked so dire early on. We were richly rewarded, however, with lots of fungi to enjoy and bright sunshine by the time we finished at around 1.15pm. Thank you to Mick for hosting the occasion and leading us round so efficiently, and last but not least thank you to our faithful photographers who support me so willingly at these events. For more details of what we found see the complete list.

Photographers

CS = Claudi Soler; JL = Justin Long; JW = Justin Warhurst; MJ = Mick Jones