

FUNGI WALK at RUSHBEDS WOOD on November 12th 2022

Penny Cullington

This sadly was our final walk of the autumn season and was fully booked with 18 participants well in advance - as have been all our walks since booking was introduced a month or so earlier. The morning was fine and unusually warm for mid-November; with no sign of frost yet fungi were still much in evidence and after 20 minutes or so I was still only yards from the car park along the old tram track and scribbling madly as specimens came in thick and fast. Comparing today with what we found here last year – just a week later in the month – our list is pretty similar, around 90 species, the bulk of collections again being found on this same path, with numbers notably decreasing as we turned into the main central ride, then right again at the central crossroads towards the car park. Inevitably as the season draws to a close many specimens tend to be past their best, often atypical, sometimes missing their diagnostic smells and therefore a challenge to identify either in the field or at home with the scope when contamination from other organisms often makes life tricky to say the least. Nevertheless a few very exciting things turned up though I didn't uncover two of them till going through everything later, and sadly we have photos of neither.

Not surprisingly very few mycorrhizal species were in evidence but of the two *Lactarius* (Milkcap) species found, one - just a singleton - was instantly recognisable from its rather orange-tinted and widely spaced slightly decurrent gills and association with Hazel. ***Lactarius pyrogalus*** (Fiery Milkcap) is host specific with Hazel, sometimes found surrounding that tree in good numbers – this known as a 'tethered ring' and something which occurs with *Clitocybe nebularis* (Clouded Funnel) as well though that species is not mycorrhizal and found under many different trees. If you taste a droplet of the 'milk' from this *Lactarius* you won't forget it in a hurry! As its common name suggests, it is burning burning hot: luckily with experience one can recognise the species without having to resort to the taste test!



Right: *Lactarius pyrogalus* found under Hazel today. (LS)



During the morning I retained in various pots probably about 20 collections of *Mycena* (Bonnet) – all needing to be checked later. Thankfully a few of this genus can be recognised safely in the field, and one such was the unusual and beautiful ***Mycena adonis*** (Scarlet Bonnet) which was handed in early on – just half a cap and the stem was enough to name it - and is new to the site today. Its unique colour leaves one in no doubt and it occurs in woodland in mossy scrubby areas. This was a nice find for one of our newest members on her first outing with us! (There is a name change to absorb here for those of you who follow such things: the species is now moved to genus *Atheniella* together with *M. flavoalba* – now *Atheniella flavoalba*.)

Left: *Atheniella adonis* – new to the site today. (LS)

Not long after this find I was presented with a mossy deciduous stick having several strange tiny white tubelike structures which had distinctly pink tops. Rushbeds is a very good site to come and see the stunning early Springtime fungus *Sarcoscypha austriaca* (Scarlet Elfcup) – one of the reasons we often visit here at that time. Though not looking in the least like the mature cup fungus, this is what we had on the stick: the very early stages of *S. austriaca*. Jackie MD reminded me that after I'd identified the same thing here in November last year she took the stick home, nurtured it and kept it damp and weeks later was rewarded with perfect bright scarlet cups!

Right: The undeveloped strange beginnings of *Sarcoscypha austriaca*. (LS)



Amongst the many tiny white *Mycena* collections I was shown were several examples of the exquisite *Mycena tenerrima* (Frosted Bonnet) though after rain it can be tricky to recognise conclusively because the 'frosting' which typically covers the cap and stem can be much less obvious. The other clue to look for in the species is the small 'disc' at the base of the stem which when the specimen is really minute can be no more than just a tiny swelling, only just visible here.

Left: *Mycena tenerrima*, just 5mm tall at most. (JL)

Another of this genus which with experience can be recognised in the field is *Mycena speirea* (Bark Bonnet) and one of our commonest small Bonnets occurring on fallen wood. Features to look for: the cap is off white / beige, almost translucent and very thin fleshed and has a tiny darker brown dot in the centre. Turn it over and the pale gills are not particularly crowded and slightly decurrent – this feature separating it from other look-alikes. Today we found a log which when turned over revealed a row of specimens underneath which had all upended presumably to allow the gills to drop their spores, so no cap tops were visible at all! Presumably the log must have been turned once the Bonnets were already developing there, necessitating them to adapt to allow normal spore-drop. The tell-tale central brown dot confirmed the ID once I'd picked one off the log and the decurrent gills are visible here.

Right: *Mycena speirea* growing rather strangely on the underside of a log. (LS)



We saw not only the bright yellow cups of both *Bisporrella citrina* (Lemon Disco) and *Bisporrella sulfurina* (Sulphur Disco - smaller and a more intense greener shade of yellow) today, both common species on fallen bare wood, but also a crowded cluster of a similar but unrelated species which I later identified (hopefully correctly) as *Hymenoscyphus calyculus* (no common name but not at all rare) - described as easily mistaken for *B. citrina* but with larger spores and also with a small stem. (Incidentally, just to add to the fun: both the two *Bisporrella* species are now in genus *Calycina* and *B. sulfurina* that was is now *C. flavoalba*! The joys and challenges of trying to learn fungus names)

Right: the ascomycete *Hymenoscyphus calyculus* found in a tight swarm on fallen bare deciduous wood. (LS)



A beautiful display of another cup fungus was found on a bare log – probably Oak. This was the bright turquoise green *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* (Green Elfcup). Always a crowd pleaser but especially so when showing as it was today, the species is famous for staining its wood substrate the same wonderful colour, the wood then used in the past to enhance the inlay for antique tables, boxes etc known as Tunbridgeware.



Left (JL) and below (LS): *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* fruiting beautifully on a log today, the larger cups here up to 2-3 cms across.



Now for one of our more unusual finds – still on the old tram track - this was a small pale mushroom found in litter and having some features very similar to a small *Lepiota* (Dapperling) ie with white free gills and a ring on the stem. When handed to me I noticed that it was already discoloring with signs of reddening and even blackening on all parts of the fruitbody, and this alerted me to the fact that it was likely to be a species of *Leucoagaricus*. At home it keyed out to *Leucoagaricus badhamii* (Blushing Dapperling), and I was able to confirm it by holding the tip of my ammonia bottle adjacent to the cap, the fumes of which are enough to turn the cuticle green in this species. It was new to the site today and we have a good handful of county records, so it's not rare but certainly unusual. Note in the photos how even the gill edges are discoloring. By the time I got the specimen home it was almost entirely dirty greyish black.



Right: the single specimen of *Leucoagaricus badhamii*, new to the site today. (LS)





Above: *Physisporinus sanguinolentus* showing reddening in several places. (JW)

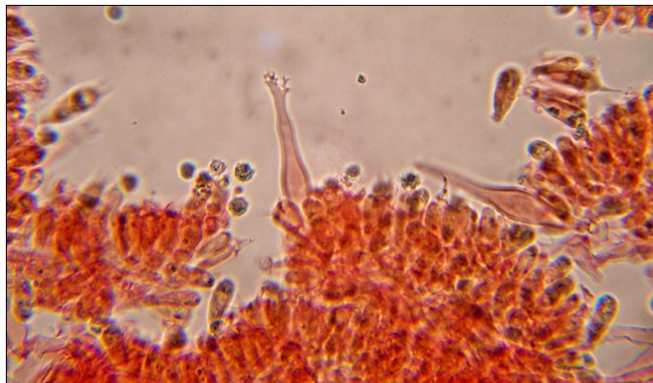
The tram track is a regular site for the unusual *Rhodocybe gemina* (Tan Pinkgill), a large chunky beige/pink mushroom. Though late in the season it was found here today though mostly well past its sell-by date – just one fresh sample was found but not photographed. Another worth a mention: Waxcaps are not by any means exclusively grassland species and last year in the woodland here we found several species. Today just one: *Cuphophyllus virgineus* (Snowy Waxcap), better known by its previous genus name *Hygrocybe*.

Right: *Cuphophyllus virgineus* found in mossy woodland litter today. (BS)



I've still not finished reporting on our finds from this amazing track! Two more exciting things to share from here, though sadly with no photos: The first I picked up from the pathside litter thinking it was a species of *Conocybe* (Conecap) – small and Mycenoid (Bonnet-like) but with a brown cap and rusty gills (and spores). It went into a pot on the offchance that I might be able to identify it to species and the genus has beautiful cells on the gill edge like skittles – always a pleasure to find. However, at home I found not skittles but different shaped cells, and the light dawned that I could be looking at a species of *Naucoria* (Aldercap). Despite its common name, most species occur only under Alder - a tree not present here – but there are a few which occur under Willow and Poplar, and I'd found one of these. It keyed out convincingly to *Naucoria amarescens* (no common name), a species found under Willow and having a faint *Pelargonium* smell (which was indeed present as it dried out), not only new to the county today but apparently with few national records.

Now for the best find of the day (though sadly I can't remember who gave it to me!). When I started the laborious task of checking through all today's *Mycena* collections at home, I came across one which made all the work worthwhile: Two tiny beige specimens found on mossy wood with very pointed conical 'pixie' caps. I recall commenting at the time that if ever there were a pair which explained why *Mycena* was named Bonnet these were they! (If this rings a bell with you do let me know!) Ironically, however, they weren't even in that genus! I found round ornamented spores which got me interested straight away and pointed to the genus *Mycenella*, but then I discovered cells on the gill edge like none I'd met before so promptly looked up the diagrams for that genus and found the perfect match. These cells are described as lageniform (swollen near the base then becoming much narrower towards the top) but with a coral-like fingered apex (my description: with a punk hairdo like Snoopy!) This had to be *Mycenella lasiosperma*, not just new to the county but maybe even the first proven British collection. I quote from Kibby vol 2: 'Reported from Britain but needs



confirmation.' I do have photos of the spores and cystidia (gill cells) and the material is safely dried and will be sent to RBG Kew.

Left: the gill cells and spores of *Mycenella lasiosperma*, a very rare species found today. The red colour is the result of staining with Congo Red used to improve visibility. To the left of the central cystidium are a few round knobbly spores. This is magnified x 400. (PC)

Just a few more

photos to share with you before I sign off for the year. Two species of Slime Mould were found, both new to the site. The first was the simply tiny but stunningly beautiful *Comatricha nigra* (sorry, no image) on a bare log – a species with few Bucks records, and the second the common *Mucilago crustacea* on some low vegetation. The photo shows the species starting to dry off and revealing the beginnings of its black spore mass.



Above right: the Myxomycete *Mucilago crustacea* on vegetation. (CW)



Another common species which we don't appear to have recorded here before was *Chlorophyllum rhacodes* (Shaggy Parasol) which obligingly took just the typical 5 seconds for the stem to stain orange once we'd scratched it.

Left: *Chlorophyllum rhacodes* found in woodland litter (SP)

Boletes were few and far between but one distinctive *Leccinum* was found under Oak. *Leccinum aurantiacum* (Orange Bolete) seems to be fairly common here though it's a species we've not recorded elsewhere this year. It's bright orange cap, firm flesh and dark scabers on the stem make it one of the easiest of the genus to identify.

Right: an impressive specimen of *Leccinum aurantiacum* found late on in our circular walk. (SE)

Another species we regularly record here (though not often elsewhere) is the bracket *Phellinus pomaceus* (Cushion Bracket). The species occurs on species of *Prunus*, most commonly on Blackthorn which is one of the commonest trees here, hence the abundant presence of the fungus.





Left: *Phellinus pomaceus* fruiting on Blackthorn. (SE)

.... and finally a pretty species we found on a log pile, probably Aspen, though it is not fussy about its choice of deciduous host and is generally common though has not been found on many of our walks this autumn. *Schizophyllum commune* (Splitgill) forms colonies of smallish pale shell-like semicircles of hairy frilly fruitbodies and underneath has attractive fan-like sharp-edged gills which fork near the edge.

Below: a log liberally covered in *Schizophyllum commune* (LS)



According to our records, of our listed 89 species today it seems that 17 were new to the site with three of those new to the county also, this being a remarkable number for so late in the season. What a splendid way to round off our programme of walks! I would like to thank everyone who's come and helped to make this autumn season so successful and enjoyable. You've all been so supportive and appreciative and that has made all the effort it takes to put on and lead these events worthwhile. What really pleases me is to observe the striking progress so many are making now: identification skills are really developing like never before in the group, with more and more of you becoming competent and also using scopes. Thank you too to our faithful band of photographers without whom these reports would be far less useful and informative. Do carry on sending in photos for Members' Finds which will continue and now has about 850 species illustrated from the county – it's just amazing how that has blossomed over the last few years and my thanks go to Peter Davis for making that possible.

See you all next year!!

Photographers

BS = Bob Simpson; CW = Claire Williams; JL = Justin Long; JW = Justin Warhurst; LS = Linda Seward; PC = Penny Cullington; SE = Sarah Ebdon; SP = Stephen Plummer.



A typical huddle of our group at Rushbeds Wood today. (LS)