

BFG Foray at Hodgemoor Woods
September 20th, 2014

Report by Penny Cullington

Our group of twelve enjoyed a somewhat misty morning here, the lack of light making identifying and photography quite tricky under the tree canopy. The recent rain had not had sufficient time to make much difference to fungal fruiting, so diligent searching was needed but we ended up with a list of over 70 species, including seven species of *Amanita* and eleven of *Russula*. This is a well recorded wood so it was no surprise that only one on the list was new to the site. This was *Agaricus bitorquis*, a mature specimen picked up near the carpark by Nick before we started off – a species which discolours neither red nor yellow as many of the genus do, and with a ring low down on the stem which peels downwards and is striate on the inside. These characters plus the spore size and presence of cells on the gill edge made it key out perfectly later at home.

Boletes were surprisingly few and far between, but one which it's always nice to show people was *B. luridiformis*, with red pores and which when cut in half turns from yellow to bright blue in an instant.

Below *Boletus luridiformis* showing the typical colour change of this species when the flesh is exposed to the air. (photos NS)



Of the *Amanita* species we found, it was good to be able to compare two which are similar and possible to confuse: *A. excelsa* var. *spissa* (Grey-spotted Amanita) and the familiar and very common *A. rubescens* (The Blusher). The first lacks the tendency to turn pinky red where damaged (this the giveaway character of *A. rubescens*) and has distinctly grey patches of veil remnants on the cap which rub off easily. It is in fact often misidentified as the much rarer and also dangerously poisonous *A. pantherina* (Panthercap); if one notes the grey rather than white veil remnants, also the less pronounced volva (sac at the stem base), this error can be avoided.



Left, *Amanita excelsa* var. *spissa* with grey veil remnants on the cap, found today (photo NS), and to compare with it right *A. pantherina* with white veil remnants, also a more pronounced volva at the stem base. (photo 2006 PC)



Early on when the light was still very poor we came across the attractive and very scaly *Pholiota squarrosa* (Shaggy scalycap), just a singleton specimen at the base of a large Beech, also nearby some young specimens of *Armillaria mellea* (Honey fungus) and a large and fresh clump of *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphurtuft) – all common species with which it was useful for new members to be able to acquaint themselves.



Above *Pholiota squarrosa* (photo PCI)
Right *Armillaria mellea* (photo NS)
Below *Hypholoma fasciculare* (photo NS)



There was much discussion about the two very similar species of earthball found: *Scleroderma verrucosum* (Scaly earthball) and *S. areolatum* (Leopard earthball). The only sure way to separate them is to examine their spores which are a little bigger and also spinier in *S. areolatum*, but I always like to have a stab at their identity in the field and the one I took home to check was indeed *S. areolatum* as I'd thought.



Two earthballs, *Scleroderma areolatum* above, and *Scleroderma verrucosum* being examined. (photos NS and PCI)

This is a site which often abounds with the genus *Russula*, the Brittlegills, and though not fruiting in quantities today we were able to take a look at several interesting species. Conspicuous by its absence today in a wood dominated by Beech was *R. nobilis* (Beechwood sickener, in some books *R. mairei*).



Russula rosea found today, showing its colour variation. (photo CS)

We did however find two other bright red species, the first is very variable in colour (cap from red to cream and stipe often with a red flush too) but the give-away characters are the firm solid feel of both cap and stipe and the cap skin which hardly peels at all. (Peelability of the cap cuticle is an important character in this genus.) This was *R. rosea* (in some books as *R. lepida*), a typical Beechwood species. The name situation here is extremely confusing because the epithet *rosea* was previously applied to a completely different species which is now known as *R. aurora*!

We later came across a species which has a preference for Oak rather than Beech, this was *Russula pseudointegra* (Scarlet brittlegill), a handsome species with a shiny red cap which readily peels as can be seen in the photo, and also has gills which when mature become bright orange rather than the more normal white or cream of the genus. This is caused by the orange spores of this particular species (revealed if you take a sporeprint) colouring the gills as it ages. This is a process which occurs in all fungi which have coloured spores, and the reason why many genera - *Agaricus*, *Psathyrella*, *Pluteus*, to name a few - have gills which change from almost white when young to much darker when old.



Russula pseudointegra growing under Oak today (photo CS)

Last week at Stoke Common we discussed another pair of similar Brittlegills, this time with yellow caps, these being the very common *Russula ochroleuca* (Ochre brittlegill) and the much rarer *R. claroflava* (Yellow swamp brittlegill). We found both again today, though only one specimen of the latter. I asked Claudi to set up the photo below of both species together in order to make a comparison between them. Firstly note the dirtier ochre yellow of *R. ochroleuca* on the left, compared to the bright yellow of *R. claroflava* on the right. Then look carefully at the stems: white in *R. ochroleuca* but already developing signs of reddening then blackening in *R. claroflava* on the right. This character is the best way to split the two species if you are in doubt, and if not visible as it already was in this specimen, it can be induced by scratching the stem with your nail and waiting say 15 to 30 minutes for the tell-tale colour change to take place. If you have *R. ochroleuca* it will remain white where damaged with no staining developing. It is also worth noting that the gills are white in *R. ochroleuca* but cream in *R. claroflava*,

also that the latter only grows under Birch whereas the former is happy growing under many different trees. If there's no Birch present then you don't have *R. claroflava*, it's a simple as that! I promise not to go on about this topic - one of my favourite hobby-horses - again this year!



Left *Russula ochroleuca* and right *Russula claroflava*, both found today at Hodgemoor Wood. (photo CS)

Many thanks to all the keen collectors and photographers today.

For more details of what we found see the complete list.

photos © PC =Penny Cullington, PCI = Pat Clark, CS = Claudi Soler, NS = Nick Standing

