FUNGI WALK at MOOREND COMMON, September 23rd 2017

Penny Cullington

A large group gathered at the Prince Albert pub on a somewhat dull and dreary morning. Five from the Frieth Natural History Society boosted our BFG members to a grand total of 21 attendees, a few of whom were hybrids as Alan Gudge succinctly pointed out! Locals (and hybrids) Margaret and Bill Bolton had kindly planned our route and skilfully led us round, knowing the best spots for fungi, with the result that our species list in the field totalled 86 and comfortably topped 100 by the time I added species later identified at home.

We were soon finding large numbers of ***Tricholoma sulphureum*** (Sulphur Knight) with its distinctive smell of coal gas tar and yellow cap and stem; also another from that genus was everywhere under the many Oaks, this one with a cream cap and a different but penetrating and (to my nose) unpleasant smell – this was ***Tricholoma lascivum*** (Aromatic Kinght). Soon one of the Frieth contingent showed me a huge whitish mushroom though well past its sell-by date, the cap being all of 15 cm across. The crumbly white gills put me in mind of a species of *Russula* (Brittlegill) but I suspected that this was in fact one of the four large white species from the genus *Lactarius* (the Milkcaps), and sure enough a slice with a knife on the gills soon produced white droplets – the telltale sign of this genus. (Actually, due to DNA research these four species have now been moved to their own separate genus, *Lactifluus.*) Care is need to separate them to species and I knew that tasting the milk when isolated from the gills, also then adding a drop of Potassium Hydroxide to the milk was key. The collector led us to the spot where he'd found it and there we saw a whole troop of them (something I've not met with before) and luckily amongst them was one fresh young specimen which then obligingly dripped with copious milk. This tasted mild (though the flesh tasted really hot!) and Claudi (amazingly) produced a bottle of KOH, the appropriate chemical, which we added to the milk dripped onto a plastic lid: no colour change occurred. This data allowed me later to identify our species as ***Lactifluuus vellereus*** (Fleecy Milkcap).

***Lactifluus vellereus* – the milk droplets are just visible on the gills of the smaller cap on the left (NF)**

It's always good to have youngsters out looking for fungi: their sharp eyesight and inquisitive minds nearly always turn up things others miss. My granddaughter, Emily aged nine, provided this service for us today, and regularly through the morning added new species to the list. One of these was one of the rather few Ascomycetes we recorded – these being the spore-shooters having no gills in contrast to the Basidomycetes, the spore-droppers which include mushrooms and brackets. We

quite often find ***Helvella crispa*** (White Saddle) on our walks – two specimens turned up today, but much less regularly ***Helvella elastica*** (Elastic Saddle), so this was a nice find.

Two specimens of *Helvella elastica*, one showing the 'saddle' upturned as it is when young, the other older 'saddle' drooping downwards. (NF)

Emily was also the first to find one of the many large fruitbodies of both species of *Hydnum* (Hedgehog) we encountered. Some were a deep warm orange which I named ***Hydnum rufescens*** (Terracotta Hedgehog), others were much paler making them ***H. repandum*** (Wood Hedgehog) though there is debate as to whether separating these two colour forms into different species is entirely justifiable. I've never seen quite such an impressive display of these interesting fungi as we were treated to today, giving us the opportunity to get a close look at a fungus which has spines underneath in place of gills or pores.

Just some of the many large specimens of *Hydnum repandum* we saw today (PC) with an insert below showing the spines (NF)

Many specimens of the common ***Russula ochroleuca*** (Ochre Brittlegill) were found but a couple of different species from this genus were of interest though one of them (found yet again by Emily) had already been almost entirely eaten by squirrels or mice, leaving just the shiny bright red cap and white stem for us to see – no gills and therefore no spores to help with identification. Though vital clues were missing, I thought this might be the rare *Russula laccata* (Willow Brittlegill) judging purely from the cap and knew that examining the cap cuticle (the red skin peeled from the surface) with a scope at home would be sufficient to show me if this was the case or not. It wasn't, but did prove to be different from the common red ***Russula nobilis*** (Beechwood Sickener) and was in fact ***Russula silvestris*** - not nearly so often recorded and a species found under Oak rather than Beech. I suspect it is probably often misrecorded as *R. nobilis* because as we found at this site the two trees are often in close proximity and both fungus species were seen here together today.

Now for another *Russula* species which I always enjoy identifying: At one point I threw a firm capped and pale specimen into my basket to look at later when less rushed, and then promptly forgot all about it till emptying my collections out at home. It had a pale cream cap with the odd

splodge of pink and this, together with Alan's comment before we set off that the soil here was acid clay, made me think straight away of ***Russula luteotacta*** - surprisingly with no English name though the Latin aptly describes its distinctive character: yellow when touched. I carefully checked the fruitbody looking for signs of the bright chrome yellow which develops in this species where handled or damaged but only after time – sometimes considerable time. It was just beginning to show, so I then took a couple of quick snaps, then scratched the cap, stem and gills and put it back into a pot to inspect again later. My photos below tell the story. I seldom find this species though it's not really rare, but as I live and study fungi in the Chilterns having predominantly calcareous soil and this is a species with a distinct preference for wet clay soils our paths do not often cross. (Apologies for the quality of the photos which were taken in haste.)

Far left, the cap of *Russula luteotacta* with a deliberate scratch visible right in the middle of the photo; below is the same cap taken three hours later when the scratch has turned bright yellow.
Near left, the underside of the same specimen just showing telltale signs of yellowing on the gills, but with a scratch inflicted on the stem (still white and not visible); below is the same view taken three hours later showing the stem scratch now yellow and also with clear yellowing on the gills as well. (PC)

Claudi collected two specimens of a *Pluteus* (Shield) which clearly was not the common *P. cervinus* (Deer Shield), having a thinner-fleshed cap with a wrinkled surface. This is a genus readily recognisable in the field despite most species having brown caps: it grows on fallen wood and has pink gills when mature which are free of the top of the stem. A few can be named to species without recourse to a microscope but most need examination of the cap cuticle (as in *Russula* mentioned earlier) as was the case here. It keyed out to ***Pluteus phlebophorus*** (Wrinkled Shield).

***Pluteus phlebophorus* found on fallen wood today (CS)**

We were hopeful today of finding a striking species of *Cortinarius* (Webcap) which Margaret and Bill found here last year and had reported was fruiting again. They led us to the spot and sure enough there were several reasonable specimens. Many members of this enormous genus remain

an enigma to most mycologists even with reference to specialist books, but those which have sticky caps (the Phlegmaceum group) offer some chance of identification and have distinctive features. Many have purple tints in some part of the fruitbody though this often fades with maturity. Our species, thought previously to be *Cortinarius purpurascens* (Bruising Webcap), displays a violet cap though with brown streaking developing, also a violet cortina (i.e. the mesh or web adjoining the cap to the stem just under the gills, visible in the upturned cap bottom left in the photo below), also some violet in the stem flesh and outer surface. The gills, however, are pale beige/rust. I failed to bring a specimen home, thinking that we knew what this species was, but now having checked the features more closely from Claudi's photo I think it is wrongly identified. According to recent literature *C. purpurascens* occurs primarily in conifer forests and the English name I discovered refers to its violet gills which bruise darker purple when damaged, as does the stem. This, however, was not so in our specimens. Searching for a more likely species, one which occurs under Oak and/or Beech and matches the description better, I suspect that what we have is much closer to *C. nemorensis* or *C. largus*, but without material to hand I certainly cannot be sure. So for now this will have to remain *Cortinarius* sp. and as Margaret and Bill are now away in Australia we will have to wait, maybe till next year, for another collection and further research to come to a satisfactory identification.

Cortinarius sp. **previously named** ***C. purpurascens*** **in error and awaiting identification when it fruits again.** **(CS)**

There follow below a few more photos of things we found, but I will now thank everyone for coming and for making the morning so successful and finding so many species – it is certainly a case of 'The more of us there are, the longer the species list!' A special thank you also to Margaret and Bill, and to both Claudi and Neil for sharing their excellent photos. See you all again soon!

Photos: CS = Claudi Soler; NF = Neil Fletcher; PC = Penny Cullington

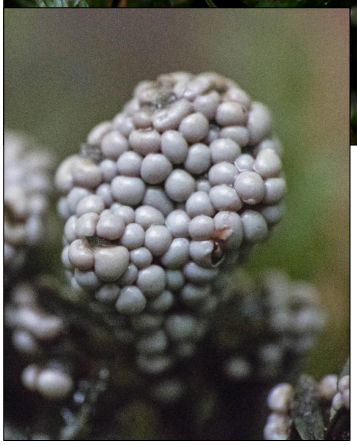
Clavulinopsis helvola **(Yellow Club) growing in woodland litter - this not the usual habitat for a species which is commonly found in unimproved grassland.** **(CS)**

Leotia lubrica **(Jellybaby) a delightful species of Ascomycete found today in woodland litter at the end of our walk. (NF)**

Ascocoryne sarcoides **(Purple Jellydisc), another Ascomycete found here growing in large colonies on a sawn off stump of Birch. (NF)**

In contrast to the enormous white *Lactifluus vellereus* featured earlier in the report, here is *Lactarius subumbonatus*, a relatively small Milkcap with a dark brown cap often having an uneven wavy fluted margin. (CS)

Greg found this unusual species: *Pseudocraterellus undulatus* - no English name but somewhat similar to *C. cornucopioides* (Horn of Plenty, Trompette de Mort) though with rather smaller and pale grey fruitbodies compared to the black fruitbodies of that species. Its name seems far from settled, having at one time been in *Cantharellus*, also in *Craterellus,* with various different species names also. Our material was particularly pale and grey and it can be darker with brown tints. Fruiting appears to be somewhat erratic: some years it's reasonably common, others there's no sign of it. (PC)



We're not even sure if this remarkable colony of egglike structures growing in moss is a slime mould. I'm still waiting for it to develop into something which might be recognisable and will add a name at a later stage if I get anywhere. (CS with insert NF)

A week later this collection had dried off (see below PC) and I was then able to identify it as *Diderma spumarioides*, a common slime mould which I discovered is a species characteristic of dry tree-leaf litter and mossy grasslands on chalk and limestone. This is, however, only the second record on our database, probably reflecting how little such organisms are studied rather than its rarity.