Foray at Pulpit Hill on October 4th, 2015

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A good sized group – twelve of us – set off into the woodland area on a beautiful Indian summer's morning after a somewhat dry previous ten days or so. My heart sank as we scratched around to find anything fungal for the first few minutes, but gradually the diligent searching paid off as we moved higher up and soon I was busy identifying or scribbling names down. Surprisingly we ended up with a really lengthy list of over 90 species, a fair number of which needed checking or identifying at home, one was new to the county, another just the second British record and 13 were new to the site.

The first species worthy of a photo was a small *Pluteus*, cap only about 3cm across but its colour making it instantly recognisable in the field. I much preferred its older name which describes its distinctive greeny shade of yellow - *P. luteovirens*; it is now known as *P. chrysophaeus* (Yellow Shield).

Left *Pluteus chrysophaeus* (NW)
Below *Russula nobilis* (NF)

Like many Chiltern woodlands where Beech predominates, this is a good site for one of my favourite genera *Russula* (Brittlegills). Two really common species were conspicuous by their absence today - *R. ochroleuca* and *R. atropurpurea*, but of the five species on the list two were new to the site. Firstly, though, a nice collection of another very common one which is only found under Beech: *Russula nobilis* (Beechwood sickener). Many reference books will have this named as *R. mairei* though the name was changed quite a few years ago, however I gather from Geoffrey Kibby that it may well revert back again soon. Hey-ho, just as we've got accustomed to yet another new name …….

Under the conifers we found several specimens of a *Russula* with not only a purple cap but also a markedly purple stem. As there was both Pine and Spruce nearby this was likely to be one of two species which has those two particular features: *R. sardonia* (Primrose brittlegill) grows with Pine and the less often recognised *R. queletii* (Fruity brittlegill) grows with Spruce. (I assume that the reason for the somewhat misleading common name of the first is that the gills tend to have a primrose yellow tone, but one would be hard pressed to glean that information from its name when most names refer to cap colour. Primrose-gilled brittlegill might be more explicit but is a bit of a mouthful. Anyway, I digress.) The common name of the second I didn't know but it would have helped had I done so because on examining the collection later it had developed a clear fruity smell

similar to *Russula fellea* (Geranium brittlegill). There is also a chemical test which separates these two purple conifer species: a drop of ammonia on the gills of *R. sardonia* turns it bright pink after a few minutes. This test being negative together with the fruity smell and lack of yellow in the gills confirmed that our collection was *R. queletii*, growing with the Spruce and a new species for the site.

Left *Russula queletii* from Moor End Common (2006) – our collection today had much more markedly dark purple caps and stems, probably the result of the damp conditions at Moor End in my photo but the very dry conditions at Pulpit Hill today. (PC)

Next to a genus which we often tend to pass by due to so many of the species being virtually unrecognisable or quite possibly still undescribed: *Cortinarius* (Webcap) – one with a huge number of species but divided up into distinct sections. All have a russet-rusty spore print and the hardest group to get to grips with is *Telamonia* containing species with dry caps and stems; more approachable is the *Phlegmacium* group with species having sticky caps but dry stems, and *Myxacium* with species having both sticky caps and stems. Many *Cortinarius* species enjoy Beech woodland in calcareous soil, and we collected three species today which luckily were identifiable. The first is from the tricky *Telamonia* group but is one with which I am familiar: *Cortinarius torvus* (Stocking webcap) is mid-sized – i.e. not a little LBG, and has a distinctive 'socklike' lower stem with a clear rim where originally the meshlike net (the cortina which gives the genus its name) originally joined the stem. Only one specimen was found today but I include here a photo of a collection from Burnham Beeches (2011) where both the sock top in the mature specimens and the cortina in the smaller right hand specimen are clearly visible. Note also the typical rusty mature gills of the genus, though in some species the immature specimens can have gills of other colours: yellow, olive, orange, lilac, purple, even red, before the mature spores have coated them.

***Cortinarius torvus* from Burnham Beeches 2011 (PC)**

The second *Cortinarius* collected was a single specimen of an ochre yellow capped *Phlegmacium* group, this one with beautiful lilac gills and a stem base which splayed out like the base of a wine glass. This I instantly recognised as a rarity and suspected it was a species new to Britain in 2010 from Mousells Wood, Bucks when I took Geoffrey Kibby for a visit there. On

checking it out at home later a drop of KOH on the cap turned suitably red, thus confirming it as *Cortinarius catharinae* and the second British record.

Left *Cortinarius catharinae* from Mousells Wood in 2010, the first British record (PC), and above our singleton of the same species, though the sunlight on the specimen rather changes its appearance and it was not possible to show the lilac gills as well. (NW)

The final *Cortinarius* we found was also a *Phlegmacium*, this one with a lilac cap and gills when young; again the determination was clinched by a drop of KOH on the cap which turned bright cherry red, thus separating it from other similar species. This was *Cortinarius sodagnitus* (Bitter Bigfoot webcap), new to the county with just 45 previous British records, the last in 2010, a species until 2006 on the Red Data List as Vulnerable.

Left *Cortinarius sodagnitus* (NW), and above the same showing the cherry red reaction with a drop of KOH on the cap (PC).

From the genus *Amanita* we found just one specimen of *A. rubescens* (The blusher) but several of the deadly *A. phalloides* (Deathcap); the bitter honey smell was apparent and is worth becoming familiar with as it is very different from that of the much commoner *A. citrina* (False deathcap). That species smells of potato peelings but is quite frequently misnamed as the Deathcap.

Right *Amanita phalloides* showing its typical gutulate volva and surprisingly sticky cap today given the dry conditions. (NW)

Other species of interest: some rather atypical specimens of *Armillaria gallica* (Bulbous honey fungus) growing apparently in soil though no doubt on the Beech roots beneath. The stems were remarkably yellow, the rings hardly apparent, also they were not tightly clustered – all of which led to confusion for some of us at the time though I was fairly certain of the identification which was confirmed later at home. No doubt the dry conditions and hard soil were responsible.

Above *Armillaria gallica* looking rather unusual today (NW)

Some tiny fruitbodies were noticed growing on Beech leaves, this was the diminutive *Marasmius bulliardii.* Once one has recognised the genus this is an easy one to determine with the use of a handlens because the gills are attached to a 'cogwheel' around the stem apex as in the common and slightly larger *M. rotula* (Collared parachute); the sunken cap centre with dark dot therein is also a good character. It is probably not uncommon growing on fallen leaves, particularly Beech, but is no doubt often overlooked.

Left *Marasmius bulliardii* growing on dead Beech leaves; the stems are thin like a horse hair and the caps are under 1mm across. (NF)

Two species of *Lepiota* were found though only the larger and more eye-catching specimen caught the eye of the two photographers who were kept pretty busy throughout the morning. The small plain white one I spent some time working on at home but failed to key it out satisfactorily (sorry, Tony). The larger and very scaly capped *L. aspera* (Freckled dapperling) is not uncommon in our area and is a very beautiful species.

Right *Lepiota aspera* showing its typical brown scales on a white background. (NW)

It amused us to see a tiny specimen of *Lactarius subdulcis* (Mild milkcap) which had developed with an extra cap emerging from the side of the stem. Suggested new name: Semaphore Milkcap! The pencil was included to give an idea of the scale.

Left *Lactarius subdulcis* with an arm. (NW)

We came across a Pholiota just developing on the sawn off end of a Beech trunk. This was not the common and very scaly dry-capped *P. squarrosa* (Shaggy scalycap), and keyed out to *Pholiota adiposa*, not rare and known from a few other Chiltern sites.

Right *Pholiota adiposa* just emerging from the sawn off end of a Beech trunk. (NW)

Next, two for the price of one: the uncommon *Ramaria flaccida* (genus name Coral but no species common name) was found growing in the conifer litter with our only identifiable slime mould of the day just behind it, *Mucilago crustacea*, affectionately but not officially known as either Dog vomit or Cat sick - take your pick! Very few slime moulds (the Myxomycetes) are nameable whilst still in their plasmodium (slimy) stage (one we found in this state which I took back failed to oblige and develop any further). However, the *Mucilago* is unmistakeable and is often found on herbaceous stems off the ground just as if deposited by an unfortunate animal.

Left in the foreground *Ramaria flaccida*, and above it the slime mould *Mucilago crustacea* (NW)

Finally to a splendid specimen of *Coprinopsis picacea* (Magpie fungus) to conclude a very enjoyable and successful foray. This report would not have been possible without everyone's contribution and efforts in collecting, and particularly without Nick and Neil's excellent photos. I'm very grateful to them because when things get busy on a foray it is not possible to get the camera out as well as keep up with identifying and listing. I think I can say that a good time was had by all.

***Coprinopsis picacea* at Pulpit Hill today (NF)**

See the complete list for further information.

Photos: PC = Penny Cullington; NF = Neil Fletcher; NW = Nick White