

Foray at Dancersend on October 5th, 2014

Penny Cullington

This was a foray joint with the Herts/Beds Fungi Group, and sixteen of us were expertly led round by Mick Jones who knows the site like the back of his hand. At his suggestion we focused on two adjacent woods soon to be acquired as part of this large BBOWT reserve and not previously forayed: Northhill Wood and Black Wood. These are archetypal Chiltern woodland with a predominance of Beech and Oak but also a little Birch and other mixed deciduous trees. The north and west sloping ground had retained at least some moisture through the incredibly dry last few weeks. We listed 62 species – a somewhat modest figure for what is normally considered the peak of the autumn fruiting season, but we were grateful to find even that number! Thirteen of these were new to the site on our database, though four of these were already on the site list which Mick provided us with, so we have added seven new species.



Very few mycorrhizal species (those which grow on tree roots in symbiosis) were around, and the only one in any numbers was a large cluster of *Hebeloma velutipes* (Pale poisonpie) which Derek later identified, this was growing under Beech on the steep bank as we walked down the road back to the carpark. Also on the roadside bank in quite good numbers was another species typically found in Beech litter:

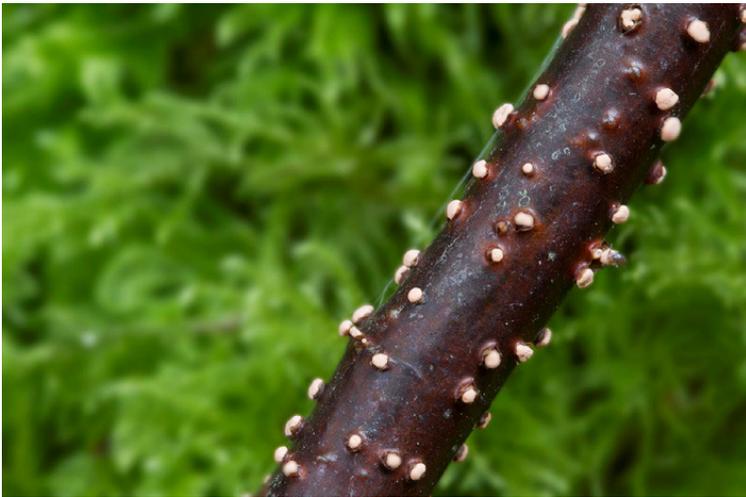
Above: *Marasmius wynnei* providing a resting place for the Daddy Longlegs today. *Marasmius wynnei* (Pearly parachute), rather a nondescript mushroom which often goes unidentified unless one is familiar with its smell and looks for the darkening lower stem which often occurs in this genus. These specimens were very dry but still recognisable.



Above: *Mycena crocata* just emerging from some fallen wood, no more than 1.5 cm tall at this stage.

As is often the way in dry conditions, we were reduced to turning over logs to find anything fungal, and most of what we found was on the good supply of fallen wood. Not many Agarics (species with gills or pores) of any sort were to be found; one, however, was *Pholiota jahnii* growing in a clump at the base of a Beech which Derek later identified - not common and new to the site. A few other brackets were found but mostly we found small things such as *Mycena arcangeliana* (Angel's bonnet) – always common here, and it was nice to be able to

demonstrate the amazing bright orange juice from the stem of *Mycena crocata* (Saffron drop bonnet). This is also a common species on the Chilterns, confined as it is to growing on fallen Beech. We found some tiny fruitbodies of this species only just developing (primordia) which were already showing the tell-tale saffron colour which sets it apart from all others in this often tricky genus having a large number of species.



I'm saving the most exciting find - an Agaric - till last, but move now onto some very common Ascomycetes (the spore-shooters rather than spore-droppers like the Agarics) of which we have nice photos. We found several sticks / twigs coated in little hard orange blobs, this being *Nectria cinnabarina* (aptly named Coral spot).

Left: *Nectria cinnabarina* on a fallen Beech twig.



Another asco we found though entirely different in appearance having a jelly-like feel to it was *Neobulgaria pura* (Beech jellydisc)

Left: *Neobulgaria pura* growing on a fallen Beech branch.



.... and yet another looking entirely different was *Xylaria longipes* (Dead Moll's fingers) - a somewhat grizzly name for this the less common of two similar species, the other being chunkier in appearance and having very different spores: *Xylaria polymorpha* (Dead man's fingers)

Left: *Xylaria longipes* growing on a mossy deciduous log.

.... and finally probably the commonest of the four species of asco shown here: *Hypoxylon fragiforme* (Beech woodwart). In this area most fallen branches of Beech are likely to have this fungus.



Left: *Hypoxylon fragiforme*, a very common species only occurring on fallen Beech branches.

Now for the real rarity I hinted at earlier. In Black Wood near the top path I found a small yellowish mushroom-like fungus (i.e. with gills) which I didn't recognise growing on a mossy rotting log. This I handed to Derek and we discussed what genus it might be, but were both very unsure. Later at home Derek took a sporeprint (vital when the genus is a mystery) and found other interesting microscopic features which eventually led him to the genus *Flammulina*. There is one fairly common species of this genus, *F. velutipes* (Velvet shank), a late season species with which we are familiar and to which the mystery fungus was indeed similar but it lacked the typical velvet stem base of that species and also differed microscopically. After much searching through some obscure and specialised literature Derek came up with a name which fitted all the characters, the only doubt being shed by the fact that it is not as yet known in Britain: *Flammulina fennea*. When this happens as it does from time to time, the mycologist experiences two contrasting feelings: excitement and self-doubt. However, I rate Derek's skills very highly and know him well enough to have every confidence that if he double checks an identification and is still convinced, then there is not much doubt that he's correct. So this was an exciting find, and the material plus a detailed description and the sporeprint will now go to Martyn Ainsworth at Kew. As is often the way, this rather insignificant little specimen did not get photographed in the field, though Derek will have taken some micro-images to back up his determination, and it is probable that DNA samples will also be checked to verify the find before it is added to the British list.

Many thanks to all the attendees who searched so diligently, to Mick for inviting us and leading us round, and in particular I'd like to thank Nick Bowles who supplied all today's photos.

See the complete list for more details of what we found today.