

BFG Foray at Hodgemoor Woods
October 9th, 2016

Report by Penny Cullington

Twelve of us started off on a bright and chilly morning and it was good to welcome a new family and also a potential new member. We last forayed here in 2014 and comparing our walk today with that event we found roughly the same number of different species (into the 70s) with the same number of people. Though as one would expect the species on the two lists vary a fair amount, the dominating genera were identical: in 2014 we found seven species of *Amanita* and eleven of *Russula*, and this time we recorded six species of *Amanita* but an impressive fourteen species of *Russula*! This site together with nearby Penn Wood were the two places which inspired and nurtured my love of fungi and of the genus *Russula* in particular, living as we did only five minutes away for many years. In fact checking in the BFG database I find we now have well over 700 species recorded for Hodgemoor, of which no less than 63 are *Russula* species! In Britain we know of somewhere over 150 species of *Russula* and as our database shows the Chiltern Beechwoods are particularly rich in this genus.



Comparing the gills of *Russula nigricans* (left) with those of *Russula densifolia* (right) (PC)

was unmistakable and we had no doubt in confirming our previous finds as *R. nigricans* after all. At home I checked the microscopic characters and identified the crowded gilled specimens as *R. densifolia* (Crowded brittlegill). I then found I had a photo comparing the two species from material in Penn Wood back in 2009 which I think it's worth including here. Be warned: there are at least three other virtually identical *Russula* species with these closely packed gills and it's only *R. nigricans* which one can be sure of without recourse to a microscope!

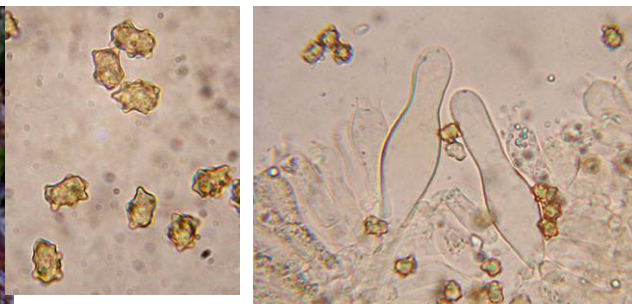
Closely related to the genus *Russula* is *Lactarius* (Milkcap), and though we found rather surprisingly few different species of this genus today I was particularly pleased to see (under the same Oak where I first encountered it) *Lactarius chrysorrheus* (Yellowdrop milkcap) - a distinctive species, only found under Oak (as is the much more common *L. quietus* (Oakbug milkcap)), with a pinkish zoned cap and when the gills are damaged there's no need for a white hankie to see if the milk turns yellow - it does this in situ after a minute or so, sometimes turning startlingly bright chrome.

Right, lovely material of *Lactarius chrysorrheus* found today (PC)



We found many specimens of *Russula nigricans* (Blackening brittlegill) under the Beeches and observed how the flesh when cut gradually reddens and then after an hour or so blackens. There are several extremely similar firm-fleshed *Russulas* with caps whitish to start with then becoming dirty brown to black as they mature, but in the field *R. nigricans* can safely be separated from them by its remarkably widely spaced gills. However, in younger specimens this character is less obvious as we discovered today; in fact we found ourselves wondering over a few we picked up until we found two which quite clearly had very closely packed gills in comparison: the difference

Another genus well represented today was *Inocybe* (Fibrecap). Our 2014 list included just one species, *I. cookei* (Straw fibrecap), but by the time I'd worked through the specimens I'd found or been handed today (this is a genus with very few one can name without a microscope) we had seven species on the list. I tend not to include photos of this 'LBJ' genus in my reports despite the fact that there are now over 140 species known in Britain and it's probably the genus I'm the most familiar with – they often don't make the most exciting and eye-catching subjects to look at but do have readily found and often very distinctive microscopic characters. Today we had a good collection of one called *Inocybe stellatospora* (Woolly fibrecap) so I shall break my pattern and include it!



Inocybe stellatospora showing its roughened scaly cap and loosely fibrous stem, and above left its stellate nobby spores and above right its large sterile cells (cystidia) found on the edge of the gill (magnified x 1000). Often in this genus these cells have thick walls with a crown of crystals on top but in this particular species those features are lacking. (PC)

This wood used to be frequented by charcoal burners and there are still patches of their spoil to be found where interesting fungi often occur. One such turned up today, a cup fungus, one of the Ascomycetes (Spore-shooters), this was *Otidea bufonia* (Toad's ear) growing in tight clusters amongst the charred remains in exactly the same spot where this photo was taken back in 2011. The other quite common species in this genus are a much paler buff colour and it is easy to mistake them all for the somewhat similar cup fungus genus – *Peziza*.



Otidea bufonia growing clustered amongst the charcoal remnants (PC)

We found various members of the Boletes (a large group of mushroom-shaped fungi but with pores in place of gills underneath and now split into many different genera) and as is often the case we identified only some of them. One which I felt fairly confident of though it was old and past its sell-by date was an unusual member of the genus *Leccinum*. These Boletes grow almost exclusively under Birch but there are two species which occur under different host trees, both recorded from Hodgemoor: one under Hornbeam and one under Oak and in both the damaged flesh turns black, an unusual feature in this genus. Today we found *Leccinum crocipodium* (Saffron bolete) which grows under Oak and when in good condition has distinctive yellow pores (most members of *Leccinum* have pale buff pores) and a rather lumpy uneven mid brown cap. Our old specimen needed to be confirmed with a microscope and by the time I looked at it at home it had turned nicely black and the microscopic features matched exactly. I found I had photos of a collection made in Hodgemoor (where as with so many fungi I became familiar with the species) dating from 2003 and as it is not that common I include those photos here.



Leccinum crocipodium, a somewhat atypical member of this genus which grows under Oak. The photos are of a specimen found at Hodgemoor Woods in 2003 – the one we found today was barely recognisable and not worthy of the camera. (PC)



For more details of what we found see the complete list. Many thanks to all attendees and we hope to see you all again soon.