

BFG Foray at Stoke Common
October 1st, 2016

Report by Penny Cullington

Our group of eight attending members got a thorough soaking this morning but still managed to enjoy this interesting and unusual site with its mature Oak and Birch on the north side of the road, then the Common proper with somewhat reduced numbers of Pine (and subsequent loss of numbers of related fungi), some heathland areas and also some more mixed deciduous woodland at the eastern end.



We kicked off under the mature Oak and Birch as usual and to begin with didn't find much; it appeared that in this normally very productive area the fruiting of regular species such as *Gymnopilus junonius* (Spectacular Rustgill) was only just starting. Our first interesting find was a pristine specimen of *Grifola frondosa* (Hen of the Woods) at the base of an Oak trunk. New to the site, it is not a rare species but one we don't find that often, this being now the eighth site in the county where we've recorded it.

Left, *Grifola frondosa*, an unusual tiered bracket (CS)

Nearby I was particularly pleased to find an old friend *Ganoderma resinaceum* fruiting high up on the same Oak where I first found it six years ago. A few minutes later Roger noticed the same species just emerging on an adjacent Oak – good news! The insert photo above of his find shows the typical lacquered surface of the species - one of the characters which separates it from the commoner *Ganoderma* species we record quite regularly. We have only three other county sites for *G. resinaceum*, however.



Ganoderma resinaceum (Above JW, left insert CS)



Also new here was a brightly coloured *Lactarius* coming up in some numbers under the Oaks, this was *L. fulvissimus* (Tawny milkcap), one with a striking orange brown cap and stem, also a mild taste and milk which remains white after time – in many *Lactarius* species the milk changes colour thus giving us a useful clue for identification.

Lactarius fulvissimus, new to the site today (JW)

Crossing over into the main Common we found that the large woodchip piles which in the past have delighted us with interesting fungi were no longer there, furthermore I was saddened to see how much of the area of Pines here had been felled with the consequent lack of numbers of mycorrhizal fungi which used to abound. I've recorded over 30 species of *Russula* here since 2008 but as the stands of Pine and Birch have been much reduced during the last six years so the diversity of this genus in particular has

dwindled. We recorded just four different *Russula* species today, none of which were Pine related, though one which grows under Oak is worthy of note. This was *R. chloroides* (Blue band brittlegill) – an unusually firm-fleshed *Russula* (one of the Compactae group like the common *R. nigricans* – Blackening brittlegill) with a white cap and gills and often (but not always!) a distinct blue-green band of colour at the stem apex. This band was barely visible today – the reason why at the time I mistook it for *R. delicata*, an almost identical species but lacking the blue-green band. Claudi, however, took it home and checked the spores which showed distinct tall warts (just visible in his excellent insert – these spores are not at all easy to photograph), a microscopic feature which separates it from *R. delicata*.



Russula chloroides found under Oak today (CS)



Two tiny specimens of *Suillus bovinus* being rather dwarfed by its companion species *Gomphidius roseus*; both are Pine associates (JW)

We searched for quite a while before finding examples of four other Pine related species which I connect with this site: *Suillus luteus* (Slippery Jack), *Suillus bovinus* (Bovine bolete) together with its close companion species *Gomphidius roseus* (Rosy spike) and lastly *Lactarius helvus* (Fenugreek milkcap). All four did eventually turn up but in much reduced numbers. The two *Suillus* species (members of the Boletes) were only just visible as such as they were still more-or-less ‘buttons’ - as were several tiny specimens of *Boletus edulis* (Penny bun) which we found in the deciduous woodland later on. It is always satisfying to find *Gomphidius roseus*, growing as it does in association with *Suillus bovinus*, though this washed out specimen was only showing a little pink on the cap.

L. helvus is an interesting species, one I’ve recorded here every year since I started visiting in 2008, nearby Burnham Beeches being the only other county site for it. It is found under Pine and Birch, often where both trees are present together, and I sometimes wonder if it is missed in the field as belonging to the Milkcap genus because the milk is completely colourless and therefore easy to overlook, especially as it retreats back into the gill tissue after a short time leaving no trace. This species has another redeeming character, however, this being its smell of curry spices, cumin or fenugreek, though in today’s specimens the smell was hard to detect.

Lactarius helvus found in vastly reduced numbers here today; note the droplet of colourless liquid under the cap which gives it away as a member of this genus. (PC)



As we roamed over the disturbed soil and debris towards the deciduous area we started picking up good numbers of two dark-spored LBJs (Little Brown Jobs often difficult to identify); one was familiar but I was unsure about, the other was new to me and the genus was not at all obvious. Both were going to need work at home. Once under some magnification, however, the mottled grey-black gills of the bright brown-capped species told me it was a member of the genus *Panaeolus*; working through the key I

eventually identified it as *P. fimicola* (Turf mottlegill) – one of two species which have strange gill cells which are only visible when Sulphovanillin is applied. I was somewhat wary of using sulphuric acid for this test but it was worth it to confirm the identification. (Sorry we have no photo of this species.)



Psathyrella lutensis - a rarity we found today (JW)

Another quite unusual species we turned up in the heathland which was new to the site was *Coltricia perennis* (Tiger's eye) – a poroid species not unlike a Polypore but unlike that genus it grows on soil, not on wood. I discovered that it is a species of sandy acid heathland, often associated with Pine, and favours bare or mossy compacted soil by tracksides near trees - an exact description of our habitat today! Other county records are restricted to Penn Vicarage lawn (also acid soil) and Wavendon Heath in the north of the county.



The heathland species *Coltricia perennis* (CS)

It was in this area several years ago that we found a colony of the tiny orange discs of *Aleuria congrex* which were new to the UK. This is still the only site the species is known from with only one other collection here in 2013. However, we failed to turn it up today despite some diligent searching.



Of interest was a good clump of *Pholiota gummosa* (Sticky scalycap). This species is somewhat atypical of the genus as the gills are pale rather than the expected rusty colour, also it grows in paths or soil rather than obviously on wood though no doubt it is attached to submerged woody debris. The sticky cap with torn fibrils around the edge and floccose stem are all good characters to help one recognise it in the field.

Pholiota gummosa found near the main entrance to the Common today. (CS)

Worth including are two nice photos of Justin's, though both are common species. However, the Inkcap took me a while to key out as normally I can hand this genus on to Derek to sort out so am not so au fait with the literature! Also I'm used to finding *Coprinellus lagopus* (Hare'sfoot inkcap) on woodchip piles rather than on a small twig as it was here!



Amanita fulva (Tawny grisette) and *Coprinellus lagopus* (Hare's foot inkcap) found today (JW)

It's always good to find a species of *Cortinarius* distinctive enough to be sure of naming in the field (there aren't many!) In the mixed deciduous woodland Paul recognised *Cortinarius bolaris* (Dappled webcap) straight away despite the tipping rain at the time. We both know this species well from Penn Wood but it was one of twelve species new to the site today. The cap with its red spotting together with the obvious hallmarks of the genus to be seen on the stem make it an easy one to learn.



Right: *Cortinarius bolaris* just starting to fruit under the Birch and Oak today (PC)



As we made our way back across the heathland Joanna handed me a few fruitbodies of something I'd given up hope of finding today. I was delighted to see again *Cantharellula umbonata* (The Humpback) and this is the only site I've ever seen it. At first glance this is a small rather nondescript pale grey-capped mushroom with a long stem and nothing much to give a clue as to its identity. Having struggled for a long time to place it when I first came across it here, the characters to look for stick clearly in my mind: it's the amazing forking gills which give it away for me rather than the cap shape referred to in its common name. It is yet another species of acid soil, stressing again what an important site Stoke Common is for fungi, and is usually found in mossy areas. There are 159 UK records so it's not really rare though it's quite possible it would be overlooked unless one is familiar with it. This is now the third time it's been found here.

Cantharellula umbonata found by Joanna today, with excellent photos of the forking gills provided by Justin. (JW)

We found over 70 species in all today with some interesting and rare things. See the complete list for further details. Many thanks to all attendees and especially to Justin and Claudi for their photos. See you all again soon.