FUNGI WALK at DEANGARDEN WOOD – September 17th, 2023

Penny Cullington

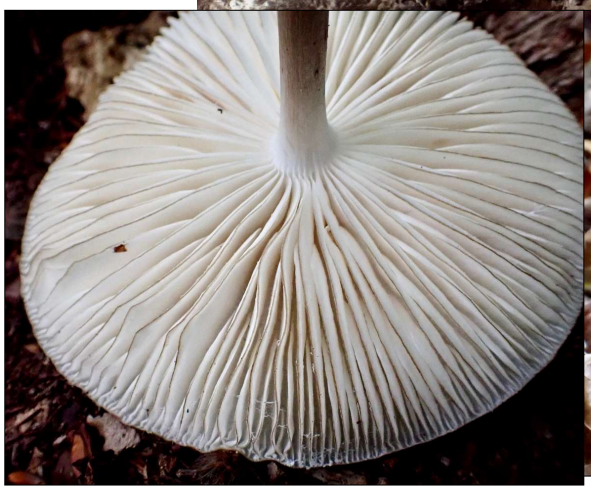
We were a group 18 today and met up in the Abbey Barn Business Centre car park adjacent to the wood, permission kindly obtained by Tony Speight - operations director of the Chiltern Rangers who manage this wood. Tony also led us round as this was BFG's first visit here. The site shows great potential and certainly warrants further visits; there was a good mix of trees, not surprisingly dominated by Beech as we're in the Wycombe area but also with some Pine and Yew and plenty of fallen and dead wood around – vital for finding fungi when conditions are somewhat dry and unproductive as they were today. Many of the 'mushroom'-types I was handed were either shrivelled up like the one shown here or covered in mould – I'm afraid I declined to spend time attempting an ID on these!

Right: a dessicated unidentified mushroom – typical of what we found today! (LS)

Nevertheless a group of this size is always going to turn up interesting things with some diligent searching, and this was certainly the case today. Yes, our list is short – just over 40 species – mostly comprising things found on or related to living or fallen wood, always a reliable source of nutrients and moisture when these are in short supply from the soil or litter as at present. The most impressive and largest mushroom of the day was ***Hymenopellis radicata*** (Rooting Toughshank) - a common species more familiar by its previous genus name *Xerula* (and before that *Oudemansiella*!). I was first handed a somewhat small and pale dry example though identifiable from its wrinkled cap surface and broken stem base (often the case when the collector is unaware to check for its extending taproot linking it to the tree roots below). Then later I was shown a much fresher and larger example in situ (cap about 8 cm across) and was able to excavate the root. Note the dark gill edge seen here – a variable character of the species - sometimes present, sometimes not.

Right and below: *Hymenopellis radicata* showing its main features which help to separate it from other similar brown capped mushrooms: The soil-covered thick white root often extends the stem by about another half; the brown cap, slimy in moist conditions, is always centrally wrinkled even when dry as here; the widely spaced white gills sometimes have a dark edge. (LS)

Now from our largest mushroom to our smallest: On the underside of a Beech log a few bright orange though tiny specimens were noticed emerging and searching for a suitable upright position, probably no more than 1 cm tall including their caps.



These were recognisable even at this immature stage as ***Mycena crocata*** (Saffrondrop Bonnet), one of our commonest and most distinctive species of Bonnet and found on fallen Beech - always in plentiful supply in the Chilterns. *Mycena* is a large genus with approaching 100 different species known in the UK, the vast majority needing a scope to identify. A few have unique characteristics visible in the field, this species being one of them: It contains bright orange latex (juice) in the stem which (when damaged) spreads also to the cap and gills. No doubt the damage occurred here when the log was disturbed thus turning one of the caps bright orange as well. Cap colour varies considerably from white to some shade of brown, but its latex is consistently saffron – hence its common name. By far its commonest tree host is Beech but it is becoming apparent that it does occur on other deciduous fallen woods on occasion: I have found it on both Birch and Lime in recent years where no Beech was present on site.

Left: The tiny immature *Mycena crocata* specimens uncovered by moving a fallen bare Beech branch today. Note the furry mycelial strands at its base attaching it to its substrate, this a common feature in many of the genus. (LS)

Our rarest mushroom today was handed me in a sadly dilapidated state but was nevertheless still recognisable, though to be certain I checked the ID with a scope later – luckily there were a few gills left to reveal their colour and also the all-important spore shape, size and colour. ***Calocybe ionides*** (no common name) was new to the county in 2010 and today was just our fifth record. The species is pretty well unique in having a violet to purple cap and stem with contrasting white gills. Luckily there was just enough cap surface left to confirm its colour but the striking character here was its ridged distinctly purple stem – this was what alerted me to its ID. This longditudinal 'ridging' is not included in descriptions but the material here was so dry and looking at various images online I was able to confirm other collections which show this same feature as it dries. It is an occasional species of deciduous woodland litter, favouring calcareous soils and found mainly in S. England.

Right: the rare *Calocybe ionides* found today though not looking its best but still just recognisable. (LS)

Two more mushrooms to share with you: we came across a colony of ***Coprinellus disseminatus*** (Fairy Inkcap) growing on roots in the path with a further colony discovered in nearby vegetation but no doubt on more roots. A little further on a piece of rotting bare log was turned over to reveal some tiny white stemless caps, the largest seen here less than 1 cm across. I suspected from its pure white appearance that this was not a species of *Crepidotus* (Oysterling) – a genus having almost identical seashell-like stemless caps though with gills which soon turn beige when coloured by its brown spores – but was more likely to be ***Clitopilus hobsonii*** (Miller's Oysterling). Though this species has spores which are not white but pinkish, the gills tend to remain white well into maturity, furthermore its spores are uniquely ridged, unlike any in *Crepidotus*, and I was able to confirm this feature at home later. It is not that often recorded but no doubt is regularly misidentified as a species of *Crepidotus*.

Above left: *Coprinellus disseminatus*. Above right: *Clitopilus hobsonii*. (LS)

On fallen Beech a small rather stunted coral-like fungus was found. Though I suspected it might be a species of *Ramaria* (Coral) I was not at all sure until nearby a larger more typical clump was spotted, confirming the ID. This was ***Ramaria stricta*** (Upright Coral), quite common and more often found in Beech litter than actually on wood as here. It was unusual and also useful to see it in both its mature and immature stage, however.

Right and above: *Ramaria stricta* both mature (right - LS) and immature (above BW).

Just near the *Coprinellus disseminatus* spot we could smell the unmistakeable presence of ***Phallus impudicus*** (Stinkhorn) nearby! First an egg was found in the vegetation, then the real culprit of this disgusting and pervasive smell was revealed in all its stinking glory – ripe in every sense of the word for insects to come and feast upon! We moved on hurriedly ……..

Left: *Phallus impudicus* at its mature sticky and stinky best! (LS)

Amongst woody debris a couple of strange round onion-shaped objects were found, appearing a bit like conker cases but minus their spikes. I realised that these must be the undeveloped forms of a species of *Geastrum* (Earthstar) prior to

their splitting open to reveal their puffball-like interior. A positive ID was not possible at this stage of development but their size suggested ***G. triplex*** (Collared Earthstar), the commonest species and one I'd seen before in this form when together with fully developed fruitbodies, so I'm fairly confident of the ID.

Right: The unopened casing of *Geastrum triplex* found today. (LS)

A magnificent mature Beech trunk was noticed with a good display of huge brackets dotted about. They were recognised as one of two very similar species of *Ganoderma*, either the common *G. australe* (Southern Bracket) or the less frequent *G. applanatum* (Artist's Bracket). The safest way to distinguish between the two is by measuring their spores and it was easy to collect some spores here without recourse to removing one of the brackets because plenty of its cocoa-brown spores had been liberally distributed over the surrounding vegetation. A well-coated leaf was therefore collected, the spores scraped off it and onto a slide, then measured, revealing that this was ***Ganoderma australe*** as suspected.

Left: several impressive brackets of *Ganoderma australe* having dusted the surrounding area with their spores. (LS)

Now to an impressive example of an unusual Corticioid species – one that grows resupinate (ie flat) on fallen wood, without forming a cap or bracket but still quite closely related to the mushrooms, ie Basidiomycetes rather than Ascomycetes. A branch of fallen Beech was found with this unusual fungus spreading amply over it, bright ochre brown with white edges. There are literally hundreds of different Corticioid fungi, the vast majority needing specialised scope work to identify, though a few can be recognised in the field. Luckily for us this was one that I knew and could name from its colour combined with its 'toothlike' fertile surface. At first glance ***Steccherinum ochraceum*** (Ochre Spreading Tooth) has a typical smooth surface, but on closer inspection (with a hand lens) the surface is covered in unique tiny spikes similar to those found in the range of fungi known as the Hydnoids (Tooth Fungi). The species is by no means rare but is not that common either and this was a very nice example.

Right and above: *Steccherinum ochraceum* showing the Beech branch liberally coated with the spreading fungus (RW), a detail of the rough 'toothed' surface (DS), and a typical young white-rimmed circular patch before it has grown and converged with others to form the large mass seen when mature (LS).

No report on a walk with Barry present would be complete without at least one of his beautiful Slime Mould photos. We have several on our list today but ***Diderma floriforme*** was a special find and is uncommon. The species name refers to the way the outer shell of the fertile head splits open 'petal-like' to release the mature spores. His two photos show the species both before and after this has occurred. It is worth mentioning that each fruitbody here is probably less than 4mm tall!

Above: two views of the miniscule Slime Mould *Diderma floriforme* (BW)

For more details of what we found see the separate complete species list. Thank you all for attending and making the morning so enjoyable, and a big thank you to our photographers, particularly Linda who was kept very busy! I'm sure we'll be back here next year!

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; DS = Daniel Speechley; LS = Linda Seward; RW = Roger Wilding.