FUNGI WALK at BURNHAM BEECHES on Sunday May 18th 2025

Penny Cullington

Our group of 18 met up this morning in the knowledge that we were unlikely to be finding very much – this has so far been the driest spring in over a century and consequently fungi of any sort have been few and far between for what seems like months. Nevertheless we were prepared to make the most of it today, enjoying this lovely site on a fine warm morning and resigned to much turning of logs and making for any damper spots we could find.

The mire was the obvious starting point and it was not long before just a few of the tiny bright yellow heads of ***Mitrula paludosa*** (Bog Beacon) were spotted in the somewhat dried up muddy patches and general mire vegetation. This springtime species is a relative rarity – only occurring in marshy boggy areas - and had not been seen before by several of our newer members; however, once they'd realised quite how small they were (for something named a beacon!) and got their 'eye in' more were found dotted about though all rather more orange than yellow than usual, maybe as a result of the conditions? (As photo opportunities were somewhat limited today I'm including two examples here.)

Above: Two examples of *Mitrula paludosa* found today in the mire (left LS, and right KC)

After this promising start things went worryingly quiet and it was beginning to look as though we'd be doing well to list enough species by the end of the morning to equal the number of attendees! I don't recall this actually ever happening but we've been quite near it in the past at times of drought. Anyway, I needn't have worried because with some sharp-eyed and knowing mycologists amongst us we ended up with a list of over 40 species – amazing, though mostly they were pretty mundane and predictable things. Some of the rather shrivelled offerings Derek and I were presented with certainly tested our skills somewhat, and we'd both admit to a few of the identifications being partly inspired and educated guesswork.

It was a surprise to find fresh clusters of ***Pleurotus ostreatus*** (Common Oyster) fruiting on a fallen trunk, possibly Cherry. Given a suitably damp fallen deciduous trunk – or even a standing living one - this species is not unusual to find at any time of year though is probably commonest on Beech. It varies considerably in colour – a fact which can

Right: *Pleurotus ostreatus* found in a couple of places today. (JL, with insert of gills BW)

give rise to doubt over its ID until one becomes familiar with the possible range from almost white through to (sometimes bluish) grey or even brown as was seen in some examples today. (I was hoping to include our strongly brown example here but no photo was forthcoming.)

We headed at one point to a low lying area which is often under water during the winter months, and though the water had long since receded there was plenty of evidence of its presence where logs had obviously been submerged and *Juncus* was growing freely. Here we made a good search, turning logs and examining with x10 lenses, and quite a few odd bits turned up on the fallen wood and litter. On the bare wood several people came across the swarms of tiny stemless grey discs typical of the genus *Mollisia* (Grey Disco) and were then understandably disappointed to be told 'Sorry, we can name the genus but not the species – there are just too many of them which look just the same and no reliable key exists as yet.' The likelihood is that at least some of these examples are *M. cinerea* (Common Grey Disco) but if expert Kerry Robinson declines to name them even after microscopic examination then who are we to do so?!

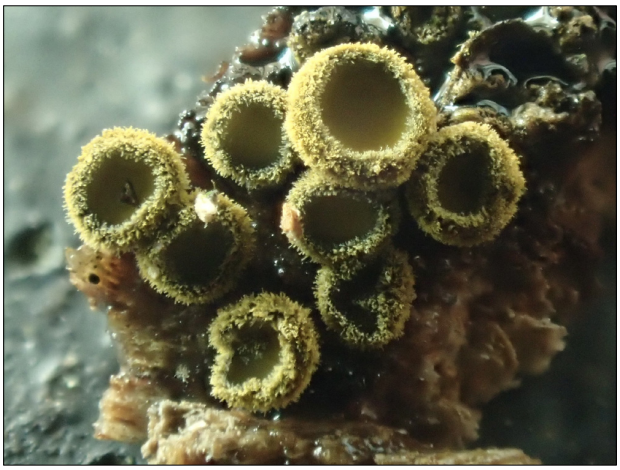
Left: *Mollisia* sp. possibly *cinerea* – who knows?! (LS)

Several other tiny cups were found on the bare previously damp but now rather dry wood in this area. Amazingly one collection of these was covered in miniscule droplets – how does it manage that? ***Lachnum brevipilosum*** (no English name) is one of several quite common white members of the genus *Lachnum* which are virtually indistinguishable from each other in the field. They occur on bare damp fallen deciduous wood of various sorts, are typically 'hairy' and have distinct stems. The hairs often seem to trap moisture droplets amongst them as seen here and this occurs commonly though not exclusively in *L. brevipilosum*, hence my suggestion of its identity in the field today. Soon after this a further collection of a slightly longer stemmed *Lachnum* species was found, and we suggested the name ***Lachnum virgineum*** (Snowy Disco) in the field for this one, it being the commonest of the white group. At home with his microscope Derek was able to confirm both IDs for us.

Above: two similar species of *Lachnum* found today; left is *L. brevipilosum* and right is *L. virgineum*. (BW)

Also in this area Derek picked up a dead Willow leaf, and on the underside noted some even smaller white stemmed cups (only 0.2mm across at most, so less than half the size of the species featured above here). We handed the leaf to Sarah in the hope that she might be able to identify them, and she did! ***Lachnum rhitismatis*** (no English name) is new to both this site and the county (with just 28 national records in FRDBI) though the name may change as it appears that this is part of a species complex which may well be split into a number of different species according to the host leaf. Sadly we have no photo to share but the material will be dried.

Sarah also identified another interesting disc which she found, this one very different in appearance. She collected what she thought might be the remains of a slime mould from a log pile, probably Beech, but at home under better magnification she realised it was nothing of the sort! Tiny flat dirty yellowish discs with a golden frilly raised edge could be seen. She then searched and found the matching images of ***Neodasyscypha cerina*** (no English name but a suggestion: Fairy Custard Tarts!), checking that the microscopic details also matched. This is another first for the site, and we have just one previous countyrecord from a collection made in nearby Cippenham in 2022. (Sarah's photo was taken at home the next day once she'd made the ID.)



Left: *Neodasyscypha cerina* (SJE)

Also in the sunken previously damp patch where several things turned up, Derek noticed yet another small white disc, this time on a large piece of Birch bark. Though similar in size to the previous white *Lachnum* species it lacked a stem and with a hand lens could be seen to be conspicuously very finely furry rather than truly hairy – ie it had a different 'jizz'. Jesper kindly offered to have a go at identifying it and, together with several corticoioid species he worked on with a scope at home, he was able to add yet more names to our list. ***Leucoscypha leucotricha*** (no English name) has around 50 records in the national database (FRDBI) and just one previous record for Bucks, from this site found by Barry in 2021 and identified by Kerry Robinson. So this was yet another nice find and skilful ID.

Right: *Leucoscypha leucotricha* (BW)

Slime moulds have also been scarce recently and require damp conditions to thrive, but a few were found today, in particular a nice example of the very common *Metatrichia floriformis* was one of several interesting things found on a fallen Birch trunk known to Barry who led us to it towards the end of the morning. One photo shows the less developed black heads on stalks just beginning to open out, the other shows these head having fully 'dehisced' ie opened out petal-like in order to disperse spores.

Below: *Metatrichia floriformis* showing two stages of its development. (BW)

It was at this spot that a strange small lump of jelly was spotted on bare fallen wood, and at first we wondered if it could be some species of *Exidea*. However, when viewed with a x10 handlens it became obvious that it contained what looked like eggs of some sort, possibly belonging to some insect. A quick check on the internet showed something very similar produced by a crane fly but these occur on leaves, not on wood. If anyone can solve this mystery for us, do please let me know!

Right: Mystery jelly egg case! (LS)

Thank you all for coming and making the most of what were trying conditions for fungi though enjoyable for humans! Thank you also to Derek, Sarah and Jesper for working on and sending me identifications afterwards. Thank you also for the photos shared here, though I was hoping for more to be sent on to me because I know many more were taken. This is our last springtime walk, so I look forward to meeting up again with you all in the autumn when fingers crossed conditions will prove more productive. For full details of what we found see the separate complete species list. I'll end with a couple of views of the group at work at Barry's Birch tree – the first mine, the second Linda's - and some delicious views of the bespectacled Mrs Mandarin plus her adorable babies taken by Claire. (Note the spectacles already developing on the ducklings.) Ahh! Oh, yes, and I now realise I've omitted to include Linda's photo of our nice fresh example of ***Laetiporus sulphureus*** (Chicken of the Woods) which was much admired, so I've stuck it on the end!

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; CW = Claire Williams; JL = Jesper Launder; KC = Kath Castillo; LS = Linda Seward; PC = Penny Cullington; SJE = Sarah Ebdon