

UK Fungus Day – “Fantastic Fungi and Secretive Slimes”

College Lake Nature Reserve, Tring – 4 October 2025

Report by Sarah-Jayne Ebdon

BFG (Bucks Fungus Group) used to regularly contribute to UK Fungus Day with wonderful displays organized by Penny and Derek at Aylesbury Museum — brilliant, busy days that many of us looked forward to. Covid brought an end to these events, but with our ever-growing group we felt it was important we were involved in UK Fungus Day again - so encouraged by Penny and Derek, and their back catalogue of resources – and the possibility of collaborating with College Lake - Jackie and I began gathering ideas, setting plans in motion and gaining support from BFG members.

The event took place at the beautiful College Lake Nature Reserve brilliantly supported by BBOWT (Berks, Bucks, Oxon, Wildlife Trust) staff and volunteers, with BFG providing the mycological expertise and enthusiasm of our members. Although Storm Amy swept in the night before and meant the woodland had to be closed, and our scheduled walks rerouted, the day itself was bright and surprisingly warm if rather blustery at times!



Left: Sarah teaching on a blustery walk (JLo); Centre: College Lake event board (SJE); Right: Stephen teaching on a walk (SJE)

About thirty BFG volunteers contributed both in the run-up to and on the day — collecting fungi, preparing the displays, organising activities, promoting the event, and helping to run the different activities. The main portion of the background coordination was done by Jackie, who unfortunately and unexpectedly couldn't attend the big day itself. She was very much missed but it is all credit to her that the foundations had been laid for a successful day.

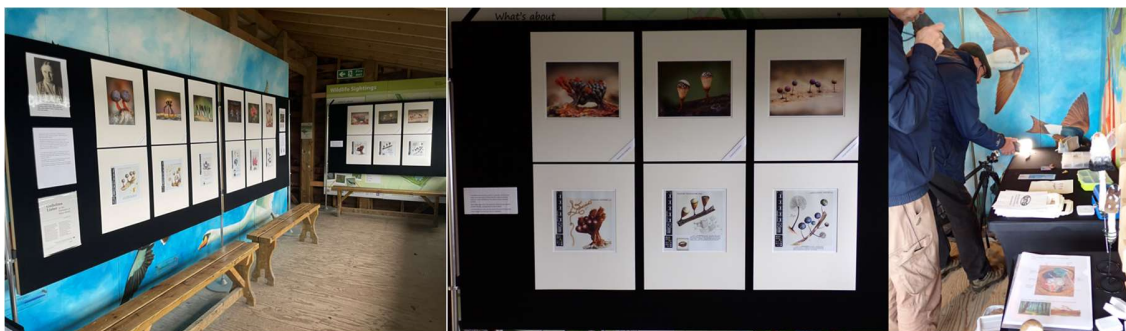
Visitors started arriving the moment the reserve opened at 10am and the flow carried on steadily all day and by the end of the day we had welcomed 310 visitors, including 40 who took part in our two pre-booked guided walks. Despite the wind making teaching on the walks a little challenging, people of all ages were very engaged, asking lots of wonderful questions. Claudi and I led one walk, supported by Linda, Justin Long – whilst Barry, Stephen and Bob led another. The site, no doubt in a large part due to our inability to access the woodlands, and the dry weather in the run up to the day, did not yield many species but there was plenty for our walk leaders to talk about throughout, aided by the inquisitive nature of the groups made up almost entirely of people new to fungi. A few memorable finds

were a pristine collection of *Coprinus comatus* (Shaggy Inkcap), a collection of *Stropharia caerulea* (Blue Roundhead) conveniently displaying specimens at varying stages of development (with the older yellowing specimens looking deceptively like a different species) and the always stunning large bright yellow fruitbodies of *Hygrocybe acutoconica* (Persistent Waxcap) – examples of all shown below.



Specimens from the site. Left: *Stropharia caerulea* (SJE); Centre: *Coprinus comatus* (SJE); Right: *Hygrocybe acutoconica* (LD)

Our exhibitions and activities were spread across the site. Graham's Hide was turned into an exhibition space with its panoramic views of the lake creating a very special backdrop to Barry's slime mould exhibition. His stunning ultra macro photographs were displayed alongside prints of Gulielma Lister's exquisite historical watercolours. NHM (Natural History Museum) Tring had kindly loaned us some quality boards which set the images off perfectly. The exhibition was a brilliant vision brought to fruition by Barry and Jackie and drew continuous interest and amazement throughout the day. Barry had carefully selected images from the NHM London archive and matched up his own images that reflected the specimens and compositions depicted in the watercolours so they related perfectly to each other when sat side by side. We can only imagine what Gulielma herself would have thought!



Photos of the Barry – Giulelma slime exhibition - Left (SJE); Centre and Right (LS)

Alongside the exhibition Barry and Gill had slime specimens that visitors could view under magnification. It was really eye-opening for visitors to see the real size specimens

next to the highly magnified images. Gill was particularly enamoured by the engagement of the young visitors and the pertinent questions they were asking. I was thrilled that Gill also offered to display her wonderful, felted fungi models and brooches bringing another element of creativity and joy to our event. Also, in this space there were displays and information about Gulielma, collecting slime moulds, the NHM cryptogamic collections, DNA sequencing, fungal conservation, poisonous and edible fungi, and BFG – our aims, areas we visit and membership.



Left: Barry's slime specimens and a young participant's drawing of *Lamproderma scintillans* (a slime mould with no English name) (SJE); Centre: Barry and Gills cards and felted fungi (LS); Right: Part of the BFG display boards and BMS leaflets (SJE)

A short walk around the lake in Bat Roost was the fungi display. This was also a source of continuous busyness and wonder - we had so many specimens collected in the preceding days it was a real task for the team to get them, named and displayed during the morning. Derek, Claudi, Jesper, with the support of Yen, Lisa, Robert, Laura and Jordy all worked tirelessly to get the display looking spectacular in the little time they had. Derek even provided an array of spore prints to show the differing, and diagnostic, range of colours they produce. The team did an amazing job with the public hankering to dive in before they had even finished, and they were kept busy throughout the day answering questions and talking to visitors about the specimens. A huge thanks to all of you who contributed specimens to make this such success – it really was worth your efforts collecting and delivering them to create this brilliant display of Buckinghamshire fungi!



Left: Jesper's show and tell talk (SJE); Centre: Derek and Yen on the display table (JLo); Right: UV display showing off the fluorescent qualities of the common *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphur Tuft) (SJE)

Jesper's Show and Tell talk in the afternoon was another highlight, his teaching expertise and knowledge flowing effortlessly in response to the display and the questions the audience brought. He delved into all sorts of fungi angles including spore dispersal, habitats, medicinal compounds and toxicity all interwoven with tales of his finds over the years. He

devoted a whole section to focusing on the importance of aroma in fungal ID in an engaging hands-on interactive discussion with the audience. On the display table we had several interesting specimens to complement this including the rare and wonderful *Rubroboletus legaliae* (Bilious Bolete) and its smell of chicory, *Clitocybe odora* (Aniseed Funnel) with its sweet anise aroma and *Gymnopus brassicolens* (Cabbage Parachute) which I had found on site during one of the walks, with its much less delightful, but never the less amazing, smell of rotting cabbage! People loved comparing and discussing them and were truly astonished by the array of scents and how useful it is for identification. As a wonderful round up to the talk we were able to offer visitors their very own *Clathrus archeri* (Devil's Fingers Stinkhorn) egg to take away, to nurture, hatch and smell! (Thanks to Jesper and Jackie Ewan for making this possible!)



Across the path in The Outdoor Inn building, Bob's microscopy table introduced visitors to another perspective. He was demonstrating how to create fresh spore deposits, and then viewing them under the microscope and explaining how to work through the Fungi of Temperate Europe spore keys to reach an ID. He cast live microscope images onto a TV screen so visitors could see and discuss the process. This station drew in both adults and children, many of whom had not seen spores before and were fascinated by the microscopic detail.

Left: Bob in action in the Outdoor Inn (LS)

The play-doh slime mould and fungus-making table was also buzzing all day. Volunteers encouraged children (and quite a few adults) to think about texture, colour, function and habitat while shaping their creations. Some of my personal favourites include the mushroom that 'turns you bright blue if you sniff it' and the fungus 'that only fruits at Christmas'. The imagination and enthusiasm at this table was wonderful to watch. Lisa, Claire and Lynn were exceptional at engaging folk on this stall and it was great to watch the mini exhibition evolve over the day. The Outdoor Inn also hosted a fungi book library, fungi fun facts quiz and a brilliant ecosystem Jenga game loaned to us by Jordy with thanks to Burnham Beeches.



Displays and activities in the Outdoor Inn (SJE)

We had great feedback from visitors and volunteers alike - not least from the excellent BBOWT volunteers who supported our walks – they were really excited by what they had learnt and were planning how they would use that in the sessions they run at College Lake.

We've also had a number of new members join us as a result of the event. College Lake staff were also extremely positive and have already offered to host us again.

A huge thank you to the wonderful team of volunteers who helped make the day happen — more people, support and detail than I have been able to name here - everyone brought something different, whether expertise, warmth, humour, fungi, photographs, creativity or practical support ... the event simply wouldn't have happened in the same glorious way without the collective input.

Thanks also to BBOWT, College Lake staff for their excellent organization and enthusiasm, and NHM London and Tring for their support. Fungalphabet for donating children's books and allowing us to use their 10 things to help with ID infographic. Also, BMERC (Bucks and Milton Keynes Environmental Recording Centre) for a grant providing us with some display boards and BMS (British Mycological Society) for the grant that covered a lot of the costs including producing our new gill attachment bookmarks and providing us with leaflets and freebies which were a really valuable addition enjoyed by our visitors.

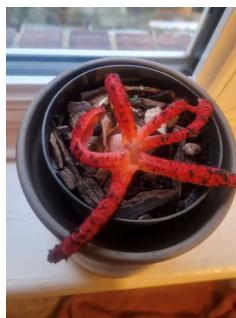
If you'd like to help organize or get involved and help us build on this event next year, please do get in touch ... as discussions are already underway!



The BFG team busy engaging with the public (LR)

Photographer credits: JLo - Justin Long, LS - Linda Seward, LR - Lisa Rock, LD - Lynn Day and SJE - Sarah-Jayne Ebdon.

List of BFG Contributors – Andrew Dodd, Barry Webb, Bob Simpson, Claire Williams, Claudi Soler, Derek Schafer, Felicity Palmer, Gill Ferguson, Jackie Ewan, Jackie Mackenzie-Dodds, Jesper Launder, Jordan Payne, Justin Long, Justin Warhurst, Laura Dodd, Linda Seward, Lisa Dodd, Lisa Rock, Lynn Day, Mark Harris, Mick Jones, Nova Ebdon, Penny Cullington, Robert Bailey, Sarah-Jayne Ebdon, Stephen Plummer, Yen Hoe and even more members were involved in putting up posters for us!



One of the successfully hatched at home *Clathrus archeri* (Devil's Fingers Stinkhorn) (LR)