

FUNGI WALK at COOMBE HILL on Wednesday October 29th 2025

Penny Cullington

Our group of 19 met up in the large car park and proceeded in the fine 'smur' straight to the escarpment in the hope of finding a few of the interesting species which are known to grow mycorrhizally with the plentiful *Helianthemum* (Rock Rose) in this area, the latter half of October having proved in the past to be the best fruiting time. Maybe we were a bit late but whatever the reason it was a challenge today to find many of them to say the least. There were, however, a good number of somewhat soggy LBJs of one sort or another handed to me from this area and I apologise to the diligent team of searchers for not retaining many of them but knew that the time spent on trying to identify them at home later was probably going to be time wasted.

The first fungus of particular interest to turn up was not one of the *Helianthemum* specialists but a grassland species which we've not recorded in the county for seven years. ***Lepista saeva*** (Field Blewit) is far less common than *L. nuda* (Wood Blewit) – a species we saw later in the morning several times – and also less eye-catching having a dull cream buff cap and gills, but its saving grace is the thick stocky stem which is subtly violaceous blue. An earlier English name was Blue Leg and in years past it was a regular in local markets and much prized for its edibility, apparently being superior to *L. nuda*. It occurs in grassy spots, fields, parks, even garden lawns though does appear to be on the decrease locally. According to our records it was new to the site today.

Right: *Lepista saeva* (LS)



Another of interest I must apologise for because in the heat of the moment I misidentified this as *Hydnum rufescens* (Terracotta Hedgehog). Thinking there were several others in the genus *Hydnum* which this might be I luckily took it home, only to realise as soon as I examined it in good light that the undersurface was not spiny as in *Hydnum* as I'd thought but was a maze of tiny wrinkled deep pinkish pores. The penny dropped (excuse the pun) and I realised this was in fact ***Abortiporus biennis*** (Blushing Rosette), the tiny round spores of which then confirmed it. (One of the hazards of leading walks is that more often than not one is handed a specimen for identification rather than seeing it in situ which makes it considerably harder – anyway, that's my excuse!) Furthermore this happens to be a very variable species at the best of times and is one that regularly catches people out.

Left: *Abortiporus biennis* (and not *Hydnum rufescens*!) (LS)



Now to the *Helianthemum* specialists. We managed to find the three species which are probably the commonest to occur in this habitat but only in ones or twos at most. First was ***Cortinarius epsomiensis*** (a webcap with no English name), the Latin epithet chosen because the first UK collection came from Epsom Downs in 1954 (though the connection to *Helianthemum* – present there - was not

realised till the early 2000s). We have no photo of today's two separate singletons but I include a photo taken at this site back in 2007 soon after I'd first discovered it here. (My apologies that the name eluded me till we were on the way home!). This is a member of Section *Telamonia* having a dry cap and stem; note the lilac gills when young which become brown as it matures, also the dark green *Helianthemum* leaves dotted about.

Right: *Cortinarius epsomiensis* (pc)



Next was a species of *Tricholoma* (Knight) which is closely related to *T. sulphureum* (Sulphur Knight), one which is familiar to many of you: it's the one with yellow cap, gills and stem and an unmistakeable smell of coal gas tar which we find fairly frequently in deciduous woodland. So when I first discovered this species in the Chiltern downland areas in the early 2000s I was utterly confused because the smell was so familiar but it clearly was not *T. sulphureum* and there were no trees in the area with which it could be associating.

Eventually the mycological community began to realise that there were a growing number of mycorrhizal mushrooms found in abundance with this small woody shrub, some of them proving to be host specific to *Helianthemum*, others also occurring in woodland with various trees. *Tricholoma hemisulphureum* (no English name) was first described growing with *Dryas* and *Helianthemum* in the Alps back in 1989 and since the early 2000s is now frequent in the UK wherever those plants occur. We found just these three specimens today.

Left: *Tricholoma hemisulphureum* (cvs)



singleton of a species of *Lactarius* (Milkcap) which I've seen fruiting literally in hundreds at Watlington Hill (further south along the Chiltern ridge about 15 miles from here as the Red Kite flies and just into Oxfordshire). *Lactarius evosmus* (Fruity Milkcap) also occurs under Beech and Oak though only infrequently and never in the numbers when with *Helianthemum*. It has a zoned orangey cap, tightly inrolled when young, and a sweet apple smell though sadly today's singleton was well past its sell-by date. This photo was taken at Watlington Hill in 2012.

Right: *Lactarius evosmus* (pc)



Also with this productive plant today was another example of *Cortinarius* Section *Telamonia* which I'm drying for sequencing and which may or may not be new to this habitat. Furthermore at home afterwards I discovered one of the many LBJ's I'd been handed from this area was a strange unfamiliar species of *Inocybe* (Fibre-cap) which had yellowish gills – not recognised as representative of this genus which is one of the most plentiful found with *Helianthemum*, both in fruitbody numbers and in species numbers. This is also dried for sequencing (the photo taken at home the following morning).

Left: the strange unfamiliar *Inocybe* sp. (pc)

Other genera which have members known to fruit in association with this plant but not represented here today are *Amanita*, *Boletus* of various sorts, *Hebeloma*, also one species of *Russula*. This is truly a remarkable habitat and I suspect many more such species of fungi will be discovered.



On to other things now. On a cowpat a pink somewhat fluffy Inkcap was found, this being *Coprinopsis pseudonivea* (Aromatic Inkcap), a close relative of the equally fluffy but pure white *C. nivea* (Snowy Inkcap), a common species also found on this substrate. Not described till 2001 when thought to be rare, we now find *C. pseudonivea* quite frequently given this substrate. The fluffy effect is caused by the veil, a feature found on the caps of many Inkcaps, though particularly thick in these two species like a coating of icing sugar. Note how some of this veil has dropped onto the surrounding debris. The species is recognisable in the field by its pink cap when young and fresh though this colour fades with age.

Left: *Coprinopsis pseudonivea* (LS)

Another member of this genus, *Coprinopsis lagopus* (Hare'sfoot Inkcap), was found in woodland litter. Then on a large stump together with several other species of fungi the closely related

and very common *Coprinellus micaceus* (Glistening Inkcap) was fruiting, both these species also have flecks of veil on their caps though not nearly as conspicuously as on the previous Inkcap species.

Right: *Coprinellus micaceus*, and far right, *Coprinopsis lagopus* (LS)



Below: *Lepista luscina* (LS)



A grassland species we've found here before though not that common is *Lepista luscina* (Spotted Blewit). Today many examples were well past their sell-by date but a few were still reasonably photogenic and showing the characteristic blotches on the cap. A scope was needed to check their identity which both I and Claudi did independently today – spore size and ornamentation being critical.

A mushroom apparently new to the site today was *Rhodocybe gemina* (Tan Pinkgill), quite a large chunky species with pink colours throughout and decurrent gills. We see it regularly as Rushbeds Wood but it is considered an occasional fruitier, some years quite prolific but other almost absent. The singleton seen here was split into two in order to show both the cap surface and gills.

Right: *Rhodocybe gemina* (KR)





Waxcaps were not plentiful today and though we listed three species only the very common ***Cuphophyllus virgineus*** (Snowy Waxcap) was showing in any numbers. Another grassland species was spotted poking through the vegetation, this was ***Clavulinopsis helvola*** (Yellow Club), the commonest of several very similar species and always needing a scope to confirm from its spore markings.

Left, ***Cuphophyllus virgineus*** (LS), and below: ***Clavulinopsis helvola*** (CW)



Perhaps the rarest find of the day was an inconspicuous species of ***Cordyceps*** growing on an insect pupa which was nestled deep into a piece of fallen rotten wood, probably Oak. The white strands were noticed whilst we were looking at some other small fungi on the wood, and Claudi volunteered to take it home to work on. ***Cordyceps farinosa*** (no English name and previously in genus *Isaria*) is a pathogenic species which apparently invades the pupae of butterflies and moths and we have very few county records though two in the last year or so. Claudi's photo was taken at home on his stereo microscope.

Right: ***Cordyceps farinosa*** (CVS)



Time to round off now. Though the morning became increasingly drizzly with very low cloud we managed a list of nearly 80 species of which around a quarter seem to be new to the site according to our records. However, this is perhaps not surprising since the group has not visited here since April 2006 and before that in October 1999, the first year of BFG! Members have of course made private visits here over that time and it is a site I make a point of visiting quite regularly, but we should perhaps aim to come more frequently in view of the unusual and interesting habitat. Thank you all for coming and searching in less than ideal conditions; thank you to Claudi for his help with leading and with IDs later; thank you also to the photographers as always. For more detail of what we found see the separate complete species list. A few extra photos follow.

Photographers

CVS = Claudi Soler; CW = Claire Williams; KR = Katie Rooney; LS = Linda Seward; PC = Penny Cullington.

Below left: *Conocybe cf anthracophila*, rare and one of the few LBJs I worked on – to be sequenced to confirm. (LS)



Above right: *Mycena rosea* (Rosy Bonnet), a common but attractive species of deciduous litter (LS)

Below left: *Macrolepiota procera* (Parasol) – a smart specimen standing about 15 cms tall (cw)



Above right: *Hygrocybe conica* (Blackening Waxcap), just showing above the grassy sward (CW)

..... and finally (LS)



