

This was our first walk of the autumn season and was well supported with a full midweek compliment plus our three leaders with guests Mario Tortelli from London and Fran Verenciano from the Warwickshire group. Our previous visit here (two years ago almost to the day) produced a varied list of 60 species, mostly of things we saw no sign of today! We were not expecting to find much as it was disappointingly tinder dry and crunchy underfoot everywhere, but such are the field experience and ID skills of this group that we ended up with an equally long list - amazing!

In the first Spruce area the only species found in any numbers was ***Megacollybia platyphylla*** (Whitelaced Shank), a species we regularly record in deciduous woodland but decidedly less frequently under conifer as here. Nevertheless the give-away white mycelial strands referred to in the English name were clearly present today though not as obvious and substantial as often. Note the widely spaced cream gills with adnate attachment to the stem - features which help to separate this species from some quite similar members of genus *Pluteus* which in contrast have crowded pink gills with free attachment.



Above: *Megacollybia platyphylla* (PC)

Also in this area were collections of three different members of the slime mould genus *Cribraria* spotted by Barry Webb, always on the lookout for these tiny organisms with his camera at the ready. Members of this genus occur on fallen bare rotting conifer wood, they are stalked, are at most a few mm tall and have exquisitely delicate heads, the characteristic structure and markings of which are critical in separating the species – no mean task. Two species were new to the site today and one of these was also new to the county (though with a little doubt over its ID once Jackie worked on it at home, so named cf. for now).

Below left: *Cribraria cancellata*, new to the site. Below right: *Cribraria* cf. *piriforme*, new to the site and the county. (BW)



Still under Spruce Gill spotted a tiny dead shield bug covered in creamy white fungal matter – a gruesome sight indeed! Sarah had previously studied several examples of this phenomenon and recognised the species *Beauveria bassiana*, described as an entomopathogenic fungus living in soil and parasitising many species of arthropod insects by growing into and feeding upon the body of its victim. This fungus is now used commercially as a biological control.

Right: *Beauveria bassiana* parasitizing a shield bug (BW)



On a stick we noticed this crusty colony of blackberry-like bobbles which were recognisable as the pyrenomycete asco *Bertia moriformis* (Wood Mulberry). Not rare, it can be found on deciduous and coniferous wood and is quite distinctive, but I suspect this is the first time we've featured the species in one of these reports.

Left: *Bertia moriformis* (BW)

We now proceeded into an area dominated by Oak but with some Birch and Hazel amongst other trees, and if we were hopeful of finding this part more fruitful than the Spruce area we were disappointed! Very little of any sort was found here but things began to get slightly more interesting when moving on into a further area of Spruce. Here amongst the mossy soil Hasan spotted a small scrap and suspected it was fungal and possibly part of a truffle. Jesper soon confirmed this and promptly set about feeling his way into various digholes in the vicinity. Success! It was not long before he turned up another two undamaged specimens, much to his and everyone else's delight! Being something of a truffle expert he immediately recognised the ascomycete truffle genus *Elaphomyces* and upon cutting one open he was able to tell that this was not the more common *E. granulatus* (False Truffle) with which he is very familiar but looked to be a good candidate for the much rarer *E. asperulus* (Roughened Truffle). At home it checked out fine as this species, new to the county and with around 30 records in FRDBI mostly from Scotland under conifer. Apparently in this species the inner peridial layer can show both pink and blue colouration, also the spores display raised plaques rather than spines helping to confirm its separation from *E. granulatus*. This find made Jesper's day and was probably the group's find of the day also.

Above: *Elaphomyces asperulus* (SJE)



As we headed back towards the car park several small puffballs were found in the path edge and were the subject of much discussion. The spiny surface was examined with care and the fine spines appeared not to be easily rubbed off to leave a residual pattern - this being a key

character of *Lycoperdon perlatum* (Common Puffball), but were typically convergent (ie in small groups of tiny hairs coming together at a point). This indicated possibly *L. nigrescens* (Dusky Puffball) or maybe *L. echinatum* (Spiny Puffball), and we just couldn't agree: neither really seemed to fit. Sarah collected one which was hopefully mature enough to contain spores and at home solved the problem for us. ***Lycoperdon molle*** (Soft Puffball) was the answer – one we'd not considered! *L. nigrescens* is the commonest and smallest of the three and we read that even when immature the spines are brown thus not concolorous with the surface though eventually the whole puffball darkens as its name suggests. *L. echinatum* is the rarest and largest of the three and has notably long brown spines even when young (not seen here), and *L. molle* sits nicely in the middle of the three though is not that well known, and I for one was wrongly under the impression that it was a grassland species thus had discounted it from our discussion. (Incidentally all three species are in imminent danger of moving to different genera!)



Above: *Lycoperdon molle* with detail of the convergent spines (SJE)

Back at the car park Chris Grimbly dashed off to a favourite area of his near the entrance and came back with a stunning specimen of ***Pluteus umbrosus*** (Velvet Shield). This is one of the most distinctive Shields having dense brown fine scales on the cap and stem, and if that wasn't enough it also has contrastingly dark gill edges. What a lovely species to finish with! (Photos of this are below.)

Well, I've not quite finished because I'd like to include an ID just received in the nick of time! Early on Sally Knight turned up the only *Russula* of the day, found under Oak – this was a genus none of us were expecting to see due to the dry conditions. In the field Mario expertly suggested it was ***Russula decipiens*** (no English name and not at all common) and Claudi undertook to work on it at home. (Both Mario and Claudi are co-authors of the latest *Russula* monograph headed by Geoffrey Kibby and just published – highly recommended!) A spore print overnight proved amazingly dark orange as predicted in the field, and chemical tests and microscopic details further confirmed Mario's ID. We have just 4 previous county records, three from Mousells Wood where found by Geoffrey and one from Wotton Park Estate – not far from Oakley Wood as the kite flies. What a nice find! (Photo of this is also below)

Right! Time to finish off. Thank you to all the photographers who sent in to me so promptly – it makes all the difference. Thanks to all attendees who searched so diligently. A special thank you to Sarah who undertook the bulk of the microscopic work today and consequently added

considerably to our final total of 59 species. We certainly made the most of what could have been a somewhat disappointing start to the season. Now we really need some serious rain

Photographers

BW = Barry Webb; CS = Claudi V. Soler; FV = Francisco Verenciano; MT = Mario Tortelli;
PC = Penny Cullington; SJE = Sarah Ebdon;



Above: *Pluteus umbrosus* (SJE)

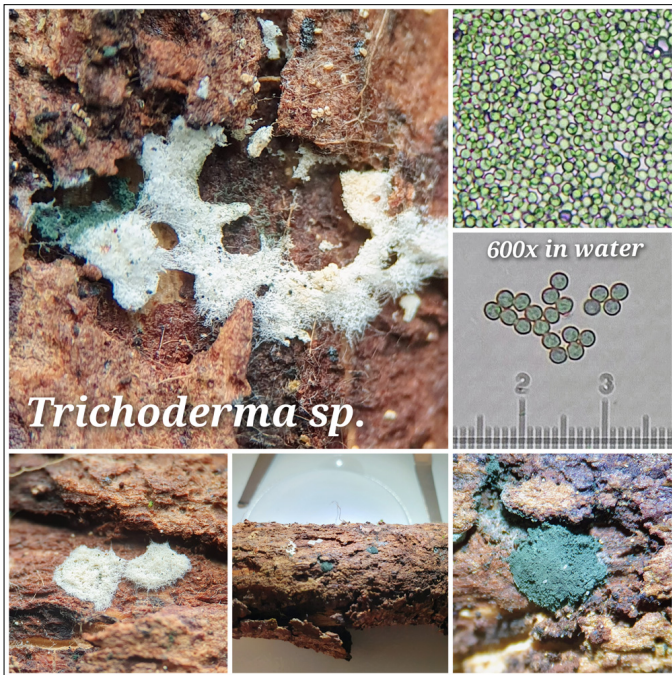
Below left: *Russula decipiens* (CVS)

Below right: *Leccinellum crocipodium*
(Saffron Bolete) and our only Bolete of the day (MT)





Left: the miniscule and beautiful *Flammulaster muricatus* found by David and identified by Sarah (SJE). Above right: the even tinier *Flagelloscypha minutissima*, also found by David and identified by Sarah! (SJE)



Left: an as yet unidentified species of *Trichoderma*, collected and worked on by Fran who hopes to have this sequenced for us. (It was thought to be a species of *Penicillium* in the field) (FV)

..... and finally, our group reconvening at one point this morning. (FV)

