FUNGI WALK at PENN WOOD on November 3rd, 2018

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Prior to writing these reports I often glance at the details of previous visits for comparison and at Penn Wood last year, just a week earlier in the season, our 16 attendees produced a list of 88 species, with the observation that fungal fruiting was clearly slowing down. This time we boasted an even bigger group, 23 attendees, and also a larger total – in fact recording by far the most species of any of our events this year. It has certainly been a topsy-turvy autumn for fungi in our area - really disappointing for September and most of October, but the much needed rain in recent weeks seems to have triggered at least some reaction in these unpredictable organisms and consequently we enjoyed a very busy and fruitful morning. Last year here we found no species of *Amanita* - a genus which normally fruits early and is pretty well over by this time: this year we found four species with good numbers of *Amanita muscaria* (Fly Agaric) including fresh young 'buttons' still emerging under the Birch – surely an indication of particularly late fruiting.

It's become customary here for us to visit the grassland areas first (the vicarage lawn, cricket pitch and churchyard) in order to make the most of the colourful waxcaps which in the past have made an impressive display at this time. Suspecting that this year was going to be disappointing on that front, we broke the pattern and after starting with the churchyard we headed straight for the woodland, leaving the cricket pitch till the end of the morning. To my surprise we spent longer than expected in the churchyard, amassing a list of 29 species of which 13 were apparently new to that area though as predicted only three species of waxcaps turned up. The star (literally!) of the show was found by Margaret M. under a large conifer, this was a delicate little Earthstar which Derek and I independently identified later as ***Geastrum pectinatum*** – a species with no common name. We've found this once before at Wotton House Estate back in 2010, though I noticed when checking the national records that the first ever British find in 1867 came from Dropmore, near Burnham in Bucks, not far as the crow (or the spore) flies!

Below and left, two views of *Geastrum pectinatum*, here looking like a mini Mount Vesuvius and found in conifer litter in the churchyard today, new to the site and only the second record for the county in recent times. (NS)

Moving into the woodland, I continued to be kept very busy scribbling down the names of specimens and collectors as best I could – inevitably things will have been missed off the list and it was not until later on that I realised that my shorthand of Marg was not sufficient to separate the two Margarets present, so my apologies if there are errors in who collected what! One species often common here and much in evidence today was a less frequently recorded species of Honey Fungus, this was ***Armillaria ostoyae*** (Dark Honey Fungus). Not only are the caps a darker less pink shade of brown but the stem ring has dark brown flocks or scales on its underside which separates it from both *A. mellea* and *A. gallica* – the two species we record regularly. The literature suggests

that it is normally on conifer wood, less often on deciduous wood, but here it abounds on and around both types of tree.

Right, both young and mature specimens of *Armillaria ostoyae* – the diagnostic dark 'flocks' just visible on the base of the stem rings. (PC)

I've commented several times this season on the dearth of mycorrhizal species on our lists (those which grow in symbiosis with trees). The genera involved tend to be early season fruiters (e.g. *Amanita* as already mentioned) but today we had a reasonably respectable number of representatives, including *Lactarius* (the Milkcaps), *Russula* (the Brittlegills), *Boletus* and related genera, also *Inocybe* (the Fibrecaps), *Cortinarius* (the Webcaps), *Hebeloma* (the Poison Pies) and *Tricholoma* (the Knights). One of two species of *Cortinarius* I was able to identify was ***Cortinarius alboviolaceus*** (Pearly Webcap); new member Vito found several specimens in the woodland and Jenny also found it on the vicarage lawn. It was new to the site today.

Right, *Cortinarius alboviolaceus*, one of many Webcaps having violet colours both on the cap and in the young gills before the rusty spores typical of the genus turn them brown. Note the diagnostic character of this genus: the 'cortina' (weblike mesh) still visible under the cap of the smallest specimen. This is soon lost, however, leaving just rusty remnants on the stem, also visible on the large specimen on the right. (PC)

Claudi found two nice specimens of a *Tricholoma* which we haven't recorded elsewhere this year though it's normally quite a common species. This was ***Tricholoma saponaceum*** (Soapy Knight), the name referring to its distinctive smell of cheap (unscented) soap.

Left, *Tricholoma saponaceum* showing its typical smooth greenish grey cap and white gills. (CS)

Paul and I lived for many years only a few minutes away from this beautiful piece of woodland and it was here that my love of fungi was kindled, though at the time much of it was privately owned and only

became accessible to the public once acquired by the Woodland Trust in 2000. BFG has been coming here every year since its formation 20 years ago, consequently we have now amassed a list of over 800 species for the site, so finding new things here becomes more of a challenge. It was gratifying, therefore, that we added 7 new to the woodland list today, though not all were unusual but just by chance had not turned up here before. A few, however, were particularly notable and worth a mention.

At one point someone handed us an Oak log with various bits of fungi growing on it, one of which was a collection of a tiny and very pretty *Mycena* (Bonnet) with a distinct blue tinge. This both Derek and I recognised as ***Mycena pseudocorticola*** (no common name), a species not that rare in some parts of the country but only known from two other sites in the county - a nice find and one of the species new to Penn Wood today.

Right, the miniscule and perfectly formed *Mycena pseudocorticola* with caps only about 5 mm across and a beautiful shade of blue. New to the wood today. (NS)

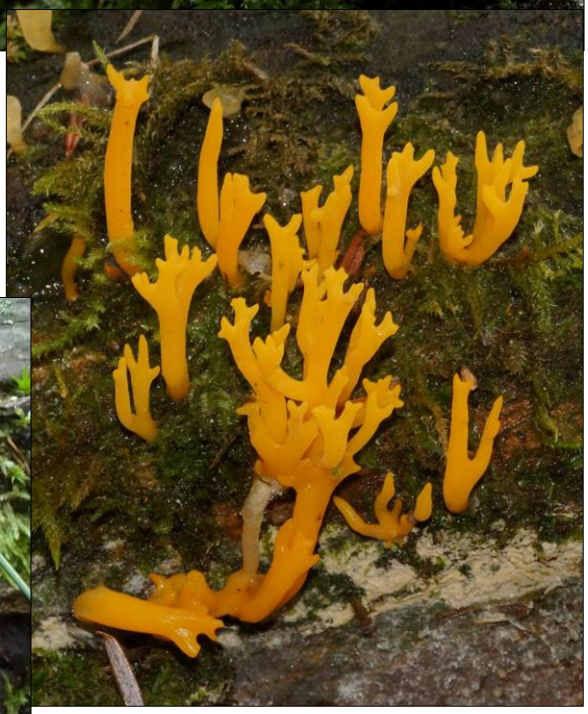
Another fungus not previously recorded here was a species of *Macrolepiota* (Parasol). The diagnostic snakeskin markings on the stem left no doubt that this was a *Macrolepiota* rather than a *Chlorophyllum* though we debated whether to name it *M. procera, M. konradii* or ***M. mastoidea***, plumping in the end for the third choice (Slender Parasol). It appears that there is in any case doubt over whether *M. konradii* and *M. mastoidea* should be separate species (in FRDBI these two are at present maintained as separate but in Index Fungorum they are combined under *M. mastoidea*). In the field the critical characters are the amount of cap covered by scales (more in *M. procera*, less in the other two) and the cap shape (flattish over the middle when fully expanded in *M. procera* and *M. konradii*, with a bump or nipple in *M. mastoidea*). Presumably DNA sequencing has presumably not yet proved conclusive but no doubt all will be revealed in time – for now 'yer pays yer money and takes yer choice'! We made ours which I later discovered gave us another new species for the wood!

Left, a species of *Macrolepiota* we named as *mastoidea*. This is a good example of the stem markings which provide a useful way to separate the genus from the otherwise very similar *Chlorophyllum rhacodes* (which lacks the snakeskin pattern. (CS)

Derek reported two exciting finds, both of which needed skilled work at home later to identify but sadly we have photos of neither. The first - an already mature Inkcap collected by Sarah from soil under Beech, had somewhat deteriorated by the time Derek got home, but the spore shape and the veil cells were sufficient to enable him to name it ***Coprinopsis* cf. *nemoralis*.** He writes: 'This would be the second UK record after Kerry Robinson's in 1994 from Gobions Wood, Herts, identified by Derek Reid and possibly only the third known after Bender's type collection from Germany…. If we can get DNA done, the other collection is at Kew and could be compared.' So congratulations to Sarah for finding it!

The second was apparently in the field thought to be a large *Tricholoma* (but I don't remember seeing it or who collected it?). This was in fact ***Entoloma myrmecophilum***, new to the county with apparently only 12 distinct records on FRDBI. So if you remember handing Derek something which he thought was a large *Tricholoma*, do let me know so that I can credit you with the find.

Toni had her eye well in today and found several interesting things. One was a conifer stump boasting at least five different species including two species of ***Calocera*** and a showy specimen of ***Postia caesia*** (Conifer Blueing Bracket) – not something we come across very often.



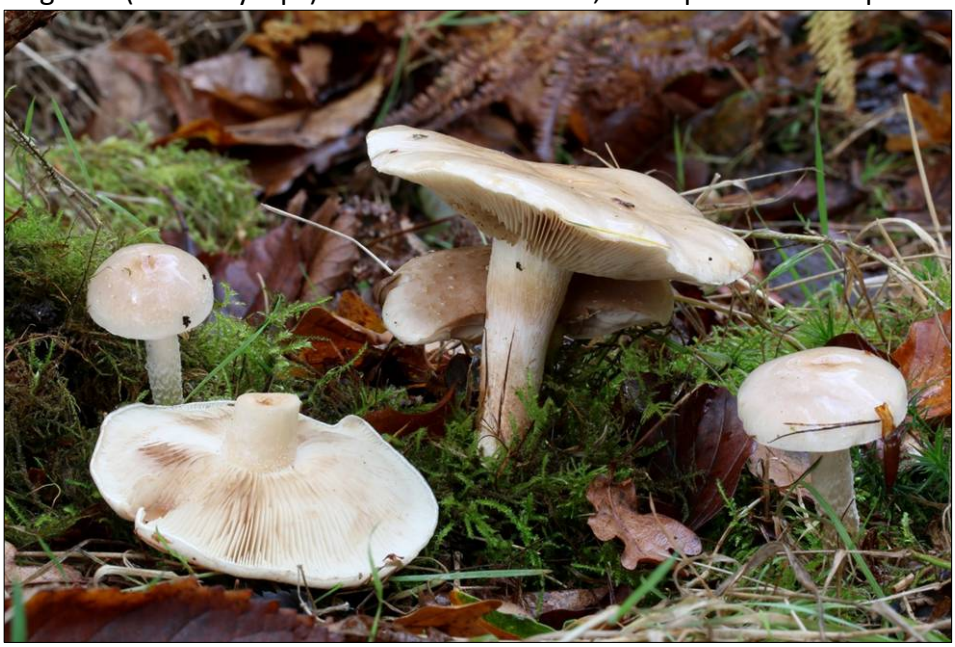
Calocera pallidospathulata **(Pale Stagshorn) (TS)**

All from one conifer stump: top *Postia caesia* (NS), above *Calocera viscosa* (Yellow Stagshorn) (NS), and left

At one point I asked people to lookout for an unusual white jelly-like species which grows on the many conifer stumps here, and sure enough Toni found it! This was ***Pseudohydnum gelatinosum*** (Jelly Tooth) – sadly not the greatest material today but I include a photo taken here in 2006 to show what an impressive species it can be.

Left, a previous image of *Pseudohydnum gelatinosum*, a species we found today and which occurs here quite regularly. (PC)

Paul (C) found a nice collection of a species which at first puzzled both Derek and myself but as often happens we both suddenly saw the light! ***Pholiota lenta*** (no common name) is somewhat atypical member of its genus (the Scalycaps) in that it lacks scales, has a pale cream cap which is extremely slimy in moist conditions, and its pale gills belie the fact that the spores are rusty brown – all in all fairly confusing! I suspected this might be a new species for the wood but found a record here in 2004, one of just 5 for the county, so it's not that common (or possibly not that often recognised?).



Right, *Pholiota lenta*, an unusual species which grows on woody litter, both deciduous and conifer, but most frequently on Beech. (CS)

One more photo to share with you, another unusual species which looks very similar to a *Crepidotus* (Oysterling) and was found by Nick today. In fact we picked up quite a few examples of *Crepidotus* during the morning so when I glanced at Nick's collection on a log I at first assumed it was that genus until he made me look more closely. The flat habit growing on wood with fanned-out gills is certainly similar, but ***Melanotus horizontalis*** (Wood Oysterling, confusingly with the same common name despite the fact that the genus is different) has darker brown spores and gills, also a short stem which is entirely lacking in *Crepidotus*.

Below, the underside of *Melanotus horizontalis* growing on a deciduous log. Note the distinctly brown gills and short stem which help to distinguish this species from the somewhat similar genus Crepidotus. (NS)

Walking back across the cricket pitch produced no waxcaps whatever and only a couple of grassland *Mycena* species. Furthermore a quick glance at the vicarage lawn showed it to be equally devoid of fungi, confirming that our decision to focus on the woodland today was the right one. To sum up, we found an amazing 29 species in the churchyard and an even more amazing 99 species in the woodland, adding just two each from the cricket pitch and vicarage lawn. Discounting the duplicates our grand total came to 121 species – certainly surprising for early November. My thanks to everyone who came and contributed to this impressive list which contained not only some interesting things but also some real rarities - a profitable and also very enjoyable morning. My particular thanks also to those who supplied me with photos without which this report would be far less interesting. As usual, for more detail of what we found see the separate list.

Photographers: CS = Claudi Soler; NS = Nick Standing; PC = Penny Cullington; TS = Toni Standing