# Fungi Walk at Rushbeds Wood on April 17th, 2017

Penny Cullington

This was our first ever outing on an Easter Monday and from the amazing number of attendees – 20 in all, 6 of whom were friends of Joanna's from nearby Brill – it would seem that we should make an event on this day a regular fixture! It was particularly good to welcome several new members, though foraying at this time of year is never the best introduction to the wonders of the world of fungi: the nearest we got to anything with gills was some dessicated specimens of a *Crepidotus* and some even more unrecognisable fruitbodies of *Panellus stipticus*. In fact as we started out I found myself wondering if for the first time at a BFG event the attendees might well outnumber the species of fungi, but we did manage to make it to 35 by the end of the morning.

Rushbeds in Spring is always a delight and we enjoyed the colourful carpets of flowers alongside the path: plenty of primroses, violets, bluebells, wood anemones, moschatels and more, all accompanied by the serenading of blackcap, chiff chaff, willow warbler together with more common woodland residents such as coal tit, nuthatch, green woodpecker. Someone found an old bird's nest beautifully lined with mud which most likely belonged to a song thrush. I digress, in part due to the lack of anything particularly notable in the way of fungi, but as always a few things were of note.

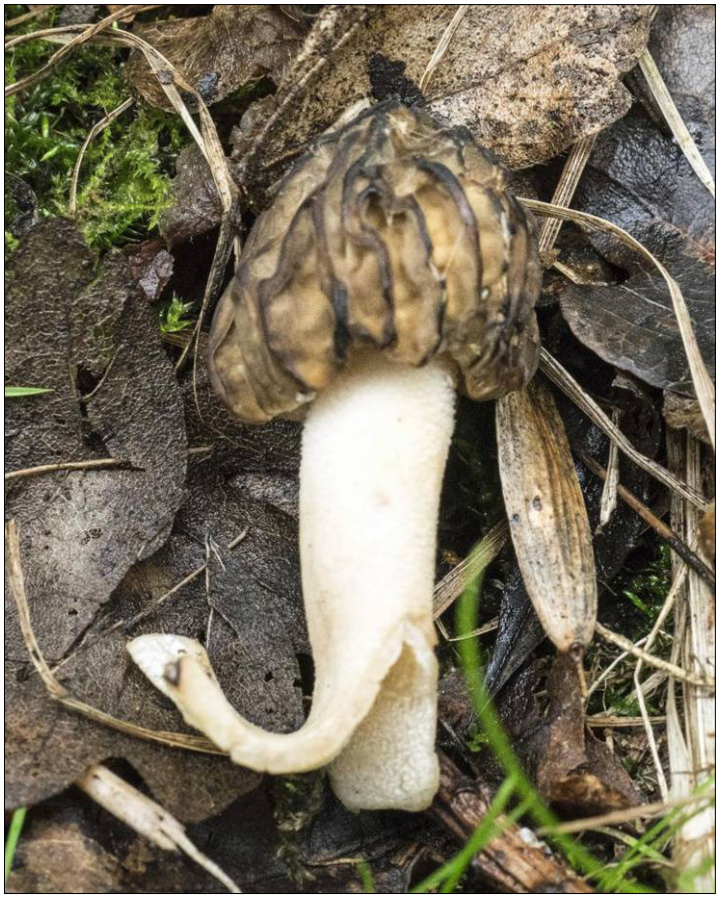
The first thing we found was a species of rust on *Mercurialis perennis*, better known to most as Dog's Mercury. There were plentiful patches of this plant along the pathsides and also plentiful patches of the rust on it. ***Melampsora populnea*** (the common name is not surprisingly Dog's Mercury Rust), is not unusual at this time and can affect both leaves and stems but appears to do the plant no lasting harm. I learnt from Ellis & Ellis that its Latin species name with reference to Poplar stems from the fact that one stage of its life-cycle occurs on White Poplar and the closely related Aspen; it can also occur on Pine and Larch.

***Melampsora populnea*** **at the typical 'rusty' stage on Dog's Mercury today. (NF)**

This is a site where we often find the eye-catching ***Sarcoscypha austriaca*** (Scarlet Elfcup) in early Spring though today's date was a bit late for it to be fruiting. However, the sharp eyes of John Tyler picked out a couple of very small specimens which at least served to demonstrate the amazing colour of the species for those members who had not seen it before. See the start of the report on our previous outing, Finemere Wood on March 19th, for a beautiful photo taken by Nick Standing.

Another Springtime species we regularly look out for here along the old tramway path is ***Mitrophora semilibera*** (Semifree Morel). This is a species renowned not only for being delicious to eat but also for fruiting very unpredictably. However, most years we visit Rushbeds at this time we manage to find at least one specimen. This time it was Joanna's sharp eyes which spotted a very small fruitbody amongst the pathside vegetation. This species, like the Elfcup mentioned above, is a distinctive member of the Ascomycetes – a very large group of fungi which do not have gills like many

mushrooms or pores like many brackets, but form their spores inside long thin microscopic sausage-like cells from where they are forcibly expelled by the fungus through the outer surface to disperse in the air currents.



**Right: The small specimen of *Mitrophora semilibera* which was found today. This species was previously a member of *Morchella* genus which contains several other very similar and equally edible species of Morel - all Springtime fruiters, but DNA research has caused it to be moved to a different genus, thus the name change. (NF)**

Much turning over of fallen branches and searching on rotting wood was needed to bump up today's list. There are two very common things which are affectionately dubbed 'Bums on seats' species because no springtime fungus list is likely to be without them owing to their occurrence on a very common substrate, last year's dead nettle stems. These are ***Calloria neglecta*** (Nettle Pox) and ***Leptosphaeria acuta*** (Nettle Rash) and both were duly found today. They are easy to find if you pluck a dead stem and look carefully along it from the base upwards, though a x10 lens is a help to see them properly because they are very small.

**Two common and easily recognisable species to be found on nettle stems in the Spring are *Leptosphaeria acuta* (above left) with its cone-shaped shiny black fruitbodies, and *Calloria neglecta* (above right) with its distinctive orange patchwork dotted over the stem. (NF)**

Towards the end of our chosen route one pile of felled deciduous logs supplied us with several easily identifiable species together with one which we guessed at but were uncertain of because its shape was somewhat atypical. This was another Ascomycete cup fungus having a brown round fleshy fruitbody about 5cm across which instead of being 'cup'-shaped was more flattened with the edges rather abruptly inrolled. Was it a species of *Peziza* or something rather different? A microscope was needed to ascertain whether the long thin sausage-like cells typical of an Ascomycete would stain blue at their tips when viewed in a solution known as Melzer's. If so then this was proof that we had a species of *Peziza*, if not then it was something different. They did, and it was (which is what we'd suspected all along) and the spores fitted well with ***Peziza micropus*** – no common name but not an unusual species to find growing on wood, just a bit unusual to find it growing this shape as if something had sat on it – a gnome perhaps?!

**A somewhat atypically squashed specimen of *Peziza macropus* growing on a log pile today. (PC)**

Many thanks to everyone who came and helped us find the few species which were managing to cope with the somewhat dry conditions of late. Thanks also to Neil for supplying most of the photos above.

For more details of what we found see the complete list.

Our next event is our AGM, almost definitely fixed for Sunday June 25th. Further details will be circulated in due course.

Photos: NF = Neil Fletcher; PC = Penny Cullington