

FUNGI WALK at MOUSELLS WOOD on Sept 29th 2018

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I will admit that I was rather dreading today's walk, having experienced the incredibly dry and disappointing conditions for fungi recently in this area and consequently fearing the worst. I therefore had mixed feelings when welcoming the assembled group – 30 strong – and introducing them to our esteemed guest leaders Geoffrey Kibby and Mario Tortelli. It's always pleasing to have such a good-sized group – about half and half BFG and Frieth Natural History Society, but was the journey from London going to prove a complete waste for our leaders and would we find enough to keep everyone's interest?

Well, though it was indeed very dry I needn't have worried: by the end of the morning everyone's diligent searching had been rewarded with an interesting selection of species typical of this calcareous woodland dominated as it is by mature Beech, a site that has proved excellent for fungi both common and rare since we first visited in 2005. The genera which I particularly connect with this site were certainly not well represented today – either in numbers of fruit bodies or in different species, but they did make enough of a showing to give a glimpse of what is here. For instance, from the 8 species of *Amanita* on our total overall site list we found just one specimen of *A. citrina* today. Similarly with the Boletes just single specimens of 2 species out of the 7 known to be here were found – one of those being so mouldy it was only identifiable later by its spores, though the very common bright yellow *Hypomyces chrysospermus* (Bolete Mould) which enveloped it added another name to today's list!



Above, *Hypomyces chrysospermus* liberally covering an unidentified species of Bolete. (Photo taken at Finemere Wood last year.) (JW)

Two genera with a most impressive number of different species having been recorded here are *Cortinarius* (the Webcaps – 13 species) and *Inocybe* (the Fibrecaps – over 30 species!). This is no coincidence: both genera contain many species which show a decided preference for calcareous Beech woodland and in the case of *Cortinarius* which are host specific to Beech. Geoffrey and Mario probably know more about *Cortinarius* in Britain than any other mycologists –

one reason why I was particularly keen for them to come today, and though the morning turned up only 3 different Webcap species two were rarities: *Cortinarius multiformis* has under 50 previous UK records, the last apparently in 2006, and *Cortinarius citrinus* has only 9 previous UK records, the last apparently in 1992!

Today's third species I was pleased to learn more about: this was

Left, *Cortinarius collocandoides* showing the remnants of weblike mesh along the cap rim – the feature which gives this genus its English name. (CS)



Cortinarius collocandoides - not rare and until 2014 included in the species complex of *C. purpurascens* (Bruising Webcap). It is now known that the true *C. purpurascens* is a species confined to conifers whereas *C. collocandoides* is confined to Oak and Beech. We can now correct our previous *C. purpurascens* records from both here and neighbouring Moorend Common to *C. collocandoides*, and the tally of *Cortinarius* species found at Mousells Wood rises to 15.

The genus *Inocybe* was sadly only poorly represented today with singletons of a couple of very common species but one nice find towards the end of the morning when we changed tack and went up the hill. 3 of the existing 5 UK records of *Inocybe huijsmanii* (no common name) are mine from this site, all from under the coppiced Hazel along the roadside, but today Mario found it under Beech. For many of the Fibrecaps the affectionate term LBJ (Little Brown Job) is appropriate – this probably the reason why even experienced mycologists tend to shy away from attempting identification, but under the microscope Fibrecaps have interesting characters though they often present a challenge to name to species.



Above, the rarely recorded *Inocybe huijsmanii* (MT)

Now to another challenging genus which has provided rarities here in previous years: *Russula*, the Brittle-gills. In contrast to the Fibrecaps they are often eye-catching and have caps of a wide range of colours – a trait which one might assume would make for quite easy identification in the field. Not so! For instance, over 50 of the 180 or so different Brittle-gills found in the UK have caps some shade of red and it takes experience to be able to separate them. There are tricks of the trade which can help; the tree species under which they are growing is often significant, also the taste, the smell, the spore colour, peeling the cap skin and colour reactions which occur when certain chemicals are applied to the stem: all these methods we used today to enable us to name the 7 species out of over 20 Brittle-gills on the overall list. One in particular was of note and needed careful checking by Geoffrey later at home to identify: 2 separate specimens of ***Russula veteriosa*** (no common name) were found under Beech, an unusual species with a cap a delicate shade of pale coral pink and spores (and therefore also mature gills) which are ochre-yellow. I discovered afterwards that I'd previously found this species in Ashridge in 2007 and had both macro and micro photos of that collection to prove it but had clearly not been confident enough at the time to do more than record it as 'doubtful'. Therefore today's nice find appears to be a first for the county as well as for the site.



Left, *Russula veteriosa*, one of the specimens clearly having been enjoyed by slugs, squirrels or mice – often the case when only a few Brittle-gills are about. (MT)

Nearby to the collection above we found another Brittle-gill which is typical of mature Beech woodland and therefore not uncommon in the Chilterns. ***Russula olivacea*** (Olive Brittle-gill) is a beautiful

chunky species and though the cap colour is somewhat variable it has two redeeming features which help to separate it from other similar species. The upper stem has a beautiful pink tinge and a drop of Phenol on the stem gradually turns Ribena purple (in all but 3 species of Brittlegill this chemical turns brown and the remaining 2 can be eliminated in other ways).



Left, *Russula olivacea* showing its characteristic pink upper stem (this photo taken elsewhere in the Chilterns last week PC), and above, today's specimen showing the Ribena reaction to a drop of phenol placed on the stem. (MT) Again in both photos here the damage due to hungry mammals is clearly apparent.

There were quite a few Inkcaps around today with nice examples of two common species found: *Coprinopsis picacea* (Magpie Inkcap) is always good for some oohs and aghs when looking fresh and pristine as it was here, as is *Coprinopsis lagopus* (Hare'sfoot Inkcap) when its fluffy icing sugar coating (the veil which gives rise to its English name) is still in tact. By the end of the day both these two collections had probably started to deteriorate and 'deliquesce' into a black inky mess.



Above, *Coprinopsis picacea* (BS) and left *Coprinopsis lagopus* (MT) were found today.

We found several examples of two very similar common species of *Hygrophorus* (Woodwax). Both species grow in Beech litter, are white and unusually sticky, so much so that after rain it can be tricky to pick them up without dropping them. Today's were merely tacky due to the dry conditions. I find that in the Chilterns *Hygrophorus discoxanthus* (Yellowing Woodwax) is by far the commonest of the two though is less often recorded (in error?), the other being *Hygrophorus eburneus* (Ivory Woodwax). When young and fresh the two species are virtually identical (thus no doubt causing the errors in identification) but as *H. discoxanthus* matures and ages it does what its English name says on the tin: it turns at first yellow and eventually dark rusty in patches, a character not seen at any stage in *H. eburneus*. One can with a little help from a chemical accelerate this colour change, a method which conveniently serves to separate the two species instantly even when young and fresh. With this test



today we were therefore able to confirm that we had both species: one which turned instantly rusty after a drop of KOH (Potassium hydroxide) was applied and one which remained white.

Left, a collection of *Hygrophorus discoxanthus*. A drop of KOH had been applied to the young fresh cap of the central specimen where the instant rusty staining is visible; the rather old and damaged cap to the right of this had already changed colour naturally; the two younger outer specimens are still white, showing how easy it is to mistake this species for *H. eburneus*. (MT)

In complete contrast to the mushrooms so far discussed, someone found a small log liberally covered in perfect specimens of *Chlorociboria aeruginascens* (Green Elfcup). One quite often picks up bare deciduous sticks which show the telltale signs of this fungus because it stains the wood in which it is living the same turquoise green colour even when no fruitbodies are in evidence. It was a treat to see such a profusion of fruiting today. This species is a member of the Ascomycetes - the spore-shooters - which have a mechanism very different from the Basidiomycetes - the spore-droppers like mushrooms - for producing and dispersing their spores, needing neither gills nor pores to achieve this. In the past the Green Elfcup was the source of the green wood used in the manufacture of Tunbridgeware.



Right, a beautiful display of *Chlorociboria aeruginascens*, each little cup no more than 5 mm across. (CS)

Back to mushrooms again: it's worth including here a photo which contains two entirely different fungi which at a quick glance could be mistaken for the same thing. It shows several clusters of *Lycoperdon pyriforme* (Stump Puffball) but it would be possible to overlook that there is also a cluster of young *Hypholoma fasciculare* (Sulphurtuft) just emerging as well. Both grow on wood, or in this case probably submerged rotting wood remnants, and are clearly quite at home growing



Above, three clusters of young *Lycoperdon pyriforme* together with (top left) a cluster of equally young *Hypholoma fasciculare*. (BS)

adjacent to each other. Yes, hopefully the yellow colour of the mushroom species here would be noticed but without picking either species to enable one to see that one has gills and a stem with a ring and the other has no gills and lacks a stem, an error could be made. Considering that the Puffball is collected to eat by some and that Sulphurtuft is extremely poisonous, this serves as a cautionary lesson not to collect to eat unless you really know what you are doing. There are some very dangerous, even deadly, species which are common. You have been warned!

Lastly to a find which completely foxed us in the field. Several suggestions as to a genus were made but it was Mario's suggestion which proved correct. Growing in soil near the path amongst mixed Ash and Beech were several whitish mushrooms, the young ones with thick stems and small inrolled smooth caps, the mature one with pinkish gills, an indented margin and a distinctive somewhat sweet smell. It was this feature which led Mario to the genus *Lepista* (Blewit). Geoffrey took the specimens



home and was able to identify it as *Lepista irina* (Flowery Blewit, the name referring to its violet-like scent). This apparently is an uncommon species which can be found in open grassland as well as woodland, one that was new to the wood today and only the fourth time we've recorded it in the county.

Left, *Lepista irina* found today and later identified by Geoffrey. (MT)

With such a large group it was possible to amass a surprising number of different species today despite the adverse conditions. We listed 88 species of which 10 were new to the site. My thanks to all the attendees and particularly to Geoffrey and Mario for leading so expertly and making the morning so enjoyable, also to Alan Gudge for getting the permission for our visit and for leading us round so patiently and efficiently, and finally to the photographers who've so generously contributed to this report. For more details of what we found see the separate complete list.

BS = Bob Simpson; CS = Claudi Soler; JW = Justin Warhurst; MT = Mario Tortelli; PC = Penny Cullington