

Clubs, Spindles, Corals and Clavarioid Fungi of the Wyre Forest

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A newly completed checklist for the fungi found within the Wyre Forest (see WFGS website) shows that we have some 2,177 species for the woodland sites and the immediate area. This represents an excellent number of fungi for the site and makes the forest nationally important for its fungal diversity. (Evans et al 2001). With so many species recorded it's impossible to summarise them all, but this article looks just at the group of Clavarioid fungi that have been found.

Clavarioid fungi form a distinctive but varied group unlike most other species of fungi. Typically they are spindle shaped, often branched like deer antlers and sometimes coral-like. Some jelly fungi such as *Calocera* can look similar but these species will be very gelatinous whilst Clavarioid fungi are much drier. Other similar species are the *Geoglossum* and related fungi but are in a different division of fungi, the Ascomycetes.

Many Clavarioid species are quite colourful and range from pink, orange, yellow, grey to white. Sizes vary considerably and some species are so small, like *Typhula*, that they can be easily missed. Most Clavarioid fungi are saprotrophic growing in grassland often with moss, or in woodlands on leaf litter of both deciduous and coniferous trees. A few grow on wood or on decaying plant matter. A few species, particularly in the genera *Clavulina* and *Ramaria* are known to be ectomycorrhizal (forming a beneficial association with the roots of living trees and plants). The spores form on the sides of the clubs or branches. The best places to look in Wyre Forest are the old grasslands and forest rides where most species can be found, but woodlands also have several very common and typical species and these are easiest to find in areas of bare leaf or conifer needle litter.

The Woodlands

The white coloured *Clavulina coralloides* Crested Coral is perhaps the commonest species; most books will have this under the old name of *Clavulina cristata* (see photograph on cover). It varies in form but typically forms are branched with numerous small spikes, like a tree with small spiky side branches. It is found in both broadleaf and conifer woodlands, often abundantly. *Clavulina cinerea* Grey Coral is also common, a grey brown colour or even with a violet-purple tone which is caused by an ascomycete fungus *Helminthosphaeria clavariorum*. *C. cinerea* is more robust but similar to *C. coralloides*, but although branched it is far less spiky in appearance. *Clavulina rugosa* Wrinkled Club is typically less branched and a dull white in colour. It is also quite common in Wyre's woodlands including areas with conifers. All three species are around 3-8cm in height and should prove easy to find in most years.



Clavulina rugosa

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Clavariadelphus pistillaris Giant Club, is a rather special fungus for Wyre being quite scarce nationally. For a photo and note see the Wyre Forest Study Group Review 2007 (Bingham 2007). I have seen it a few times over recent years in various parts of the forest. Most sites are under oak woodland with a weak scattering of bracken over a more acidic ground flora with Bilberry often present. The fungus is pale brown and looks like a stout club about 12-15cm tall and quite fat at the top but often partly eaten by slugs. This is a species to carefully record if ever found. A similar species found with birch woodland is *C. ligula* now extinct in Britain since 1948, but there were old records for Wyre and Chaddesley Woods!



Macrotyphula fistulosa

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Similar larger species are *Macrotyphula fistulosa* var. *fistulosa* Pipe Club, a long pale-brown thin spike some 20-25cm long but quite thin, growing from small dead branches on the ground in broadleaved woodland. In some years it can be quite common but is occasionally found in more open woodlands. It can be hard to see amongst the leaf litter. A distorted form *M. fistulosa* var. *contorta* is scarce but seen occasionally and is shorter and more crumpled. *Macrotyphula juncea* Slender Club is less common but often found in damper woodlands growing on wet leaf litter. It is pale-brown, more slender than *M. fistulosa* and some 8-10cm long. Both species are more likely to be found along the wetter areas of our forest stream valleys and ash or willow are often the preferred trees they grow under. Just to confuse matters there is another very similar species *Typhula phacorrhiza*, and more on this later.



Macrotyphula juncea

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Small clubs can be found on leaf litter but a hands and knees search is needed and a magnifier useful to appreciate these small fungi. *Clavaria straminea* Straw Club, has a conservation status of Near Threatened (Red Data List, Evans et al. 2006). It can occur in grassland but I have found it growing most often on bare wet soil under bramble in woodland. It is a small slender club, some 2-cm long and a pale grey-brown. Like so many smaller clubs it does need a careful check to identify it correctly. There are rather few records in the forest and it is possibly more common in grasslands. For some species we have just one record, for example *Clavaria rosea* Rose Spindles (as it's pink in colour) has been recorded from the forest at Postenplain by Rosemary Winnall in 2005. It may be found in other acid grassland sites.

Our rarest species is *Clavaria greletii* Dark Club, conservation status of Endangered (Red Data List, Evans et al. 2006) with only 12 records for Great Britain. For a photo and note see (Bingham 2007). This is a rather special Wyre Forest species first recorded by Carleton



Clavaria rosea

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Rea on an old charcoal burn hearth site. The British Mycological Society Database record (BMSD) reads; "*Clavaria greletii*, charcoal heap, woodland, 12/10/1922, England, Shropshire (VC: 40), Wyre Forest: Break Neck Bank, coll.: anon, id: C. Rea, herb.: K(M)120240." It had never been seen for years in the forest when it turned up, 83 years later on a small area of grassland at Roxel Rocket Motors found by Rosemary Winnall on a Study Group meeting; BMSD record - "*Clavaria greletii*, on/ with Musci (as moss / grass), unimproved grassland at woodland edge, 21/10/2005, England, Shropshire (VC: 40), Wyre Forest, Postensplain, Roxel Site, coll.: R. Winnall, id: P.J. Roberts, herb.: K(M)135942."

These fungi are rare and could be easily mistaken for species such as the black *Geoglossum*, so care is needed in the identification. Mycologist Peter Roberts has produced a key to three similar species (Roberts 2009). They are *Clavaria atroumbrina*, *Clavaria asperulispora* (not yet seen in Wyre) and *Clavaria greletii*. All are very rare, dark brown or black coloured small club-shaped fungi about 3-6cm long, 4-5mm wide. If you find one it needs to be checked by an expert and a voucher specimen retained. Most records are from mossy, short-turf grassland but Rea's record was from a woodland site on an old charcoal hearth, so it is always worth checking those old fire sites where brash has been burnt!

Occasionally *Ramariopsis kunzei* Ivory Coral appears in woodland, but it is very localised and scarce. It has long branches with antler-like growths, white some 5-10cm tall, and found typically in more grassy habitats often on flat ground close to streams. Like many of the less frequent and smaller species it's difficult to say how common it is in the forest but records are few.



Typhula erythropus

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Typhula erythropus Redleg Club is a tiny thread-like fungus about 25mm long with a white head. It is attached to a tiny blackish sclerotium (a small seed-like structure) hidden in the leaf litter from which it grows. At times this fungus is very common, especially along the Dowles Brook valley where ash can be found. *Typhula phacorrhiza* is another thread-like fungus but often longer up to 10cm and occurring en masse in deep leaf litter in damp woodland. The brown stems can look like dead grasses growing out of the leaves. It too has a sclerotium hidden in the leaves but this is often overlooked. On bracken stems the tiny white *Typhula quisquiliaris* Bracken Club is often seen. It needs old stems which are often damp and hidden from view, but a 'ferret around' in late autumn normally reveals the fungus. Mycologists looking for smaller fungi develop these special techniques (a skill or expertise in doing a specific thing) to find small fungi. Ferret (to search for something in a small space) and mooch (to wander or linger in an aimless way) are considered the best



Typhula quisquiliaris

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Typhula spathulata

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methods! Several members of the Wyre Forest Study Group have these off to a fine art!

Other woodland species include *Typhula spathulata* found growing on small branches such as willow, often dead on the tree or recently fallen. It is about 20mm long, white with a short stalk. It appears to be quite scarce in Wyre with only a few recent records. *Typhula setipes* on leaf litter, very small and under recorded, is possibly common along the damper valleys. A few other *Typhula* species might be present and we need to look (very closely)! *Pterula gracilis* is a small, hair-like white fungus on leaf litter that has been recorded for the forest but no recent records appear to exist.



Typhula setipes

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The Grasslands

Many of the more conspicuous Clavarioid fungi occur in unimproved old grassland habitats. Rides and pastures are typical; often the best have short turf with moss. Several species are yellow or pale orange in colour. One of the commonest is *Clavulinopsis corniculata* Meadow Coral, an orange-yellow species much branched and often partly hidden in the grass. It often grows in a dense tuft of bent stems, hence the coral name. A single yellow spike, or small trooping group of spikes some 5-12cm long will be *Clavulinopsis helvola* Yellow Club sometimes found in woodland. This species is common and often seen in



grassland or along rides in the forest. A similar species is *Clavulinopsis luteoalba* Apricot Club which is yellow or apricot in colour with a white tip to the spindle. It can be confused with *C. helvola* but generally tends to be smaller, around 5-8cm. A small, more apricot-orange spike in small troops in acid soils may well be *Clavulinopsis laeticolor* Handsome Club. This is a yellow-orange colour often paler near the base but



generally it is its small size, typically less than 5cm tall which helps separate it from the other species. It also can be found occurring in grass on forest rides or glades. Identification of these similar looking spindles can be difficult especially if specimens are old or faded by rain.



Less common and more often in grassland pasture is *Clavulinopsis fusiformis* Golden Spindles, a larger (5-12cm) densely tufted and bright yellow species which is an impressive fungus when fruiting well. Similar to this is *Clavaria fragilis* White Spindles, a pure white spindle often growing in a large impressive tufts but sometimes just a few spikes trooping together. *Clavaria fumosa* Smoky Spindles is only rarely seen and forms tufts of grey-brown spindles typically in unimproved grassland and only recorded twice in Wyre. The nationally uncommon *Clavaria zollingeri* Violet Coral has been recorded from Wyre but not recently. This large and impressive coral-like fungus is a deep violet colour when fresh. It would be good to find this species again. Grassy Churchyards are often the preferred habitat.





After the larger species there are quite a few smaller ones in grassland and heathy woodland rides. *Clavaria argillacea* Moor Club is a grey-yellow or brown-yellow species on bare or mossy soil near heather, its club-shaped fruit body tapered to the base. It can be common along heathy rides in the forest but in recent years it has become quite scarce. The very slender 5cm tall *Clavaria acuta* Pointed Club is common but easy to miss amongst the grass or leaf litter. It has a tiny long white spindle and lighter pinkish distinctive stem. This is a hand and knees search for the keen mycologist, but a nice fungus once found. *Clavaria tenuipes* is a rare species and only recently found on grassland at Bliss Gate in an area previously used for burning brush. It is a small club, rather a grey or grey-brown colour, with a short stalk and rounded blunt top. It may be more common and could occur on other old burn sites but it seems to need a grassy sward. *Clavaria*



incarnata has also been recorded from grassland sites but this is also very scarce or overlooked. *Clavulinopsis umbrinella* Beige Coral is very rare in Wyre. It is often hidden deep in the grassy sward and has a coral-like, branched pinkish-brown fruit-body often lighter near the base.

Larger Coral Fungi

Larger coral fungi appear to be rare in Wyre but eight species have been noted. The pale buff to cream coloured *Ramaria stricta* Upright Coral grows typically



in broadleaf woodland. It has occurred under oak, is 10cm high and grows densely branched and tightly upright. The only other *Ramarias* that I have seen in the forest are *Ramaria formosa* and *R. abietina*, both are uncommon. *R. formosa* favours beech woodland but to date does not appear to like the planted beech in Wyre Forest, so it's unlikely that this 10cm tall yellowish 'hedgehog of a fungus' will be found in the forest, although it can appear under oak. *R. abietina* has appeared most often under conifer as well as broadleaf trees. It did make quite a few appearances a



few years ago when it was more frequent and formed some large patches in several places, but little has been seen recently. Records indicate that *R. aurea*, *R. botrytis*, *R. fennica*, *R. flaccida* and *R. gracilis* all can occur in Wyre, but all are scarce species and a voucher specimen would be needed with expert identification to confirm any new records.



Clavulinopsis subtilis

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Clavulinopsis subtilis is another white coral-like fungus but is more antler-like and open in structure. It is quite small, 4cm typically, and can be occasionally found on soil in richer woodland, typically near to Dowles Brook.

Other species of Clavarioid species of fungi also occur in Britain and may yet be discovered in the forest. Seasons vary and with fungi you need to expect the unexpected. A year can be a long time in fungus terms and anything can happen if conditions are just right. Identification, especially of the smaller species and some of the *Ramaria*, can be difficult, but look out for the larger more colourful species and there is plenty to see in the woodlands and grasslands of Wyre.

References and Reading

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Clavulinopsis fusiformis

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