

Watlington Hill 25 September 2024

The first foray of the Autumn season, led by Professor Richard Fortey, took place under threatening skies that thankfully remained dry while the group was on the hill. As we set off, everyone hoped that the previous day's rain had encouraged some fungi to rise, but expectations weren't too high due to the dry weather of the previous week. However, within our first few steps, we were met with *Mycena crocata* (Saffrondrop Bonnets), a ubiquitous sight in the Chilterns.

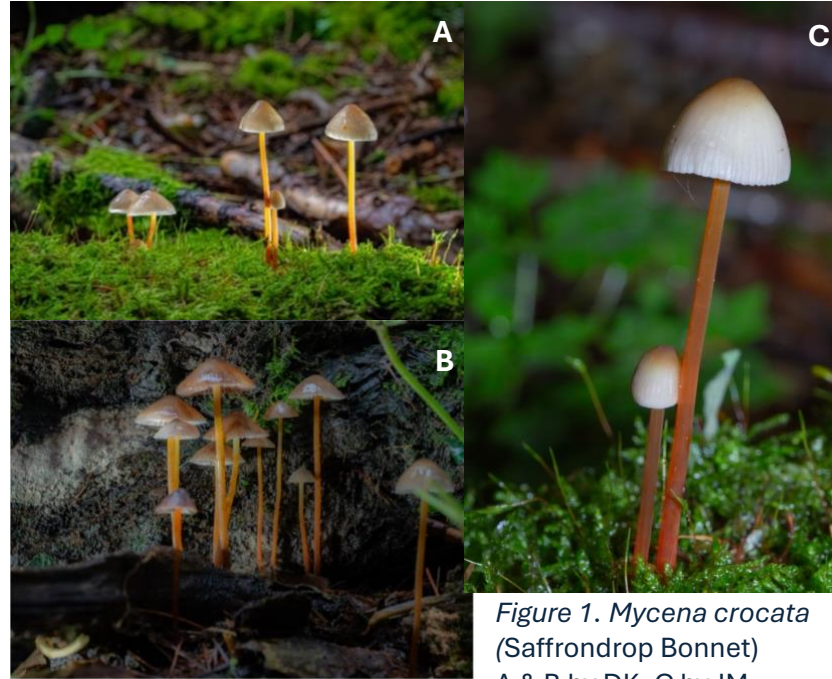


Figure 1. *Mycena crocata* (Saffrondrop Bonnet)
A & B by DK, C by JM



Figure 2. Professor Fortey demonstrates how Saffrondrop Bonnets release an orange latex when broken, hence their name.
Photo by JM.

Some other finds near the bonnets included *Coprinellus micaceus* (Glistening Inkcap). This large group, surrounding a large broadleaf stump, demonstrated the vast changes in appearance of inkcaps as they approach maturity. Members could see the sparking veil fragments on the younger mushrooms, while the older specimens showed the characteristic trait of inkcaps - deliquescing.

Figure 3. *Coprinellus micaceus* (Glistening Inkcap), Photos by JM



Continuing on, we passed by a crowded area with fallen beech branches and logs. This location was teeming with fungi, from the saucer-shaped *Neobulgaria pura* (Beech Jellydisc) to the bright white *Oudemansia mucida* (Porcelain Fungus). There were also a variety of crusts to be found. It seemed like almost every 10 seconds someone was stating they found another fungus!



Figure 4A. *Oudemansia mucida* (Porcelain Fungus) sits on a patch of moss under a large beech log. Photo by DK.



Figure 4B. *Neobulgaria pura* (Beech Jellydisc) growing on a dead beech log, demonstrating its characteristic growth in association with beech wood. Photo by JM.

Excitement grew due to our early finds. As we stepped into the grassland on the hill, we were met with a variety of *Entolomas*. Unable to get definitive IDs on these specimens, even with microscopy, these will be the FSO's first specimens collected for our new DNA barcoding initiative, led by FSO members Julia Morneau and Daisy Yiangou with sequencing occurring at Aberystwyth University.



Figure 5. Professor Fortey, Julia Morneau, and Caroline Jackson-Houlston investigating the *Entoloma* sp. found in the grassland. A fascinating find from a genus that is notoriously difficult to ID. Off to be barcoded!
Photo by DK

Across the hill, the small, white *Lycoperdon pratense* (Meadow Puffball) were hard to miss as they appeared to sit on top of the grass due to their characteristically short stem.



Figure 6. *Lycoperdon pratense* (Meadow Puffball) sitting in the grassland. Characteristic features of this species include the white specks across its surface as well as its short stem, sometimes making it appear as if its 'squatting' in the grass. Photo A by DK; Photo B by JM.

Some other notable finds included *Hymenopellis radicata* (Rooting Shank). While it is typically found in the woods, we had the chance to observe it in the calcareous grass, a rarer habitat for this species.

Figure 7. *Hymenopellis radicata* (Rooting Shank). Photo by DK.



Clitocybe rivulosa (Fool's Funnel) were beginning to pop up; however, they were not populated enough yet to demonstrate their characteristic fairy ring. Members sat down as Professor Fortey discussed the differences between *Clitocybe rivulosa* and *Clitocybe dealbata*. Some experts consider these species synonymous while others distinguish between them based on habitat.

Figure 8. *Clitocybe rivulosa* (Fool's Funnel)

As we continued on our walk, we began to approach the *Helianthemum* (Rockrose) that covers part of the grassland on Watlington Hill. Many exciting *Helianthemum*-associated species were to come, the first of which was *Lactarius evosmus* (Fruity Milkcap). These mushrooms could be seen poking their caps through the rockrose across the hill.

Figure 9. *Lactarius Evosmus* (Fruity Milkcap)



To our surprise, the sun began to shine on this previously grey day as we went over the hill and spotted the *Helianthemum*-associated amanita species, a rare find in the UK (however, these are quite common at Watlington Hill). While there was no lack of these mushrooms across the hill, we found it quite difficult to identify both the scientific and common name attributed to this species.



Figure 10. *Amanita simulans* shining in the brief sunlight at the top of Watlington Hill. Photo by DK

Since the splitting of the *Amanita vaginata* group into true biological species, these vaginata-related species have become a taxonomic puzzle. This species is currently classified as *Amanita simulans* with no common name. However, some experts have described it before as *Amanita malleata*, or Gray Ringless Hammered Amanita. While this isn't the currently accepted name, it would very much fit this species, as you can see the dimples in its cap at varying stages of maturity.



Figure 10. You can see the characteristic transition of *A. simulans* from dark gray-brown to white as it matures, with dimples present on the cap. Photo A by DK, Photo B by JM.

After basking in the sun with these lovely amanitas, we headed back across the hill, very pleased with the day's finds. However, one more surprise was in store for us. Caroline had hoped to come across the dark blue *Entoloma* sp. she had discovered last year at Watlington but wasn't able to ID. Only a few feet away from the hill exit, Julia saw a black speck near her foot. Upon investigating closer, it was the *Entoloma* sp. that Caroline had hoped to find! You can see its deep blue gills and dark blue, almost black cap. It's hard to say for sure what this species is without barcoding, so stay tuned for an update later this season.



Figure 11. Richard, Tish and Caroline relax in the grass next to the rockrose associated Amanitas
Photo by JM.



Figure 12. The fourth and final mystery *Entoloma* of the day.
Photos by JM.

As everyone got ready to depart in the parking lot, Julia noticed the last find of the day, *Crepidotus cesatii* (Roundspored Oysterling) sitting on a tree branch (hazel) in the woodland. As the members left, the skies began to open up and rain came down. Talk about great timing and a wonderful survey to start the 2024 season.



Figure 13. *Crepidotus cesatii* (Roundspored Oysterling).
Photo by JM.

Text by Julia Morneau.
Thanks to our photographers: Denis Kennedy (DK) and Julia Morneau (JM)