

Fungus Survey of Oxfordshire

Newsletter 2012

Editor's News

This year I hope to get our Newsletter out at the same time as the 2012 Foray Programme. E-mail interchange between members has been a great help. Our great news is that thanks to Peter Davis (BFG), who kindly agreed to help at no cost to the group, we now have a web site which is 'live'. It is:

www.fungusoxfordshire.org.uk

I am sure this will help create interest in our activities and encourage more young people to join us. Please, this coming season, take lots of photos of both fungi and people.

A number of our group enjoy drawing and painting fungi. Our illustration this year is a black and white copy of one of Caroline's paintings. Next year I will try and be more organized and go for colour. Again thanks go to Marketa for help with production of the Newsletter.

Molly Dewey



Psathyrella bipellis by Caroline Jackson-Houlston

Notes from our new President

Richard Fortey FRS

The joy of sticks

It is always tempting during the high season for fungi in the autumn to go straight for the agarics, and particularly the more spectacular ones. After all, there are enough interesting problems in identification of the gilled fungi, particularly if one tries to identify an odd *Russula* or two. In spring, the temptation is always to look for morels and their relatives. But I have recently become interested in some of the 'poor relations', relatively inconspicuous fungi that can be found almost throughout the year on sticks and branches. They include both ascomycetes and basidiomycetes. This interest allows for an extension of the 'season' – indeed, one of the best times to search for these fungi is during a mild period in midwinter.

Different species are found on attached twigs and branches from those that rot away fallen wood. The latter often hide under a branch where

it lies on the ground. Turn over a log, and more often than not on the underside there is a white or coloured patch, or the black crust of a 'pyrenomycete'. They do need microscopic examination to help with their determination, and some species do indeed present a challenge for the beginner. Nonetheless, it does not take long to be able to recognise some of the commoner species with the aid of such books as the appropriate volume of *Fungi of Switzerland*. In winter in the Chilterns, for example, it is difficult to find a fallen stick that does *not* have *Radulomyces confluens* or *Schizopora paradoxa* upon it. Gradually, it becomes possible to identify more obscure patches. They have the advantage that they can be kept in an airtight box for several days if they are cut off with their moist woody substrate, so you don't often suffer from 'soggy mushroom syndrome' with these species. Some of the ascomycetes are even more durable, since many of them are adapted to cope with comparatively dry substrates.

After you get your eye in, exciting finds begin to turn up. I'll give one example. I recently

bought a small (4 acre) piece of a Chiltern beechwood (Grim's Dyke Wood), and intend to try to determine as many of the fungi as possible from it. Around Christmas time I noticed a big 20 cm black patch on a thick fallen stick (likely elder) and a quick look under the lens revealed it to be a collection of tiny black spheres resting on a dark substrate – a typical ascomycete, in other words. I thought it was a common species of *Rosellinia* but took it home for confirmation, just to be certain. Under the microscope it proved to be nothing of the sort – the little spheres were full of the wrong spores for *Rosellinia*, transparently olive coloured, and with three cross walls. The spheres had a pink circle around the ostiole, and were hairy around the base. The usual recourse at this point is to turn up Ellis & Ellis's magisterial *Microfungi on Land Plants*. Start with things on elder – no luck there – so move on to generalists on broadleaved wood – nothing like it among dozens of species. This is the point at which you debate sending a sample into Kew. This does run the risk of your being told that you had missed something perfectly obvious, leaving you feeling somewhat foolish. But in this case I thought that Alick Henrici should take a look at it, and might agree with me that it was something that had escaped the omniscient Ellises.



A few days later I got an excited call from Alick – and a name (terrible mouthful): *Byssosphaeria schiedermayeriana*. The Ellises had not included it in their big book for a very good reason. Only two previous British collections had been made – both from hothouses! One of these has now gone missing. So it looks as if the specimen from Grim's Dyke wood is the first one in Britain “in the wild”. It is a distinctive enough species to be fairly sure of its general rarity. Its original description was from Austria (on elder), and Alick tells me there are collections from Italy and (possibly) Spain, but the species does occur more widely in tropical regions (hence

the hothouse, presumably). It will probably get written up as a scientific note.

So a stick yielded not just a first for our Survey, but a find of national significance. It is encouraging to think that such finds can still be made by looking in places and on substrates that are often passed by. If some of the species on sticks are hard to identify, there is a special satisfaction when at last you succeed in doing so.

News from our Chairman

I am looking out over the snow in the garden as I write this and, while snow in February is nothing to write home about, we have had a very unusual autumn and winter. The early autumn was dry and warm with the appearance of very few fungi. However by the end of October and beginning of November the fungi that we had been eagerly waiting for arrived in profusion and we had some very good forays. With the thought that a couple of very hard frosts in November and December would polish them off again, I was surprised still to be finding plenty of fungi right up until Christmas, and picked my last field blewit at the beginning of January!

The changing seasons are playing havoc with our established notions of fungi, and whether we will lose some species in the UK and gain some others as a result of global warming, only time will tell! The closure of Botany departments in many universities and the lack of emphasis on mycology in those that remain is a sad reflection of the changing times, and I fear that study of the effects of climate change on fungi will be at a premium.

We have now moved into the 21st Century with the setting up of our splendid new website and special thanks go to Joanna Dodsworth who recommended Peter Davis who has dealt with the technical side of it. Molly Dewey and Marketa Samalova have picked up the ball and are ably running with it.

The 2011 newsletter was probably the best ever, thanks to Molly and Marketa who cajoled our members into producing so many interesting contributions.

Last but not least, Judy Webb, our recorder has brought our records right up to date. Thank you and well done!

Max Peterson

2011 Forays and news from our Recorder

During last year 2011 we managed 10 forays with only one cancellation happening. As previously the year started with a warm and dry spring, so our first foray to **Pinsley Wood** in early May was a nice walk to see spring flowers without many fungi due to the soil being as dry as dust. Rain in midsummer resulted in frustrating sightings of fungi before any official forays got going. As in previous years, by the time forays started, dry and warm conditions meant less to see on the forays.

The joint foray with Bucks Fungus Group to **Wootton Park Estate** in early September produced some very interesting species including 15 new site records. We are grateful to Penny Cullington for the following account:

Luckily this foray was an afternoon event as the torrential and persistent morning rain had passed through and the eleven attendees enjoyed the warm sunshine and beautiful lakeside views as well as the fungi. This site always provides interesting species, and today was no exception despite the dry conditions of the previous week (the latest rain being too recent to affect fruiting). We recorded just under 50 species, and Alan Hills was particularly pleased that some good boletes turned up, with a couple of specimens of *Boletus satanas*, a few more of *Boletus radicans*, and even more of *Boletus luridus* – all species we have found here before. However, *Leccinum duriusculum* was new to the site, a species which grows exclusively with Poplar (which abounds here) and which has blackening stipe flesh which helps to separate it from other similar *Leccinum* species. Mycorrhizal species – other than the boletes – were in very short supply, with no *Amanita*, *Lactarius*, *Inocybe*, *Cortinarius* or *Hebeloma* and only a couple of *Russula* species, both of which resisted identification. *Bolbitius reticulatus* was a nice find, as was *Coprinellus saccharinus* – a species added to the British Checklist on the basis of a record from this site in 2008 (it was previously rejected as being “dubiously distinct from *Coprinellus truncorum*” – another species found during the present foray). Perhaps the highlight was a beautiful collection of *Lentinus tigrinus* which Joanna found in the long grass down by the lake, no doubt growing on submerged rotting wood. This was also new to the site. See the photo below. This is an uncommon species which occurs typically in flood plains or near water on the wood of Willow or Poplar. The stipe markings are a very distinctive feature as the name ‘*tigrinus*’ implies



Lentinus tigrinus

Kennington Memorial field was notable for its large numbers of anthills and we found a few grassland fungi – obviously it would have a good fungus flora in a much wetter year. **Radley Great Wood** was unfortunately very dry and we were informed that the best crop of Shaggy Parasols (*Macrolepiota rhacodes*) had been seen and collected just the week before! Not many were left for us to view.

North Leigh Common had the biggest display of Fly Agarics, *Amanita muscaria*, and Blushers (*Amanita rubescens*) that had been seen at this site for many years.

The weekday foray to **Black Horse field, Gozzards Ford** organised by John Killick was interesting in that it enabled us to see what fungi can come in on these very sandy soils when a field enters set-aside.



Black Horse field, Gozzards Ford foray
Photo: Judy Webb

The prettiest little toadstool here was the pure white *Volvariella pusilla* identified by Richard Fortey. The volva at the base was distinctive and the gills initially white, turned the predicted shell pink when taken home and kept for a few hours,

producing a pink spore print typical of *Volvariella*.



Volvariella pusilla

Photo: Judy Webb

Besselsleigh Common wood was a joint foray in October with the volunteers of the Besselsleigh Wood Group, who were very keen to learn more about the fungi in this ancient woodland where they do a lot of traditional coppice management. Oak and hazel with alder in wetter bits and a couple of old coppice stools of small leaved lime. It was dry, but surprisingly we found a good few species with the apricot coloured Cinnamon bracket (*Hapalopus nidulans*) being the most unusual. The flesh of this bracket stains maroon-purple in alkali, so was confirmed by the reaction with a drop of potassium hydroxide solution at home. Tasting the fiery milk of *Lactarius pyrogalus* was part of the learning experience of some of the local volunteers.

Dean Wood, Woodcote was another joint foray with Woodcote Conservation Group. The wood was mostly beech on chalk. The dry conditions made the finding of a good range of things including *Boletus ferrugineus* by Alan Hills and a large troop of Horn of Plenty (*Craterellus cornucopoides*) even more surprising.

Wytham Woods joint foray with the ANHSO in the middle of October was the driest of all, but Alan Hills managed to find one of the specialities of the area the solitary amanita *Amanita echinocephala*.

Watlington Hill joint foray with TVFG and the Friends of Watlington Hill was led by Richard Fortey and the many sharp eyes of the good

number of attendees managed to produce a very good list including the expected spectacular *Entoloma bloxamii*, (Ed – see later, article by John Killick) along with both *Amanita echinocephala* and *A. strobiliformis* associated with rockrose and the *Cortinarius anomalous* which is also associated with rockrose. The tiny white *Clitopilus scyphoides* was a special new find.



Clitopilus scyphoides

Photo: Judy Webb

One exciting toadstool noticed by Judy in July is a candidate for the **The slimiest cap?** This is *Limacella ochraceolutea*, an extremely slimy orange-capped toadstool discovered by in leaf litter in hazel coppice woodland with ash and oak standards on the edge of the fen at Cothill NNR (Ruskin Reserve) in July and September by me. Rain in August meant that conditions were good for emergence.



Limacella ochraceolutea Photo: Judy Webb

A first record for Oxfordshire; the early appearance meaning that it may have been missed at other good deciduous woodland sites. Certainly one to watch out for.

Albert Park, Abingdon, November

Notes from John Killick about our late foray: After much dry weather, enough rain fell to bring out the fungi so it was possible to hold the planned foray at rather short notice on Sunday 13 November at 1.30pm. It was a beautiful sunny afternoon and 12 people came. We assembled near the Albert statue and had to go only a few yards east to find nice colonies of *Ramaria* and *Trametes* and an unnamed bright green phylloplane fungus on fallen *Acer platanoides* leaves. Then to the holm oak litter which had had *Xerocomus engelii* last year and now had a few bird's-nest fungi (I followed Courtecuisse, not Phillips, in calling this *Cyathus olla*; it was in greater numbers by a grubbed tree in the SW of the park 5 years ago.). Litter round newly planted shrubs had *Lepista inversa*.



Cyathus olla

Photo: Joanna Dodsworth

We then studied the main grassy area; the upper half is largely unfertilized and has a wealth of fairy rings. A month previously *Marasmius oreades* had been abundant but the obvious species now was a *Clitocybe*. Examples matched both *C. rivulosa* and *C. dealbata* in Phillips but I think they are all the same and *rivulosa*. One ring was 11 metres across. Some frail ink-caps in grass close to shrubs were rapidly shrivelling. There was nice *Stropharia coronilla* and further down, a few of 2 kinds of blewit.

We then looked under shrubs in the NW of the park; the most striking find was two *Stropharias* on wood chips under pine, where they have flourished for 3 years. The *Ramaria* is here also, and a host of *Psathyrella* of two sizes. *Cortinarius cf armeniacus*, abundant last February in leaf-litter under pine in the SW of the park, appeared here in small numbers. Caroline Jackson-Houlston named the *Mycenella lactea* and *Lyophyllum amariuscolum* in this area. We were still foraying near to 4 pm.

Note from John Killick taken from his articles for the Oxford times

Bloxam's *Entoloma* or 'Big blue pink-gill'.

A blue fungus is a little commoner than a blue moon but this big one, found by the Oxfordshire Fungus Survey on a chalk down last autumn, is a rarity. It figures in UK's Red Data Book and was proposed for Europe's Berne Convention. Surprisingly, the gills pictured in Margaret's photo will turn pink with age, producing pink spores as do another 1500 *Entoloma* species, many of them poisonous. It grows with waxcaps on old grassland and lawns, including at Charles Darwin's Down House in Kent. Agricultural "improvement" and even wasted windblown fertilizer from nearby fields pose a serious threat and action plans for it have to keep its habitat infertile. It was newly described, within *Agaricus*, the genus that now contains true mushrooms but was then a catch-all for umpteen toadstools, as late as 1854 and it was not until 1887 that the Italian Pier Saccardo found a better home for it in *Entoloma*.



Entoloma bloxamii

Photo: Margaret Killick